



Minutes of the Christ Church (Brondesbury) Church of England Primary School  
Governing Board meeting held on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023, at 6pm via Zoom.

Name	Initials	Attendance 07/07/22	Attendance 29/09/22	Attendance 01/12/22	Attendance 23/03/23	Attendance 18/05/23
<b>Governors</b>		Via Zoom	In school	In school	Via Zoom	Via Zoom
<b>Headteacher (1)</b>						
James Kelly (head teacher)	HT	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
<b>Foundation ex officio (1)</b>						
Mother Christine Cargill	MC	Apologies	Present	Present	Present	Present
<b>Foundation PCC (2)</b>						
Jason Kosky	JK	Present	Present	Apologies	Present	Present
Alison Schulte (Chair)	AS	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
<b>Foundation Deanery Synod (2)</b>						
Lesley Daisley	LD	Apologies	Via Zoom	Present	Present	Present
Stephen Woodward	SW	Apologies	Resigned	Resigned	Resigned	Resigned
<b>Foundation LDBS (2)</b>						
Fiona Dwinger	FD	Apologies	Via Zoom	Present	Present	Resigned
Josephine Francois-Poncet	JF	Present	Via Zoom	Apologies	Present	No
<b>LA (1)</b>						
Rohin Murari	RM	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
<b>Elected parents (2)</b>						
Karen Moran (Vice-Chair)	KM	Present	Present	Present	Resigned	Resigned
Saeed Akhtar	SA	No	Present	Present	Present	No
<b>Elected staff (1)</b>						
Eman Yaseen	EY	Not in post	Not in post	Present	Apologies	Present
<b>Associate members (3)</b>						
Vacancy (3)						
<b>Observer/advisers</b>						
Jacqui Carrington	SBM	N/A	N/A	N/A	Present	Present
<b>Clerk</b>						
Lynda Rees	Clerk	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present

Part one - public

Item	Who	When
<p><b>1a. Welcome, Opening Prayer and Apologies for Absence</b></p> <p>The Chair (AS) welcomed everyone to this Special GB meeting that was being held via Zoom and opened the meeting with a prayer.</p> <p>The Chair added that there had been no apologies for absence sent in prior to the meeting.</p> <p>AS explained to governors that the purpose of this Special GB meeting is to approve/ratify the final budget for 2023/24 and the draft budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 – which had been reviewed at the F&amp;R meeting held on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and led to further adjustments being included in the budget papers that have been shared with all governors prior to this FGB meeting.</p>		



<b>1b.</b>	<b>Declarations of Interest and notice of confidentiality (relevant to items on this agenda)</b>  The Chair asked governors if they have any declarations of interest (DOI) to declare on anything that is to be discussed under the agenda items for this meeting.  Governors had no declarations to declare for this meeting.		
<b>2</b>	<b>HT and SBM presentation of the Budget</b>  The Chair asked HT/SBM and the Chair of Finance (LD) to give a summary to governors of the final outturn for 2022/23 that was reviewed at the 11 May F&R meeting and further documents that have been produced following that meeting in preparation for presenting the final 2023/24 budget figures at this Special GB meeting.  <b>a) 2022/23 outturn</b> SBM explained that the 2022/23 final outturn position was higher than what was originally anticipated when the December 2022 budget monitoring reports were reviewed at the F&R committee meeting held in January 2023 – the in - year deficit as of December 2022 was £39k but this has now reduced to an in-year deficit of £14k. The school brought forward a surplus of £252k which has now become a cumulative surplus of £238k as of 31 March 2023, which has been used to support the 3-year budget plans presented to this meeting for approval.  LD added that at the F&R meeting held on 11 <sup>th</sup> May the final outturn figures and the 2023/24 budget plan were reviewed in detail which included a number of probing questions being asked by governors.  F&R governors had also asked for further work to be undertaken to show the breakdown of the commitments and accruals and for the SBM/HT to revisit the expenditure figures to ensure the latest figures are based on the previous year's outturn and the most realistic costs based on usage and inflation guidance.  SBM presented the 2022/23 outturn spreadsheet and went through the main headings to explain the increases/decreases that took place during the year; <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Total income increased by £66k</li><li>• Salary expenditure was overspent by £41k</li><li>• Premises expenditure had an underspend of £8k</li><li>• Supplies and Services was overspent by £39k</li></ul> SBM added that the outturn figure for 2022/23 was a cumulative surplus of £237,810.		



LD added that the F&R governors went through the 2022/23 outturn figures in more detail and were happy with the outturn position and approved the figures at the 11<sup>th</sup> May committee meeting.

Governors had no further questions to ask on the 2022/23 outturn figures and were happy to approve these figures.

**b) 2023/24 Final Budget and 2024/25 and 2025/26 draft budgets**

SBM informed governors that the 3-year budget summary spreadsheet which is the LA template – has been updated since it was last presented to the F&R meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May to reflect the questions that had been raised by governors – this included the following changes;

- Removed the contingency figures for salaries, premises and supplies and services
- Increased income donations by £2k
- For 2023/24 budget the in-year deficit was originally £104k but this has now reduced to an £88k in year deficit position

SBM added that the F&R committee did ask about the outturn figures for the gas and electricity services and whether the 2023/24 budget figures were realistic and based on the latest guidance.

SBM has now spoken to the Laser representative (Gas and Electricity come within the Laser contract) and the representative has explained that the school will receive further savings of £5,023 in 2023/24.

SBM added that the Laser representative stated that schools did not receive the full extent of the changes in utility prices in the 2022/23 financial year – as the costs were based on the April 2022 to March 2023 figures and the costs will be lower for the September 2023 to October 2024 period.

AS added that it was quite surprising to find that the outturn figures for 2022/23 for Gas and Electricity were close to the original budgets that were set although prices had gone up. What seems to be a concern is that the projected figures for 2023/24 have risen significantly when prices are now starting to go down.

LD added that she has looked at the gas and electricity percentage increases and does not accept that the 2023/24 budget figures are an accurate reflection of what the costs should be – an increase of 85% based on the actual outturn figures for 2022/23.

LD would like further details from Laser to explain where they have got their figures from and how they can justify a percentage increase of 85%

HT stated that in previous years the school has received a good deal from Laser with a lower price point but now the prices being quoted are on a higher tariff.



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LD added that last year's gas and electricity was £30k but for 2023/24 is showing £56k which is an unacceptable increase of 85% when prices are starting to go down and it is unreasonable to have 6-month lag in pricing before passing a price increase onto schools.

SBM explained that utility companies secure prices in advance and have only partly charged schools for the price hike last winter (2022-23) before the next price increase is applied to schools.

MC agreed that the 85% price increase is unreasonable – as the October to April rate should be lower, as prices are going down for the utility services across the country.

LD asked what the contractual arrangement the school currently has with Laser and whether they could look at other utility suppliers.

LD spoke about the spreadsheet she has prepared to show the lower percentage figures that would be more reasonable for the gas and electricity budgets and the impact these revised budgets would have on the overall in year deficit position for 2023/24 and future budgets and reiterated that the 85% percentage increase is not acceptable.

LD added that the forecasters are predicting that gas and electricity prices will continue to go down over the coming months – so the Laser projections are not realistic.

LD stated that her proposed percentage increases – 20% for 2023/24 and 5.5% for 2024/25 and 2025/26 would bring about a better surplus position at the end of 2023/24 and avoid going into deficit at the end of 2024/25. The proposal would mean that the school would be likely to go into deficit only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the budget plan – for 2025/26.

LD explained to the non-F&R governors, that for the income budgets the school is unable to include any projected figures that are not guaranteed. She also added that it is important that governors show due diligence when reviewing the budget and that realistic figures are presented for the expenditure areas. These should not be over inflated.

LD reiterated her concern that if the Laser supplier adjust their prices every 6 months – the prices that are being set now should be lower than previously and not still showing a price rise of 85%.

MC suggested that if the current supplier is quoting an 85% increase but the advice from the forecasters is more likely to be 20% - it would seem reasonable to use 20% as this is what the market experts are predicting.

AS added that the current advice for householders on a fixed rate tariff for utilities is that the best rate is a variable one.



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HT summarised that he agreed with the different opinions expressed by governors on the utility budgets and that it would be nice to set a budget that was more cautious – but the advice from the Laser representative is that the trend will be for prices to start going down in October and the budgets can be adjusted as the school will then be paying less for gas and electricity.

RM added that until the Laser contract terms and conditions are known there is a risk that by terminating the contract could leave the school with penalty fees to pay.

AS understands the predicament of the school and the opinions being put forward by governors to find out more about the Laser contract and whether the school is tied into it so that penalties would occur if terminated early – but it should be noted that at the time of the budget review/approval by governors – the school was planning further action to review the Laser contract and take the necessary action to reduce costs by terminating the contract ( if out of contact) and sourcing new suppliers.

AS added that if the school was tied into a contract an option could still be to re-negotiate the percentage increases based on the trends currently being predicted for the utility services over the many different service providers.

LD is very mindful of Governors responsibilities in holding the school to account and ensuring value for money when setting the budget and any auditors that would review the budget approval process may feel the GB did not adhere to their roles and responsibilities by approving elements of the budget which were showing unreasonable percentage increases of 85%.

JK agreed that it would seem more sensible for the school to look through the paperwork for the Laser contract to determine the contract terms and conditions and whether there may be a penalty for exiting the contract early before the final decision is made on approving the 2023/24 budget.

MC added that the only issue seems to be regarding the gas and electricity budgets and the other budgets look fine.

*Governors all agreed that they were happy with the figures for the other budget areas and only had an issue with the unreasonable percentage increases for the gas and electricity budgets.*

HT added that the school has one week to submit the final budget and it may not be enough time to source new providers to move to another gas/electricity supplier – but is happy to start the process of looking at the options if the school are out of contract with Laser.

LD confirmed that if the school is not tied into a contract with Laser, it could be possible to get indicative costs and start the process for contract negotiations as soon as it is possible to do so.



MC suggested that 2 separate issues could be considered

- a) That Governors approve the 2023/24 budget in principle despite not being comfortable with having an 85% increase for gas and electricity .
- b) That the school look at other options as soon as possible which would include renegotiating the rate with Laser if tied into a contract – or if within a rolling contract – look at other suppliers with lower tariffs/rates.

AS recommended that HT and SBM look at the contract documentation in the next few days and inform all governors via Governor Hub/email of the existing Laser contract and whether the school is tied into it or not and for how long.

HT added that he understands the Governors' concern with the very high percentage increase for the gas and electricity budgets and is very keen to reduce the budgets for these when it is possible to do so but is not sure if the school has the capacity to source quotes and renegotiate new contracts within a 5 day period before the final budget for 2023/24 needs to be submitted to the LA.

LD suggested that the school could contact a few utility suppliers to see what their cost and tariffs are using the current usage by the school for gas and electricity.

AS added that the school has been prudent in setting the 2023/24 budget and if the percentage increases proved eventually to be too low this would not be considered being prudent. If governors are unhappy with the 85% increase in the gas/electricity budgets – it is important that the school urgently finds out what the status is for the current Laser contract and whether anything can be done to rectify these excessive price increases. It would be better not to be in this position for the gas and electricity budgets but there are other budgets that still have unknown factors – such as the teachers' pay awards which could be higher than what has currently been offered which would also have an impact on the 2023/24 budget figures – and we cannot guess at these at present.

HT agreed to look at the Laser contract and will circulate any additional information to Governors via the Governor Hub system by midday Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023.

He would then ask that Governors vote on the position for the 2023/24 final budget which would have the 2 options:

- a) the budget remains as presented to 18<sup>th</sup> May Special GB meeting if the school is tied into the Laser contract or
- b) quotes are sourced for a new gas/electricity supplier – and the latest information on these new quotes are shared with governors for the most suitable percentages to be included in the 2023/24 budget for gas and electricity).

**Action HT**

**HT**

AS added that the Terms of Reference document has the facility for governors to approve decisions – in exceptional circumstances via email – which would require



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	<p>governors to respond by email by a set date and with a minimum of 50% of the governing board membership having to agree to a decision.</p> <p>Governors agreed that the current situation was an exceptional circumstance and therefore that the ratification of the final budget for 2023-24 could be agreed by email – as it was not possible to convene another GB meeting prior to the end of term date of Friday 26 May and until the Laser contract position is known – approval could not be given at this Special GB meeting.</p> <p>There were no further questions raised by Governors and all thanked HT, SBM and Chair of Finance (LD) for all the additional work that has been undertaken on the budget spreadsheets since they were last reviewed at the F&amp;R meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> May which enabled the updated budget spreadsheets to be presented at this Special GB meeting.</p>		
3.	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>No further matters were discussed at this Special GB meeting and no matters were discussed under confidential matters.</p>		
	<p><b>The public meeting closed at 7.35pm</b></p>		

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES BY THE CHAIR OF THE GB**

These minutes are an accurate representation of the Special GB meeting which took place on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at 6pm via Zoom.

Signed..... Date.....

Alison Schulte Chair of the GB

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