

# CHELMSFORD COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

## Minutes of a meeting of the FACILITIES & FINANCE COMMITTEE held in the School & via Microsoft Teams at 8.10am on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Present:	Richard Brown (T) Stephen Lawlor Margaret Cousins Niamh Dobson (T) Stephen Miles (T)	Chair Headteacher  Vice Chair	(T) = via Teams
In Attendance:	Melissa Mulgrew Wendy Newton	Business Manager Clerk to Governors	

### ITEM 1 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. There were no apologies for absence, all Committee members were present. The Committee were advised that Mary Argent, Associate Member, had resigned from the Board the previous week and would therefore not be present at the meeting. The Chair noted Mary's great contribution during her long association with the School.

### ITEM 2 - DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2. There were no declarations of business interest further to those already stated on the Register of Business Interests for 2023-24, conflicts of interest or receipts of gifts or hospitality.

### ITEM 3 - MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

3. The minutes of the Facilities & Finance Committee meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2024 were **approved** as a true record.

### ITEM 4 - MATTERS ARISING

4. Item 4, Para 4 – Site Visit. The Chair had undertaken a site visit in March and summarised the findings of his visit. The campus was in a good state with a notable difference since the completion of the SSEF project. The significant number of CCTV cameras was noted, giving good coverage of most of the school site. Some issues were arising with the Languages Centre for the first time, and the major problems relating to the swimming pool were viewed and discussed with the Site Manager. The Chair reported that the Trustee Conference was to include an item on Sixth Form facilities and alternative provision. The Headteacher advised that there was a benefit to not having a single Sixth Form Centre as the current de-centralised system-maintained integration between Sixth Form and Main School students, possibly assisting with the retention of Year 11 students. It was stated that all School improvements, however minor, were known to be appreciated by the students. Richard Free, Site Manager, was thanked for the visit.

5. Item 4, Para 5 – Art Lift. Superseding the action of the last meeting, the Management Committee had now agreed expenditure of £22,000 for the repair of the Art Lift as further investigation had found this would be best value for money and the work was to be undertaken during the Summer break.

6. Item 9, Para 16 – Smart Boards. The Business Manager confirmed that five new smartboards had been ordered and were installed over Easter.

7. **Decision**. The Chair noted that it had been agreed that Sustainability would be added as a separate agenda item. The Clerk **agreed** to add this item to the next meeting agenda.

### ITEM 5 – CHAIR'S ACTION

8. There had been no Chair's Action since the last meeting other than routine financial expenditure authorisations within his agreed remit.

**ACTION**

**Clerk**

## **ITEM 6 – FINANCIAL UPDATE**

## **ACTION**

9. The Financial Management Reports for Month 5 (January 2024) were reviewed. The Business Manager advised that the School still hoped to be able to break-even at the end of the financial year but that the financial situation was challenging. It was stated that future finances looked extremely difficult for all schools. Some 2024-25 income components were still awaited and the teachers' 2024 pay increase may not be received until July. It was reported that the confirmed Teachers' Pensions grants did not cover the actual increase amount for the School. The Committee were advised that it was not currently possible to balance the budget for 2024-25. The School was looking at all expenditure areas and attempting to find savings wherever possible, with current inflation rates all contracts and professional services costs were increasing. One of the biggest challenges was with curriculum expenditure as changes in exam syllabuses for modern foreign languages required the purchase of new textbooks for each language and would be very costly.

10. The Headteacher advised that due to the country's political situation and possible election, DfE had gone into silent mode with no information being released and a general lack of clarity in relation to future finances. It was re-iterated that beyond 2024-25 finances would become very difficult. In anticipation of this, SLT were currently preparing a paper outlining possible curriculum-related changes which may need to be considered if the financial situation did not change, details of which were summarised. It was noted that a change of Government may possibly result in improved education funding. The Business Manager advised that any shortfall to the 2024-25 budget would need to be filled by School reserves but that this option would not be sustainable in the long-term. Trustees noted the difficult financial situation.

**8.20am – Steve Miles encountered internet connectivity problems and dropped from the meeting.**

11. The Chair raised the benefit of the lettings income, in particular the swimming pool, and questioned whether it was sustainable. It was stated that a significant amount of the lettings income came from the swimming pool, although the pool itself only produced around £20,000 surplus. More income was received from the Sports Hall but that was now practically fully let. It was reported that the School facilities were generally fully let, and that any additional letting income could bring VAT-related problems. The lettings business for CCHS was very high compared to other schools. It was confirmed that the School's letting prices were benchmarked against other schools and town facilities and were very competitive. The Committee were advised that similar financial situations were occurring at other schools and that the issue affected the whole education sector. The Balance Sheet and Cashflow Reports were noted as being healthy.

## **ITEM 7 – CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT**

12. CIF Bid. The Business Manager advised that the School had been successful with one of the two CIF bids. The bid for replacement windows and asbestos removal in the Art Block had received a CIF grant for a total spend of £215,000, just under £65,000 of which would be required to come from School's reserves. There had been a project meeting during Easter and the work on the Art Block would commence at the end of the Summer Term. The asbestos removal part of the project would be a challenge as there were School lettings during the Summer holiday. The CIF bid for new Main School boilers had not been successful probably because the bid did not include an element of de-carbonisation.

13. Sustainability. The School had received elements of quotes relating to sustainability changes, particularly relating to the swimming pool. The feasibility of installing solar PV panels to power an air source heat pump was being investigated and only part-quotes received to date. No full quotes had been received. It was suggested that a solar PV option was likely to be the same cost as gas replacement. Additional quotes were being sought for the installation of solar PV panels on the Hall roof and Dining Hall roof to power the Main Building. It was noted that the Music Block and Cadbury Building may also be possible sites for solar panels. A bid had recently been put in for grant funding for the replacement of the halogen theatre lights in the School Hall, if successful it should be of no cost to the School. The School's Climate Action Plan was likely to be completed during the Summer holiday. The Business Manager reported that the School had intended to apply to the Government's Low Carbon Skills Fund for a grant towards the sustainability projects but that the paperwork and

analysis required by the application process was unreasonable for schools to undertake and that schools did not have the necessary skills set. It was reported that PCH, the School's project managers, were intending to lobby the DfE on this issue as it was unfair to schools. An LCSF bid may be possible next year with the assistance of PCH.

### **ITEM 8 – AUDIT RESPONSIBILITIES**

14. A Juniper Internal Scrutiny audit on financial controls had taken place in February and their audit report was received for review. The report was clean and had no findings thanks to the exceptional work of the School's Finance Team. The second Juniper audit of 2023-24 was to cover HR policies and was scheduled to take place this term.

### **ITEM 9 – IT & CYBER SECURITY UPDATE**

15. The Business Manager reported that five smartboards had been installed during the Easter break and that 3-5 others were targeted to be installed in the next financial year, if finances permitted. Staff were very appreciative of the new technology. It was confirmed that there were still 7-8 projector-style projectors in use but that the aim was to be a full Smart TV school. The next phase of cyber security improvements had begun and included moving some of the School drives onto One Drive and stopping downloads and printing to personal devices. The School was attempting to reduce its reliance on physical servers, which would help energy use, and slowly adding items to the Cloud. The IT Manager was continuing to work through the DfE Cyber Secure assessment programme. An initial report had been received at the last meeting and an update on progress would be received at the next meeting. The Headteacher advised that Adam Selby, Asst Headteacher (T&L) was currently chairing a School CPD digital learning group for teachers which was looking into how AI may assist with marking and assessment which could be a benefit to teachers' wellbeing.

### **ITEM 10 – RISK REGISTER**

16. **Decision.** The Facilities, Finance and Capital Development sections of the CCHS Risk Register were reviewed and **approved** as presented. A query was raised as to whether any specific risks related to swimming pool injuries, this was deemed to be covered by Risks P6 & P7.

### **ITEM 11 – GDPR**

17. The Business Manager advised that the annual GDPR audit was taking place the following week and no adverse issues were anticipated. There had been no data breaches since the last meeting. There had been a small number of Freedom of Information requests, mostly relating to the Year 7 Entrance Test, and all requests had been dealt with.

### **ITEM 12 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

18. No other business was raised for discussion.

### **ITEM 13 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

19. **Decision.** It was **agreed** that the next meeting would be held at 8.00am on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

**All**

The Chair thanked the Business Manager and Finance Team for their continuing excellent work.

The meeting closed at 8.46am.

R Brown, Chair

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> June 2024