

WestBerkshireCouncil college alternative education Management Committee

D1 12.12.21 Finance Committee (virtual meeting) Tuesday 23rd November 2021 at 6pm

Present: Harry James - Community Governor (Chair) Tim Pritchard – Community Governor Maureen Sims – Community Governor Judith Fisher – Community Governor (from 6.12pm) Jacquie Davies – Headteacher Darren King – Community Governor	Apologies: Richard Thompson – Community Governor Karen Price (KP) – School Business Manager
Absent: None	Duration of meeting: 6 – 6.50pm
In attendance: 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	The Chair welcomed those present and advised that Richard Thompson and Karen Price had sent apologies. Judith Fisher had also sent apologies as she was running late and would join the meeting as soon as possible.	
1.2	There were no declaration of business interests. The Headteacher had a couple of information item of any other business that would be covered at the end of the meeting.	
2.	Minutes of the Meeting on 2nd November 2021 and Matters Arising where not elsewhere on the agenda.	
2.1	The minutes of the Finance Committee on 2 nd November 2021 had been circulated with the Agenda. The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and will be signed by the Chair as soon as covid restrictions permit.	
2.2	Matters Arising (where not elsewhere on the agenda) The Chair advised that as the focus of this meeting was on the Heads Funding Group Working Party (HFGWP) and Internal Financial Review, only matters arising from 2 nd November relating to these areas would be covered by this meeting and under their respective agenda items. The remaining actions would be reported to the FC on 14.12.21.	
3.	HFG Working Party Review of icollege	
3.1	Verbal feedback on the HFG meeting on 18th November 2021 The Headteacher had circulated in advance of the meeting a note of items discussed at the HFGWP on 18 th November 2021. The Headteacher highlighted that the financial modeling had been set at the same bands as currently used. £820,000 had been allowed by the LA for top up funding and £840,000 for place funding.	
3.2	In respect of placements, icollege currently enables schools to manage placements post day 5 of a fixed term exclusion. The cost is met 50/50 between the LA and the school. The LA wants this to cease and are not willing to continue to fund their half of the cost. Governors asked what the impact of this would be for icollege. The Headteacher advised that it would make management of Integration more straightforward as there would be less change in students. It would also enable the unit to offer a fuller and more focused curriculum for those students who attend the unit for a longer period of time. The Headteacher advised that should this be agreed, then it would have a significant impact on schools as they will need to find provision for those learners from day 6.	
3.3	Governors asked if this would cause further financial insecurity for icollege. The Headteacher advised that it could, but if the outcome of the review was the funding of commissioned places up front by the LA, then this should smooth funding implications out, as the LA will be paying for places rather than	

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	individual learners. Governors asked if this would mean the financial implications for icollege would be negligible. The Headteacher advised that this couldn't yet be determined but that any impact on icollege's financial stability would be negated by the payment of a larger proportion of its funding up front and therefore more stable.	
3.4	The Headteacher advised that changes were also being proposed to Post 16 places which the LA were proposing would only be for learners who had EHCP's/SEN. Whilst the majority of Post 16 learners have EHCP's/SEN the numbers have decreased from between 18 and 22 to between 6 and 10. This was because there is more provision available for these learners post school. The NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) figures appear to be under control within West Berkshire. Local Colleges and the West Berkshire Training Consortium are providing more options for these learners. icollege picks up those learners who have more challenging needs.	
3.5	Governors asked about the LA's proposal to reduce the number of EHCP places over seven years, to 13. The Headteacher advised that this had been discussed at Heads Funding Group and was part of the proposal by Jane Seymour (LA Service Manager, SEN & Disabled Children's Team). The LA needs to be demonstrating that it is looking at all provision in order to reduce places. The Headteacher felt this was unrealistic and contradictory as on one hand SEN were saying icollege provided good value for money, but are then looking to reduce the number of places. The proposal would now be reviewed by Secondary Headteachers. The planned reduction would equate to a reduction of two places per year, whereas in reality, an additional two places or more, are likely to be needed.	
3.6	Governors discussed that there seemed to be a number of contradictory statements within the proposals and as a result it was unclear what the overall aim of the LA was. The Headteacher advised that it was part of the LA's Deficit Recovery Plan for the High Needs Block (HNB). The LA was working its way through all services/provision within West Berkshire, to see where places could be reduced. At the same time additional resource would be put into mainstream schools to support pupils such as Emotional Based School Avoiders in terms of Therapeutic Thinking etc to prevent them getting to the point where they need a placement outside of mainstream.	
3.7	Governors asked based on the experience of Emma Dodridge (Inclusion Manager), how easy it was to get an EHCP for learners. The Headteacher advised that it is estimated that the LA/SEN Panel is turning down between 35 and 45% of EHCP applications at the final stage, on the basis that the mainstream school should be able to manage the learners. Governors asked how long it took to get an EHCP. The Headteacher advised that the process should take 20 weeks from when the panel sits, which equates to half a school year. Judith Fisher joined the meeting at 6.12pm. The Headteacher explained that there are two aspects to the LA's approach. The aim is to push for mainstream schools to be more able to manage pupils with SEN. The LA has set aside HNB Additional Funding which is £40,000 for the 2022/23 financial year for schools to access to provide support for learners over and above the £6,000 they are required to provide for learners with EHCP's. Some of the EHCP's are turned down by the SEN Panel because the paperwork is inadequate.	
3.8	Governors asked if in light of the above there was scope for icollege to increase the level of Outreach it provides. The Headteacher advised that icollege already provides outreach for both Primary and Secondary schools. This includes both supporting learners and assisting the school with the preparation of EHCP documentation. The LA's plans include the same level of funding for icollege Outreach (£61,000 per year). Depending on capacity within icollege, it can typically provide schools with three sessions for free, as part of the reintegration of learners from icollege back into mainstream schools. icollege charges for work it does within the mainstream school around supporting the learner.	
3.9	Governors sought clarification as to whether the points discussed above were recommendations from the LA or discussion points. The Headteacher advised that currently they are discussion points for the HFGWP. There is a further meeting on 6 th December, and the recommendations arising from that	

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	meeting will feed into the report to the Heads Funding Group for them to vote on. The deadline for the report is 5 th January 2022. The Headteacher would be able to update Governors on the outcome of the meeting on 6 th December at the FC on 14 th December, but minutes from the meeting or the report to HFG would not be available.	
4.	icollege Internal Financial Review	
4.1	The draft terms of reference for the icollege Internal Financial Review had been circulated with the agenda and the Chair advised that they had been drafted following a discussion with the Headteacher and SBM. Each bullet point was discussed in turn.	
4.2	<p>1.Reviewing the budget setting process to ascertain how the system is aligned to SDP priorities, how individual budgets are allocated, and how best value for money is guaranteed.</p> <p>This was linked to the SDP priorities being costed, which they already are. The aim was to look at when the SDP is put together and those priorities are costed, that they are included in the icollege budget and how costs are monitored. The Headteacher advised that what was needed was to marry up the priorities in the SDP with the specific budget line in which the costs are included. Once the new SDP has been completed, it would be beneficial for the FC to review it alongside the budget to enable the links to be clarified. Governors asked if the information provided would include aspirational elements and best case/worse case financial positions etc. The Headteacher advised that icollege had a three year budget plan which this would be part of.</p> <p>2.Reviewing the process for producing reports to governors so that, as far as possible, governors can have confidence in the accuracy of data.</p> <p>3.Reviewing the format and presentation of reports, and other financial information, in order to inform governors' understanding of icollege finances, including any constraints under which we have to operate.</p>	
4.3	Points 2 and 3 are linked in that when governors receive reports as well as looking at the content, the format of the report is also considered. The suggestion was that there should be a time every year when governors formally assess the format of the information they receive to ensure that it still meets their needs. Governors have got into the routine of raising questions by email and so the format of reports will naturally evolve over time. Governors discussed the need to have a consistent format as it seemed that the FC had been in the review stage for some considerable time. This makes it difficult for Governors to compare to previous financial information and for the SBM to be continually tweaking the format of the reports.	
4.4	<p>The Headteacher advised that the SBM had resurrected the High Level Summary Report that had been used several years ago. This was felt to be a clear summary of the overall budget position with details of any significant under/overspends. There would be reference to the detail if Governors wanted to dig deeper into a particular budget line.</p> <p>4.Review the level of financial training and communication that governors receive to enhance their knowledge and allow them to make informed contributions. This to include contributions from the local authority.</p>	
4.5	The Chair advised that there were two elements to this. Firstly Governors undertaking finance training to ensure that their knowledge was current and then to gain an understanding of the way finances work within the wider LA environment. It is important for icollege to be aware at the point the LA are setting their budget strategy, of how this could impact on services provided by icollege and therefore its financial stability. Governors also need to be aware of the potential implications of national strategies e.g. the National Funding Formula and pay rises etc.	
4.6	<p>The Clerk advised that one of the problems with training is that because icollege financing is so different to a mainstream school, the standard finance training offered by the LA isn't relevant. The Chair advised that it may be a case of applying the more standardised training to icollege requirements.</p> <p>5.To facilitate an independent review of the icollege group size to ensure that staff are being paid at the right level.</p>	

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4.7	The Chair of Governors advised that there was an item later on the agenda relating to this. The suggestion being that a Pay Committee is formed from FC membership to review the document that the Headteacher had produced in support of a review of the Group Size. Mark Brown, School Improvement Adviser had also reviewed the document. There would be a detailed process to go through in order to review the Group size. The suggestion was that the Pay Committee would consist of either the Chair of Governors or the Vice Chair and two other Governors.	
4.8	The Headteacher advised that there was another area which had been discussed to be included in the review; to ensure that icollege is charging the correct daily rate. Although the rate is determined by the LA, it does not reflect any inflationary rise so it would be useful to see if the current daily rate was sufficient to cover costs of the service provided. Action: Add to the TOR's review the daily rate charge to ensure it covers icollege costs.	Chair MC 07.12.21
4.9	The FC Chair advised that there were several other activities which needed to happen which were not directly linked to the icollege review, namely SFVS Follow up of Internal Audit Recommendations Financial Skills Audit Benchmarking The Chair was meeting with the Headteacher and SBM later in the week to schedule regular meetings to discuss the Budget Monitoring Reports before they are circulated to the FC. Benchmarking is always difficult for Alternative Provision, although based on guidance around the changes to this years SFVS, it was thought there may not be a need to produce this element of the SFVS for the 2021/22 financial year. Post Meeting Note: The Clerk has checked the guidance which states: "Previously, schools have been required to complete the SFVS checklist and dashboard. This year schools will need to complete the checklist only and answer the following question: Has the school leadership team considered the results of the self-assessment dashboard or other DfE benchmarking tools? "	
5.	IPR Review – Pay Committee	
5.1	Following on from discussion at 4.7 above, it was agreed that the membership of the Pay Committee would consist of Maureen Sims, Tim Pritchard and Darren King. MS would email some suggested dates and circulate draft Terms of Reference which would consist of one item/role, although it may be decided that this should be expanded to cover other areas moving forward. The Clerk advised that the Management Committee would need to agree to set up and delegate to the Pay Committee at its meeting on 7 th December 2021. Action: Include formation of a Pay Committee on the MC agenda for 07.12.21. Action: Circulate draft TOR's for the Pay Committee and discuss dates for it to meet.	Clerk MC 07.12. 21 MS 07.12.21
6.	Revised timings of FC meetings for the rest of the academic year.	
6.1	Following on from discussions at previous meetings, the Clerk had circulated revised meeting times for the FC for the remainder of the year so that they alternated between an 8am, 4pm and 6pm start. Governors thanked the Clerk for her efforts to try to schedule meetings to accommodate the demands on everyone's availability.	
7.	Any Other Urgent Business	
7.1	Scheme for Financing Schools – The Headteacher advised that the revisions proposed by the LA had been approved on the basis that no comments had been received on the document. The model Financial Management Policy which is based on the Scheme would need to be tailored to reflect icollege authorisation levels etc and included for approval on the FC agenda for 14.12.21. Action: Clerk to add Financial Management Policy to the FC on 14.12.21.	Clerk FC14.12.21

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7.2	The Headteacher advised that there had been an issue with the icollege overdraft on its Imprest Account. The situation had arisen whereby icollege needed to pay two lots of BAC's payments, which included two Outdoor Academy invoices which had taken the total over the amount icollege can sign for in one go. An overdraft had been applied for via WBC Education Finance, which had been granted but not given permission for, so was in effect unlicensed by the LA. The limit on the overdraft was £50,000 and the total value of the BAC's payments was c£120,000. The invoices had been processed on one return when they should have been split over three. Governors asked what the implications were. The Headteacher advised that it could be raised by the Internal Auditor when they undertake their follow up of the recommendations in their report from last December and that it would not help bring the overall opinion on icollege budget control up to good.	
8.	Date and Focus of Next Meeting - 14th December 2021 at 8am P7 Budget Monitoring and year end forecast Heads Funding Group Report (deadline 5th January 2022 for HFG 12th January 2022 then Schools Forum 24.01.22)	

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 6.50pm.

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