

CHELMSFORD COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Minutes of a meeting of the FACILITIES & FINANCE COMMITTEE
held in the School at 8.00am on Wednesday 19th June 2024

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

ITEM 1 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. Apologies for expected late arrival were received from Steve Miles; all other Committee members were present.

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 24th April 2024 were **approved** as a true record.

ITEM 4 - MATTERS ARISING

4. There were no matters arising from the last minutes which required further discussion.

ITEM 5 – CHAIR’S ACTION

5. There had been no Chair’s Action since the last meeting other than routine financial expenditure authorisations within his delegated remit.

ITEM 6 – FINANCIAL UPDATE

6. Item 6.1 – School Financial Management Reports. The Financial Management Reports for Month 7 (March 2024) were reviewed. The Business Manager advised that there was nothing significant to report and that School finances were still trending towards break-even at the end of the financial year. A very close eye was being kept on all elements of expenditure and departments were being permitted to draw down on their next year’s budget if necessary. It was reported that utility consumption was down on last year due to the mild winter. The Balance Sheet and Cashflow Reports were received and noted. The cashflow balance had reduced slightly but was not a concern.

7. Item 6.2 – School Unrestricted Funds. Unrestricted funds were tight and reliant on lettings income. It was reported that parental donations to the School were a lot lower than previously.

ITEM 7 – SCHOOL BUDGET 2024-25

8. The first draft of the School budget for 2024-25 was tabled and reviewed. The Business Manager advised that it had not been possible to include a contingency in the 2024-25 budget and that individual expenditure budgets had been reduced wherever possible. The Asset Replacement Plan budget had been halved for the coming year and items would be addressed on a failure basis. The budget forecast an In Year deficit of £(143,452). The meeting was advised that the budget was very pessimistic and that there were some possible staff changes which may improve the figures slightly.

ACTION

It was confirmed that the budget assumed an unfunded teaching staff cost increase of 2% and an unfunded support staff cost increase of 4%. Details of staff pay increases would not be known until after the election and more likely the Autumn Term.

8.10am – Steve Miles joined the meeting.

9. Other than staff costs all other expenditure areas were known. It was possible that more lettings income could be received than shown in the budget. A new gas contract for September 2024 was being fixed later that day and would require Management Committee approval by email. The energy market was coming down and the issue of standing charges was a point of public interest, these might both affect utility expenditure costs next year. Pupil assumptions were discussed, Main School figures were known to be 180 for all year groups and the Year 12 pupil figure for September 2024 was an assumed 160 minimum. A 2% minimum uplift had been assumed for KS3 and KS4 pupil funding rates and a 1.3%-1.5% uplift had been assumed for the Sixth Form. The Headteacher gave additional Sixth Form recruitment information pertinent to School finances.

10. Trustees put forward questions on the budget which were explained by the Business Manager. It was confirmed that the School was not allowed to set a deficit budget and that any shortfalls would be required to be filled from School reserves. Trustees noted that staff costs were the biggest expenditure and that they were relatively fixed. There was a discussion on what else could be done to reduce costs. The Headteacher advised that SLT were in the process of preparing a cost-reduction options document which would be presented in due course if needed in the worst case. The Committee discussed the financial situation and the future variables which could affect it, and the effect of lagged pupil funding was noted. The benefit of sending DfE a budget showing potential future reductions (to show that the School was addressing the deficit situation) was raised and the concept discussed. The areas of possible future savings in the 3-year budget were debated at length.

11. **Decision.** The Business Manager **agreed** to re-draft the 2024-25 budget in line with the discussions of the meeting and re-send it to the Committee by email for further review and approval prior to formal presentation at the Board meeting on 5th July 2024.

M Mulgrew

12. Trustees noted the very low level of parental donations to the School Fund. It was reported that donations had started to reduce prior to the pandemic and had been significantly affected by the pandemic, donation levels had never recovered. The Committee discussed the issue of poor donations to the swimming pool project and how parents could be encouraged to donate to both the swimming pool project and other items such as books. It was hoped that the new 'green' solution being investigated for the swimming pool may encourage more donations. The Business Manager confirmed that the external users of the swimming pool had indicated that they were happy to engage in the fundraising project. The large amount of work involved in producing the budget was noted and the Business Manager was thanked for her work to date.

ITEM 8 – CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT

13. The meeting was advised that the appeal for the increased financial variation to the CIF Art Block window project had been rejected by the DfE. PCH had agreed to reduce their fees for the project and the remaining shortfall was to be covered by School reserves. There had been some delay on the ordering of the windows as they were bespoke, anti-glare and fire-rated. Asbestos removal in the project area would take place during the Summer holiday and fitting of the windows would begin before the start of the Autumn Term. It was hoped the project would be finished by the October half term. Plans were in place to keep all areas of the School open during the project. The total cost of the project was originally £220,000 and the School was required to finance £65,000 of this amount. However, the project cost had now risen to £247,000 with the £27,000 variation being covered from 2023-24 capital funding and up to £10,000 from reserves.

ITEM 9 – SUSTAINABILITY

14. An LED lighting survey had been undertaken but their report was still awaited. A further solar energy proposal was still to be reviewed. A second solar and LED survey had been undertaken and was to be discussed with the company the following week. Both companies were part of a framework

and would therefore the school does not need additional quotations. A cost benefit analysis was to be undertaken by the Business Manager once all the information had been received. The meeting discussed the issue of excess electricity generation and its linkage to the other parts of the campus, plus the use of battery storage. It was confirmed that most of the School buildings were already using LED lighting, and the challenge of getting School users to turn off lights was stressed. The Business Manager confirmed that the School was pushing ahead with the decarbonisation agenda and that a School Climate Action Plan had to be in place by September 2024.

ITEM 10 – AUDIT RESPONSIBILITIES

15. A Juniper Education HR Policy Audit had been undertaken in early June and the audit report was received. Trustees noted the minor comments and the action to be taken by the School. It was noted that there were other options for model policy acquisition, and the concept was discussed.

ITEM 11 – IT & CYBER SECURITY UPDATE

16. The Headteacher informed the Committee of a scheme whereby every pupil in a School could purchase a laptop of their own from a third-party company, hence reducing IT costs for the School. Details of the scheme were received and discussed. It was reported that SLT were investigating the concept, including ownership, safeguarding and security-related issues.

9.05am – The Head left the meeting to teach.

17. An IT Update for June 2024 was received and discussed. Trustees noted the progress made on the DfE Cyber Security Assessment Programme and commended the levels achieved in the first fifteen sections of the Programme. CCHS scores were Level 3 (the expected level) in 10 sections, Level 4 (exceeding expectations) in 3 sections, and Level 5 (the maximum level) in 2 areas. The School was mainly above the national level in all areas so far and had been able to achieve the maximum levels by having Multi-Factor Authentication for all users of the School IT system. The final section of the Programme to be undertaken related to the area of policies and IT administration.

18. Trustees queried the School's IT back up system and were advised that it had two back up servers, one on-site and one off-site. The School had also started migrating data to the Cloud which was suggested to be a more secure system. The School's main drive was due to be moved to the Cloud by the end of the Autumn Term 2024. Trustees noted that the IT Update assumed a high level of technical IT knowledge and suggested that the report could be made more reader-friendly.

ITEM 12 – SITE TEAM REPORT

19. The Site Team Activity report since January 2024 was received. The Committee noted the significant amount of work undertaken and praised the excellent work of the Site Team in relation to the redecoration of the Drama Studio and the swimming pool changing rooms. The Business Manager highlighted that fact that the CCHS PA had funded the redecoration of the swimming pool changing rooms and the Trustees asked for their thanks to be passed to the PA. It was reported that the School had now taken re-possession of the former Caretaker's House and was intending to use it for storage and additional staff workspace. Work was to be done to the building but this required planning permission and building control approval. PCH had agreed to help with the project. The Committee asked for their thanks to be passed to the Site Manager and his team for their work.

ITEM 13 – HEALTH & SAFETY

20. The minutes of the School Health & Safety Committee meeting held on 10th June 2024 were received for information and noted. There were no major issues to report.

ITEM 14 – POLICIES

21. **Decision**. The following policies were reviewed and **approved** as presented with the review periods shown below.

Item 14.1 – Charges & Remissions Policy with a 2-year review.

Item 14.2 – Lettings Policy & Lettings Rates 2024-25 with an annual review. Governors were advised that the proposed lettings rates were unchanged from the current year. The rates had been bench-marked against other schools and were still comparable.

ACTION

Item 14.3 – First Aid Policy with an annual review. Trustees put forward questions relating to first aider requirements and trips and the Business Manager gave additional information on staffing levels and the ECC Evolve trips system.

Item 14.4 – Mobility Policy with an annual review.

Item 14.5 – Three cyber security policies – (1) Patch Management Policy, (2) Ransomware Policy and (3) Password Policy (all Secure Schools model policies) all with an annual review.

ITEM 15 – GDPR

22. There were no GDPR issues of great concern to report. Freedom of Information requests had increased since the last meeting, mainly relating to the Year 7 Entrance Test, its waiting list and associated appeals. All requests had been dealt with by the School.

ITEM 16 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS

23. No other business was raised for discussion.

ITEM 17 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

24. **Decision.** It was **agreed** that the next meeting would be held at 8.00am on Thursday 3rd October 2024.

All

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

The meeting closed at 9.25am.

R Brown, Chair

Date: 3rd October 2024