

WestBerkshireCouncil college alternative education Management Committee

D1 13.03.21 Finance Committee (virtual meeting) Tuesday 23rd February 2021 at 4pm

Present: Harry James - Community Governor (Chair) Maureen Sims – Community Governor Judith Fisher – Community Governor Jacquie Davies – Headteacher Darren King – Community Governor (from 4.50) Emma Fearn – Support Staff Governor		Apologies: Darren King – joining later due to work commitment.
Absent: None		Duration of meeting: 4 – 5.30pm
In attendance: Karen Price (KP) – School Business Manager Jill Hills (JH) - Clerk		MC members will be referred to as governors
		Action
1.	Welcome & Apologies Declaration of Any Other Urgent Business Declaration of Business Interests	
1.1	Harry James welcomed those present to his first meeting as Chair of Finance. Apologies had been received from Darren King who hoped to join the meeting about 5.40pm due to a work commitment.	
1.2	There were no items of any other urgent business raised. There were no declaration of business interests.	
2.	Minutes of the Meeting on 26th January 2021	
2.1	The minutes of the Finance Committee on 26 th January 2021 had been circulated with the Agenda. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and will be signed by the Chair once icollege is able to reopen.	
2.2	Matters Arising (where not elsewhere on the agenda) Governors were advised of the progress on a number of matters arising: There were seven actions to be carried forward:- 2.3 Book Maureen Sims onto Safer Recruitment training in the Autumn 2021; 2.12 Consider how best to feedback to policy holders approval of policies by Committees/MC (including signature) and any queries which need to be addressed. 2.15 Clerking Hours review – carried forward to Summer Term 1. 4.9 Look into publicising good news stories such as laptop donations and printing within local press (going via the WBC press office). 6.1 Include Internal Audit report on FC agenda as soon as available. 11.1 Annual Inventory Check - Clerk to add to 2021/22 meeting planner. 12.2 Confirm the review of the ICT & online security, Driving at Work Risk Management and Smoke Free Policy has been completed.	SBM/Clerk AT 1 Headteacher FC 20.04.21 Clerk ST1 JF/DK FC 23.03.21 Clerk Clerk 20.07.21 Headteacher FC 23.03.21
2.3	2.10 First Aid Policy – The SBM confirmed that the First Aid Policy had been updated to reflect where First Aid boxes and Red Books are kept and frequency with which contents of first aid boxes should be checked. 2.16 Travel Claims Policy - The Headteacher confirmed that Appendix 2 had been amended some time ago to reflect that payment for lunches does not apply where a member of staff was at a unit other than their base unit.	
3.	P10 Budget Monitoring Report	
3.1	The SBM advised that the P10 Budget Monitoring Report which had been circulated with the agenda was in the process of being reviewed by WBC Accountancy. They had reviewed P9 and a discrepancy	

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	<p>was identified with P10 whereby the projected year end surplus had unexpected and significantly increased. WBC had fed back a number of areas which the SBM needed to investigate and she was in the process of working through these to see if the reason for the discrepancy could be identified. The problem was thought to be relating to funding which as discussed at previous FC's can be difficult to predict and reconcile, due to its volatile nature. WBC and the SBM will be working together to produce a coherent explanation of the funding situation up to the end of March 2021 and how this will impact on the year end carry forward. The SBM advised that there would be a surplus at year end but it was unclear at this stage exactly what the level of surplus would be, other than it was likely to be larger than forecast. In addition to funding, some areas of expenditure had been lower this year than budgeted due to the impact of CV-19 on the service which was closed during the first national lockdown.</p>	
3.2	<p>Governors asked if there were any disadvantages of having a large surplus. The SBM advised that the main disadvantage would be a false sense of security when setting the 2021/22 budget. With the lower surplus, the service would have potentially needed to have looked at changes to income and expenditure so as to avoid a deficit budget for 2021/22. The higher surplus has in effect delayed the need for changes until 2022/23. Governors asked for clarification as to whether the reason or specific area leading to an increase in surplus was unknown. The SBM confirmed that whilst this was currently the case, the reasons would be established once the review by WBC and the SBM had been completed. The SBM will be working through the Budget Monitoring Report line by line to establish where the differences are in expenditure. As icollege has had less students this year as a result of lockdown it did not appear logical that a larger surplus had resulted. However, there had been more Band 2 students than budgeted for. There had been less expenditure on high budget lines such as Supply and Teaching Assistants but more on lower cost items.</p>	
3.3	<p>Governors asked if the reduced use of Outdoor Academy (OA) due to lockdown could be part of the explanation of the larger surplus. The SBM advised that although there had been some cutbacks, icollege had continued to use OA during lockdowns 2 and 3 but in a different way. The Headteacher advised that icollege had continued to pay OA during lockdown as schools had been told by the DfE that they should continue to pay certain providers which tied into the CV-19/furlough arrangements etc. There had however, been some reduction in use of OA.</p>	
3.4	<p>The Headteacher advised that another factor was the need to ensure that income hasn't been inadvertently double counted due to the random way that it is received and timing differences in the way it is reflected in WBC and icollege financial systems. Expenditure is much less of a problem. The current situation supports the need for a funding review to simplify the income/funding process. This need has also been discussed at the Heads Funding Group, although for a different reason. Given that 70% of icollege income is volatile this causes difficulties for the budget monitoring process. The Headteacher added that it is not certain whether the work which has been undertaken by WBC with the SBM is accurate either. icollege is therefore being very cautious about the surplus position, other than to confirm there will be a surplus.</p>	
3.5	<p>Governors asked how much influence icollege had in respect of the Funding Review. The Headteacher advised that potentially icollege had minimal influence. The review was tied up with not having a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place and the flexibility the Local Authority (LA) want to have in how they use the service. The LA prefer a funding structure where by they top up funding on a daily rate per student but this makes the administration complicated. However, getting the LA to move away from this approach is a significant issue. The LA Finance Manager would need to be on board and although they have stated that the current procedure is complicated, there may still be a reluctance on the part of the LA to make the change. There are however, some changes which could be made which would simplify the process. For example, there is currently discussion around single and dual roll status. Long term students are on single roll but the funding structure requires schools to fund 50% of the placement costs with the LA picking up the remainder. WBC legal department have been reviewing the situation and are starting to question why if a student has been placed long term with icollege via the Pupil Placement Panel (PPP) the LA asking schools to pick up 50% of the cost. The Heads Funding Group are looking at this as part of the Funding Review. If it was agreed that the LA was responsible for 100% of the funding for these students then there would be no reason why these places</p>	

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	could not be funded up front in the same way that schools receive their income in one lump. This would reduce the need for a daily rate to be applied and reduce the volume of invoicing and adjustments required.	
3.6	Governors asked if to move things forward, was icollege able to put forward proposed changes to the funding structure or of working with the LA to bring about those changes. The Headteacher advised that it is a question of working with the LA. icollege as an alternative education provider is in a different position to a mainstream schools where the FGB has more control over the direction of the school. As an alternative provider with a Management Committee there is a closer link to the LA who control the High Needs Block funding and therefore have a greater degree of control. icollege is able to put forward suggestions to the LA and has done this in the past.	
3.7	Governors asked when was the last time icollege suggested changes to the funding structure to the LA. Governors were not aware of any suggestions coming via the Management Committee to the LA. Governors discussed that the way forward would appear to be for icollege to propose a funding structure that would work for the service. The Headteacher advised that the paper going forward to the Heads Funding Group today includes the proposal that “ To provide financial modelling for options recommended by the task and finish group to ensure impact on the High Needs block is fully considered.” As part of this process it would be possible for icollege to put forward its own proposals for consideration by the Funding Review. Governors agreed that this is something icollege should do. See further discussion under Item 5 Budget Strategy 2021/22.	
3.8	Covid Expenditure Claim – Governors asked whether the allocation of £50,000 referred to in the Budget Monitoring Report was received by icollege regardless of whether that level of expenditure has been incurred. The SBM advised that icollege could only claim for actual additional expenditure incurred. This had been complicated by the frequently changing guidance from the DfE on what could and couldn't be claimed for.	
3.9	Referring to Table 3 Areas of concern, Governors asked for clarification of the colour coding. The SBM confirmed that those in red were significant overspends which were cause for concern. Those in green were underspends.	
3.10	IT equipment/Laptops etc – Governors asked if students all have adequate access to equipment needed for remote learning. The SBM advised that nine laptops had been provided from government funding. Emma Fearn advised that there had been a pre-emptive piece of work undertaken at the start of the pandemic to look at what access to equipment and internet students had at home. For icollege students, the situation is complicated by laptops being seen in some cases as “currency” and so less attractive equipment such as Kindles had been provided instead. A bespoke package of learning based on individual student needs were developed according to need and what worked best for them. Kindles are easier to set up to access programmes being used e.g. Satchel1. Mainstream learners have different barriers to learning than icollege students. However, laptops are available as a backup if needed. In addition, students are still receiving face to face tuition as unlike schools, icollege has been open to all learners during the pandemic, except for lockdown 1.	
3.11	Capital – Governors asked for clarification around the change in the proposed spend of £30,000 on a project which had been replaced by a £10,000 project and whether this meant there was an additional £20,000 available to spend. The SBM advised that this refers to improvements to the outdoor area at Intervention and The Pod. Originally, a playground was going to be installed but Lead Teachers had decided that this was not necessary and that a patio area would suffice. This had reduced the estimated cost to c.£10,000. With the pandemic, this had become a lower priority and so had not progressed but the capital funding is still earmarked for this when circumstances permit. The £20,000 difference in cost can be used for an additional project or saved as capital balances can be carried forward. There is a fixed amount allocated per year which can only be used for capital projects.	
3.12	Band 2 Funding – Governors asked for further clarification about the increase in the surplus being partly attributable to an increase in non-SEN learners being funded at Band 2. The SBM advised that	

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	<p>the SEN Team agree the funding bands in conjunction with the Inclusion Manager (Emma Dodridge) and the Primary Lead Teacher (Charlotte Duly). They will approach the SEN Team with a business case for funding at a higher level if there is no EHCP in place for the student at the time of placement with icollege. The majority of Band 2 students have EHCP's awarded to them, but not necessarily at the point they arrive. Governors asked if the increase in funding/Band 2 related to negotiations with the SEN Team resulting in better outcomes than in the past. The SBM advised that it was more related to there being an increasing number of learners with EHCP's. For example, all learners at The Pod are on Band 2 and will be with icollege until Year 6. Governors asked therefore whether the level of funding/income received for these students should be easier to forecast/predict, but funding received had still been more than expected. The SBM advised that icollege had budgeted for eight Band 2 learners on average, but not necessarily the same students for the whole of the academic year. Six had been known about, but two did move on and happened to be back filled by other Band 2 students but this may not have been the case. The budget is set conservatively based on an average number of learners at each funding level in previous years. The Headteacher added that included in the budget assumptions are the number of students who will be remaining with icollege, but it is not possible to predict how many Band 2/3 referrals will be made during the year. Some come with a higher level of need but no EHCP for a variety of reasons e.g. an EHCP has been applied for but their needs are not deemed sufficient for one to be awarded, but they still have a higher level of need or because they are too young.</p>	
3.13	<p>Governors asked in relation to staffing at The Pod and the balance for a key member of staff based there who also provides Outreach support and whether the latter can be detrimental to maintaining the quality of provision for students in The Pod. The Headteacher clarified that the Lead Teacher's time is limited to one day a week for Outreach activities and so is capped. This is only exceeded when there are exceptional circumstances e.g. the additional support needed by one Primary School around the time of the PC Harper incident. Outreach is also provided from Integration and Inspiration to support students returning to mainstream or special schools.</p>	
4.	Funding Implications - Strategies	
4.1	<p>Catch up Funding inc information for website MS advised that following the last meeting she had researched and forwarded to the Headteacher information relating to what schools are required to publish on their website in respect of the use and impact of Catch up Funding. The Headteacher advised that she is in the process of producing a report for the website similar to that for Pupil Premium (PPG) e.g. number of pupils, strategy statement, barriers to attainment, expenditure etc. Emma Douglas (AHT) is producing a document summarising the use of funding to which financial information will be added ready for the next meeting. Action: Include Catch up information for website on next agenda.</p>	Headteacher/Clerk FC 23.03.21
4.2	<p>Governors asked whether these feed into the budget setting process. The SBM advised that the funding received is for this academic year to enable students to catch up on lost learning from the first lockdown. As this falls partly into the next financial year, the amount of funding to be received during the Summer Term is known and can be built into the budget. It is hoped that in light of further lockdowns additional funding will be made available during the 2021/22 academic year, but schools are unlikely to have this confirmed or how much will be received for the Autumn or Spring Term 2021/22 for some time.</p>	
5.	Budget Strategy 2021/22	Actions
5.1	<p>The Headteacher referred to the paper being considered at the Heads Funding Group today which had been shared with the Chair of Governors and the Chair of Finance. It had been received very positively by Ian Pearson (Head of Education) and that it provided a clear strategy for a way forward and background for the Funding Working Party. The recommendations for the Task and Finish Group moving forward were:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To clarify the roll status of long term students placed with icollege. The Headteacher advised that this work had been completed previously by icollege, but at that time the LA were 	

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		Actions
	<p>not in favour of the proposed changes as there were implications for the High Needs Block.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop guidance document on how to access icollege places. There had been suggestions that there were non-standard practices which the Headteacher felt had not been the case. If the learner was full time/long term placement this was always via the PPP. Short term placements are through negotiation with the Headteacher at the mainstream school making the referral. The report eluded to primary places saying they did not know how to access places but the Headteacher felt this was more about not knowing how to access funding than places. Governors asked if this was more about communication than the processes. The Headteacher reiterated that primary schools are aware of icollege and how to contact them, but not so aware about how to access funding for placements with icollege. • To develop an SLA between the LA and icollege. This has been discussed by Governors for some time now and the Headteacher had advised Education that if the Task and Finish Group were going to develop an SLA, then icollege Governors need to be involved in this process so that the SLA was not imposed on icollege. The Headteacher felt this could result in a bland document as the LA would want to keep the flexibility of the service as is. Governors discussed that the Admissions Policy which had been produced recently would go some way to address those concerns and that there could be some Primary Headteachers, if they were new to the role or from out of area, who were unclear about how to go about arranging placements and that any document that clarified this would be helpful. <p>Darren King joined the meeting at 4.50pm.</p> <p>This is something that could be easily produced by icollege without the need for a review group.</p> <p>In terms of an SLA, the Headteacher advised that WBC are different to other LA's. For example, in Nottinghamshire when their PRU is full its full and places have to be found with other providers. However, in West Berkshire, the LA always look to icollege to find a way to accommodate the pupils needs as the provision is cheaper than that from outside of the LA remit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To track pupils over time to measure outcomes and impact of the provision provided by icollege. icollege has this information already e.g. exam results, NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) etc. For example, since 2018 of the 54 learners who have been supported by Outreach, only four have been permanently excluded. • To undertake financial modelling for options recommended by task and finish group to ensure impact on the High Needs block is fully considered. As discussed under 3.5 to 3.7 above. <p>5.2 Governors asked how this could be taken forward. The Headteacher advised that there is to be another meeting of the Task and Finish Group and that icollege need to be involved in this and put forward its own proposal. Governors asked how the proposal would be produced i.e. is it within the remit of the Finance Committee, a group of governors or individuals. The Headteacher suggested an Extraordinary meeting of the Finance Committee. Some of the proposals had been raised in the past with the LA albeit not formally. The main sticking point is that icollege want the LA to pay up front for places and the LA wants to pay on daily rates. Governors asked what timescales are being worked to and were advised that the Heads Funding Group is on 9th June, so papers would need to be ready by end of May 2021. The Headteacher advised that the roll status of students would form a significant part of any model as icollege is always full based on averages across the financial year, but by the end of the year icollege is over full. One of the challenges is accomodating this with a static staffing level whilst funding is fluid. Action: Arrange Exo FC to discuss funding proposal for Task and Finish Group/Heads Funding Group.</p>	<p>Chair/Headteacher /Clerk asap.</p>

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	Budget Strategy 2021/22	
5.3	The first draft of the Budget Strategy had been circulated in advance of the agenda papers so Governors had the opportunity to raise any questions on the assumptions which were being proposed when setting the budget, so they could be discussed further at this meeting. Governors had raised questions via email in advance of the meeting and these had been collated into one document which had been circulated with the agenda. A number of the questions had already been answered by email.	
5.4	Governors asked about the impact the uncertainty around the relocation of some students to Moorside would have on the budget. The Headteacher advised that Pod+ (to accommodate existing Pod pupils into Year 7 until the additional secondary provision planned by the LA was operational) would bring in additional funding and is already included in the strategy document. This has been forecast based on known banding. The Headteacher is awaiting the opportunity to visit Moorside to review the feasibility of moving students there. There are two large communal spaces which could be used for activities currently being provided offsite e.g. badminton and there is access to the communal football pitch which would save having to hire facilities elsewhere. It is understood that Moorside is currently operating at a loss and the LA is covering this e.g. energy, lift maintenance. The LA has agreed to continue to cover these running costs whilst icollege would be using the building. Initially the Headteacher had intended to locate Pod+ there, but is intending to review the distribution of students and whether it might be better to move Post 16 students there as it is easier to catch the train to Thatcham and then walk to the unit. Intervention Year 9 and Year 10 students which is the smallest group of students could also move to Moorside, leaving the building at Intervention for Pod+ students alongside The Pod. icollege would have use of Moorside for two years. It is possible that Pod+ places will be needed for two academic years depending on when the SEMH provision planned by the LA on the Theale Primary site is ready. The situation is frustrating for the Headteacher who had raised the situation regarding the current Year 6 students at the Pod with the LA in September 2019 but there had been no action taken until recently. Funding will follow for students placed there and the LA will cover the running costs. (does some of this need to be in part II?)	
5.5	The Headteacher advised that the practice had been in the past for the main user at Moorside to take on the role of Health and Safety Responsible Officer. The Headteacher had advised the LA that she is not prepared to do this. However, to have single useage of Moorside would be the Headteachers preference.	
5.6	Governors asked whether the additional staffing included in the Budget Strategy would be replacement staff or anticipated movement in staff. The Headteacher advised that the additional 16 hours Admin is to make the SBM/HR Support permanent instead of fixed term. Then there is additional staffing for Pod+, however if there were to be two provisions on the one site, there would be economies of scale for staffing.	
6.	Pay Policy	
6.1	Governors sought clarification of the status of the Pay Policy which from the document circulated appeared to have been approved in October 2020. The Headteacher advised that the policy had not been agreed as she had requested a review of the Headteacher and Assistant Headteacher's (AHT's) pay ranges. Governors were aware of this request, but did not recall the request including the AHT's. The Headteacher would need to go back and check the original request. Governors advised that in order to progress the Headteachers request for a review of pay ranges, they needed to understand the rationale behind the request i.e. what significant changes had taken place to prompt a review. Action: Headteacher to formally put forward a case for the need to review the Headteacher and AHT pay ranges.	Headteacher FC 23.03.21
6.2	Governors discussed that the second reason for not approving the Pay Policy related to the request from the Unions that ½ point increments included in the pay structure should be removed as they did not reflect the national scheme. Where the half points are applied, the Teacher has been assessed as delivering a quality of teaching which is at least good and that their managerial responsibility had been discharged effectively where appropriate. One point is awarded for very good performance and	

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	1 ½ points equates to exceptional performance. If the ½ point is removed then the 1 ½ point would need to be removed as well. Governors sought clarification as to whether half points had been included in previous Pay Policies. The Headteacher advised that they had but this was the first year it had been queried by Unions. Governors asked if the inclusion of ½ points works for icollege. The Headteacher advised that if a member of staff has not been able to complete a full year for some reason, a half point could be awarded. It would be used in rare instances and to provide a degree of flexibility as part of the performance management process. The SBM advised that there are no members of staff currently on half points. Governors unanimously agreed to retain half points within the Pay Policy.	
7.	Capital/Building Maintenance	
7.1	7.1 New Build at Integration The Headteacher advised that we are still waiting for the issue with the lease for the land to be resolved. Nothing further has been received from the Parish Council. Until this has been resolved there can be no further progress. In light of the stalemate, the Headteacher was beginning to wonder whether icollege should look to relocate from Integration alongside the SEMH provision being developed by the LA. Governors asked how time critical such considerations are in the context of the intention for icollege to review and develop a long term strategy and way forward. The Headteacher advised that she was not fully aware of the timescales for the new SEMH provision but understands that the project brief has not been produced yet. Theoretically there could be time for icollege to become part of the project brief.	
7.2	7.2 Garden at Intervention and The Pod – This was discussed under 3.11 above.	
8.	Health and Safety	
8.1	The FC Chair advised that in his capacity as Health and Safety Governor he had met with Monica Romano (H&S Co-ordinator) at Independence. A series of meetings on a regular basis were being scheduled (covid 19 restrictions permitting).	
8.2	The Headteacher advised that following Government announcements, icollege was starting to consider the next stage of CV-19 testing, social distancing, mask wearing etc. Governors discussed that it is very difficult to keep up to date with constantly changing requirements. The Headteacher and SBM advised that the latest guidance issued was much clearer and concise and had been made available very quickly after the announcement had been made.	
9.	Revised timescaled for the completion of the 2020/21 SFVS.	
9.1	The DfE had announced on 4 th February 2021, that in light of CV-19, the deadline for the completion of the SFVS had been changed from the 31 st March to 28 th May 2021. The FC Chair advised that he would be arranging a meeting with the SBM to run through the SFVS. The Clerk advised that the document would need to be approved at the MC on 27 th April 2021 in order to meet the deadline for submission to the LA. The draft would therefore need to be approved at the FC on 20 th April 2021. Action: FC Chair to meet with SBM to complete SFVS.	FC Chair FC 20.04.21
10.	Any Other Urgent Business - none	
11.	Part II Minutes for 26th January 2021	
11.1	The Part II minutes of the Finance Committee on 26 th January 2021 had been circulated with the Agenda. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and will be signed by the Chair once icollege is able to reopen. There were no matters arising.	
12.	Date and Focus of Next Meeting – The next meeting is 23 rd March 2021 at 4pm. The focus will be:- P11 Budget Monitoring Report and Year-end Outturn, Budget Strategy – update, First Draft budget 2021/22, SFVS 2021– first draft, Integration – New Build update, H&S, Support Staff Appraisal Outcomes.	

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 5.30pm.

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