

**MINUTES OF THE 115th FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
MEETING
OF ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
TUESDAY 9 JULY 2024 AT 16.30**

Present: Dick Whitcutt (DW) - Chair, Richard Perry (RJP), Douglas Mitchell (DMI), Angela Entwistle (AEE) via TEAMS, Stewart Harris (SH), Kevin Chamberlain (KC)

In Attendance: Jane Kiddell (JKD) (Minutes)

Start Time: 16:30

1. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies

2. Declaration of interest

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of last meeting held on Tuesday 30 April 2024

DW referred to page two regarding the “cage” area in the Year 10/11 playground. ATA had been waiting for confirmation that the previous year’s estimate for the works had not been subject to price changes, which RJP had subsequently confirmed was the case in his report.

DW questioned the IT upgrade requirements which RJP has covered in his report.

DW referred to Openview which will be covered RJP’s report.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

5. Capital Developments

RJP updated colleagues that the AstroTurf carpet costings have been secured at the same cost as last year’s first phase, which is £108K.

RJP updated colleagues on the Academy’s virus protection and the negotiations which have taken place with a provider named Darktrace to provide a much-enhanced virus and cyber-secure protection that is affordable to the Academy.

DW asked about stability of costings and RJP explained that the costings have been agreed for a three-year period. After the three-year period expires, the maximum that the cost will increase will be in line with the rate of inflation. The Academy has several layers of protection already in place, although it is a fast-moving and hugely expensive area in terms of time and money, if you fall foul of an attack.

RJP spoke about some of the experiences of other schools and other major companies that have suffered as a result of not having sufficient protection in place.

DMI told colleagues about a local school which had suffered from a major attack on their IT infrastructure and were left with very limited or no stored information and are in the process of having to rebuild their entire network. A discussion was had amongst colleagues.

RJP informed colleagues that the protection is now being embedded into ATA's systems, which will further protect the Academy going forward. A separate company is being commissioned to look at all of ATA's IT infrastructure holistically to ensure the set-up is still relevant and that protection is optimised.

RJP spoke about other IT updates due for the Academy, in particular the re-use of the monitors within the science area which will be used reallocated elsewhere in the Academy as they get no use in the laboratories.

ATA has to replace approximately 9-10 interactive whiteboards, nine are in Zone C and 1 in Zone D. The Academy's IT staff have negotiated a good price following a tender to several companies and the total cost is £26K. A number of desktop computers will need to be replaced – 35 machines in total at a cost of £19k. RJP asked if the FRC were happy to agree the costing, which they agreed.

DW asked about the laptops to be replaced at some point within the auditorium and RJP gave an explanation on usage of the machines which was mainly for Catch-Up and Study Hall purposes. The existing machines are being stripped back so only key software is available and upgrades have also been carried out to the WIFI in the Auditorium. ATA is hoping to get another year or two's usage out of the existing machines before they will need replacing.

FRC approved the costings for both the whiteboards at £26k and the PC's at £19k and were pleased that the Academy was seeking to extend the life of the machines within the auditorium, rather than outright replacements

6. Revenue Funding 2023-24 Update

RJP gave an update for the year in terms of what the Academy has spent and what the Academy anticipates to receive in income. ATA had spent 75% of its expected income as at the end of May, which is much as planned, although it is slightly higher than this stage last year.

From April, the cost of paying teachers has increased due to the employer contribution to teachers' pensions increasing by 5% from 23.6% to 28.6% for all schools. To compensate for this, ATA are in receipt of a new teacher's pensions grant, which it is stated will cover the increase before this is absorbed into core funding for schools.

The inflationary pay increase for Associate Staff, due for the forthcoming September, is largely based on that which has been offered within local government, though this has not been agreed as yet. But if accepted by local government unions, it is looking like it will take a similar format to the previous year where those on lower pay points receive a higher percentage increase. RJP will update the FRC in advance of the October meeting once considered by the Trustee Remuneration Committee.

The figures for next year's income from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) show an increase of 6.4 % for ATA. The 6.4% increase is not as large as it seems, however, since much of this is purely down to the increase in student numbers with funding for an extra 65 children included within this.

7. Academies Budget Forecast Return

RJP will submit the Academy's Budget Forecast Return before the 29th August deadline which is used by the ESFA for their own budgeting and auditing purposes. It incorporates outcomes for last year and also forecasts three years' ahead which itself feeds into the Academy's own 5-year forecast. RJP will circulate the document to all colleagues and briefly cover this at the next FRC meeting in October.

8. Openview Sportsground and Trading Company

RJP gave an update as to where ATA are with the usage of the space. It was confirmed that much of the usage made by ATA pre-Covid was taken up by independent schools hiring using the sportsground and that a change in the main user from Thomas' to Broomwood/LPS will take place this summer. A User Agreement has been finalised and will be sent to the schools in question. It will outline the securement of the three-year deal for using the site. RJP will update the FRC once the new schools are using the facility.

9. Administration and Staffing Matters

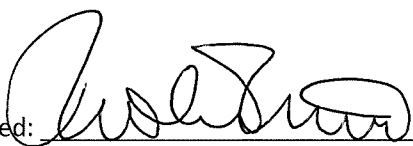
Staff costs have increased around 11% overall which is above what RJP estimated at the start of the year but includes the employer pension contribution increase referred to above. RJP told colleagues that the recruitment process has been more difficult this year, but all of the vacant roles have now been filled. The recruitment process now has to be undertaken expediently as good people are snapped up very quickly. ATA have a number of former students coming back to work at the Academy and they will be trained to take on specific roles within the Academy.

RJP told colleagues that ATA has initiated a review of how it utilises the Teaching and Learning Assistants. Many discussions have taken place with the Leadership Group, Curriculum Managers and with the Teaching and Learning Assistants themselves. This review will continue.

RJP updated colleagues about the meeting of the Trustees of the Foundation Pension Plan and a discussion took place about likely future strategy to maximise security for members.

DW thanked the FRC for their continued support.

The next FRC meeting will be Tuesday 15 October 2024

Signed: 
Richard Whitcutt
Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee

Date  /2024