

GOVERNING BODY OF HARBINGER PRIMARY SCHOOL

MINUTES OF FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING

Date of Meeting	11th February 2021
Venue	Virtually Via Zoom
Chair	Kiran Rahman
Clerk & Minutes	Suzette Nicol
Time	5:00 p.m.

MEMBERSHIP:

Governor	Category
Martin Young*	Co-opted
Rebecca Abrahams (Executive Head)*	Staff (Head)
Nimesha Nagahawatte (Head of School)*	Staff (Head)
Kiran Rahman (Chair)*	Co-opted
Ranjani Shrutisagar	Co-opted

Also In Attendance	Role/Title
Mai-Anh Dien (School Business Manager (SBM))	Observer
Srividya Srivathsan	Observer
Jasmine Islam	Observer

***Denotes attendance**

PART 1 – OPEN SECTION

	ITEM
1.	Welcome, Apologies For Absence and Declaration of Pecuniary Interests
	<p>The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. A warm welcome was extended to Vidya Srivathsan who was attending the meeting as an Observer.</p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Ranjani Shrutisagar. Apologies for lateness were received from Rebecca Abrahams.</p> <p>Vidya declared that she was a Trustee of a multi-academy trust and worked for</p>

	as a School Business Manager at Oaklands School in Tower Hamlets. No other interests were declared.
2.	Minutes Of The Committee Meeting Held On 24th September 2020 And Matters Arising
	Governors reviewed and RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting of 24 th September 2020. <u>Matters Arising</u> : None
3.	Finance
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Budget Monitoring Report</u> <p>The budget monitoring report for period 9 had been circulated prior to the meeting. The School Business Manager presented the monitoring report for that period and also highlighted the changes that had been made to the budget since the report was circulated. She added that she had done a period 10 budget monitoring report earlier in the day which had not been circulated. However, the figures in the periods 9 and 10 reports were similar. Committee members posed some questions as she went along.</p> <p>She highlighted areas in the budget which were likely to be underspent and overspent. Committee members were informed that the figures in the period 9 report were likely to be the figures at the end of the year. Income had been reduced by £15,846.26. The main bulk of the reduced income was due to the reduction in income from the Mayor's meals of £5,683. School closure and attendance had also impacted on income. The other large reduction in income was for the Staff travel. The Erasmus programme has been postponed again. The remaining 30% of the Erasmus funds would only be paid once the trip had taken place. The sum of £7,342 would be accrued for the next financial year. The overall projected year end surplus was £48,437.45.</p> <p>An attendee commented that the staffing predictions looked realistic while the non-staffing lines had only £44k for the remaining 3 months of the financial year. The expenditure section had been divided into commitments and other commitments. Staffing had been provided for the other 3 months of the financial year but provision had not been made for the other 3 months for all other lines such as cleaning, water, energy. She wanted to know whether this was because the School Business Manager knew exactly what to expect for the three months to the end of the financial year.</p> <p>The School Business Manager said that what had been budgeted for the other expenditure was what they were projecting to spend by the end of the year. This had been placed in the projected year end column and it was projected that all of the amount would be spent by the end of the year. The provisions for water, gas and other utilities in the projected section were what it was estimated that the school would spend by the end of the year. It was expected that all of the monies would be spent. She said that only the out of the ordinary expenses had</p>

been placed in the other commitments section. The commitments included purchase orders while the other commitments section included invoices that had not yet gone through.

Governors went through the substantial expenses.

Q&A: What is happening with budget heading I05 Mayor's Free School Meals? The invoices have not yet been sent to us. Although we have submitted meal numbers, the payment has not yet been calculated. I have chased that up and we should receive something soon.

Q&A: Did something happen with the British Council Travel Grant in I06? This is the Erasmus grant that was supposed to happen. We had been given a grant to travel to France. The £7k represents the remaining 30% of the grant which we will not receive until the trip has taken place. As Erasmus has been delayed until next year, we will not receive it until after the trip.

Q&A: In E09 is the portacabin lease not coming to an end? We have struggled with the portacabin. We have appointed someone to do the preliminary work in order for the portacabin company to pick it up. We had planned for it to be collected next week. G4S say that there is still something missing for the work to continue. We were informed that those doing the prep work had not applied for a tree preservation order because there is a tree that needs to be trimmed where the portacabin is. We have sent them the link so that they can apply for a tree preservation order consent.

A Governor pointed out the substantial overspend in budget heading E26 for Agency supply teaching staff and advised the school to monitor this expenditure closely. Another Governor commented that on reviewing the current expenditure and projected spend, it would appear that 82% of income was being spent on staff including agency staff. She reiterated the need to monitor expenditure on staffing closely as the ideal benchmark for staffing was between 78%-80%. The SBM reassured committee members that the staffing structure was being reviewed and that this would have an impact on staffing costs.

Q&A: Do budget lines E28a&b have anything to do with staff? They are for services such HR services, Educational Psychologists. These are service level agreements and they do not change much.

A committee member asked whether budget line E08 (staff parking permits) was a temporary arrangement due to the pandemic. The School Business Manager responded that this was a long-term arrangement which the school was thinking of phasing out. Martin Young mentioned that it was an issue of some sensitivity as the permits had been individually negotiated and were part of some teachers' contracts of employment. It was a historic practice that had developed in the school. It was noted that the permits had been mentioned in a previous audit report during the tenure of the previous Headteacher but that it had not been

prudent to address the issue at that time. Following discussion, it was agreed that while this issue needed to be addressed as it was an equality issue and was a disparity in employment practice as the school was not re-imbursing the travel costs of the staff who were travelling by public transport. It was noted that there needed to be a plan of action to address this.

Rebecca Abraham joined the meeting at this point.

The Executive Head acknowledged that the parking permit issue needed to be addressed. She explained that the current priority was the staffing structure and would remain a priority from now until September. Once the new structure had been put in place, the school would move to address this. A Governor asked whether this issue could be included in the review of the staffing structure as the arrangement had been contractually agreed by a previous Headteacher. It was agreed that this could be addressed in the next academic year. The Chair suggested that this item be deferred and placed on the agenda of a future meeting.

- Agree virements (If any)

The School Business Manager (SBM) informed the committee that Russ Mitchell, Financial Consultant, had reviewed the allocated budget and had recommended moving funds from one budget heading to another. The Financial Consultant had recommended earlier in the day that 8 virements be made. The Chair said that the committee needed to have sight of the amounts that were being recommended. The committee noted that the Scheme of Delegation provided guidance on who could approve a virement.

Committee members were of the view that it was not always advisable to resort to virements as that could mask the true cost of some budget lines. It would also be hard for the school to see why some budgets were overspending. The committee noted that good budget practice dictated that the school should stay within its budget and if it could not, it had to have a very compelling reason to request that additional sums be transferred between budget lines. By adjusting the budget during the year, it would be hard to provide the actual status of a budget line. An attendee advised that an agreement had to be made as to when to vire. She also advised that a decision to vire should be done by the Executive Head or the Head of School and not by the Financial Consultant. As there was no urgent need for the virements it was agreed that they be taken to the full governing body for approval.

Action: School Business Manager

The Executive Head concurred with what had been said before. She added that the Consultant was working in a way that he was not authorised to do. She said that although the school could not predict what would happen when the budget was set, they however needed to seek the approval of the governing body to move money between budget lines. She mentioned that routine overspends arising from the running of the school should not have virements as the school needed to know at the end of the year what was spent against those budget lines and be able to compare this against projected budgets. This

	<p>information would be useful when setting the budget for the following year. She undertook to speak to the Financial Consultant about this.</p> <p>Action: Rebecca Abrahams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Plans for deficit reduction</u> <p>The Executive Head informed the committee that the school had changed its HR provider from EPM to the same HR provider that was being used by St Luke's. The individual in question had been working on behalf of the school to pull together the narrative and the information to enable the Executive Headteacher to report to the Governors on the proposed staffing structure. The Executive Headteacher assured the committee that work on the new structure was going ahead in the background and that as soon as the documentation was ready, she would return to Governors to discuss the way forward. She added that this project was within deadline and that there was still time for a consultation to take place and for the new structure to be ready for September.</p> <p>The Executive Head said that there was a need for adaptability in setting the budget. The staffing restructure would make the biggest difference to the budget as the school would be able to have the staffing it could afford which would allow it to work efficiently and effectively. She mentioned that the huge challenge for the school currently was the PFI arrangement. There was a constant need to discuss reducing the deficit because the school was spending around £260k annually on the PFI contract to secure the site and keep it clean. As a result, in the next 7 years, the school would not be accumulating much. They would need to set a budget which was very tight and it would be a struggle to maintain a decent level of staffing. On the other hand, with the school being a Requires Improvement school, there was a need for it to have the necessary staff in order to be able to improve its rating. She asked the committee to note that the next 7 years would be difficult financially until the PFI arrangement came to an end.</p>
4.	<p>School's Financial Value Standard (SFVS) (For approval)</p>
	<p>The School Business Manager informed the committee that the SFVS was pending as schools had been given an extension until the end of May. It was pointed out that although the DfE had extended the deadline, the Local Authority's deadline was still 28 February. Committee members asked the SBM to check and confirm the deadline with the Schools Finance Team at the LA.</p> <p>Action: Mai-Anh Dien</p>
5.	<p>Benchmarking Report</p>
	<p>Mai-Anh informed the committee that in conducting the benchmarking exercise she had used 5 schools in the LA with similar pupil numbers and workforce to compare with Harbinger. She was advised that the SFVS was a useful tool in the benchmarking exercise. The SFVS had a data sheet which did the benchmarking. The SFVS would be able to tell the student/teacher contact ratio and provide other information. The RAG rating would be able to show whether the school was at par with other schools. From the report that had been submitted, Harbinger was only similar to one other school, Stewart Headlam, as</p>

	<p>the other schools in the report had an additional forty children more. Vidya Srivathsan undertook to work with the School Business Manager on the SFVS. Action: Vidya Srivathsan & Mai-Anh Dien</p>
6.	<p>School Premises Update</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Building Update</u> Mai-Anh Dien presented a premises report. The report had been circulated prior to the meeting. The report highlighted the 5 areas that had been worked on since the last meeting. These included the portacabin, LED lighting, the Front gates by Y1 classes, the Caretaker's House and the EYU maintenance. With regard to the LED lighting, she informed the committee that the school had been informed the previous day that some areas were not on the original survey and extra funding was needed to cover the other areas. The school has applied for additional funding to undertake the work and this had been approved. <p>She reported that the front fence and gates by the Year 1 classroom needed to be replaced. Life cycle (part of G4S) had added this on their list to be done in 2021 but they would only be replacing like for like. The like for like replacement was not fit for purpose because of the safeguarding issues that had been identified. She added that she had started looking into suppliers. There were 3 quotes which would be forwarded to the governing body for consideration. Governors were of the view that quotes from environmental suppliers with a design that met with safeguarding requirements would be more appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>EYU maintenance and repairs</u> The School Business Manager reported that the work was carried out in October half term. The total cost of £8,869.96 was taken from Devolved Capital. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Caretaker's House</u> Governors were informed that the school had started putting plans together to see whether the Caretaker's House could be brought back into use. An appointment had been booked to service the boiler and check the electricity. Unfortunately, the service could not be completed because the electrics were deemed unsafe. <p>The Executive Head informed Governors that the Caretaker's House was old and not fit for purpose. She commented that it would be far better to extend the main school building than to try and convert the Caretaker's House into fit for purpose accommodation. It was far better to demolish the house, in doing so create additional playground space and then extend the main building. In order to improve efficient working, the school desperately needed an enhanced welcome area for parents and visitors and better administrative officers and meeting room.</p> <p>It was agreed that this issue should be revisited in six months' time and plans put in place for the longer-term solution.</p> <p>The School Business Manager reported that the school had received a bill for over £3k for a feasibility study on the house. This had not been budgeted for</p>

	<p>and the work took place in 2018. The LA paid the bill and was now seeking reimbursement from the school. Rebecca Abrahams was in talks with the Local Authority about the bill. Martin Young mentioned that the school had to establish the terms of contracts. He undertook to go through his emails going back to 2018 to see what was agreed. He mentioned that as there was some work done, the school would need to check its position clearly before saying that it had not benefited from the work.</p> <p>Action: Martin Young/Rebecca Abrahams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Health and Safety Update</u> <p>Mai-Anh Dien presented the following health and safety update:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A Fire Risk Audit was done on 8th December. There was a delay in the return of the report which was only received on 29th January. There were no 'High' risk action points. An action plan needed to be submitted to the LA. G4S would be assisting the school with this. b. Carbon dioxide monitors had been bought for classrooms and offices. This had been identified because of recent health and safety audits in relation to Covid-19 risk assessment. c. Although schools were currently not required to carry out whole school fire drills, the school still needed to practice fire evacuation for individual bubbles. Two out of three of our bubbles had completed this task. <p>Committee members thanked Mai-Anh for the premises update.</p>
7.	<p>Review of Service Level Agreements (SLA)</p>
	<p>Mai-Anh Dien informed the committee that the SLAs had been reviewed and that the ones in her report were the ones that needed to be changed. The portacabin contract, photocopier lease and the SLA for Mentor/Counsellor would be cancelled next year. With regard to the Play Therapist SLA, the school was in discussions with the Learning Mentor to increase their hours so that they could take on the role of Play Therapist as well. This would support staff development and reduce the school's costs.</p> <p>The SENCo had requested that the SLA for Speech and Language Therapist time be increased from bi-termly to 3 times a term. Rebecca said that this would be considered during the budget setting process. With regard to HR advice, Governors were informed that the service provided by EPM (HR) had been very poor this past year. As a result, the school started a new contract with an HR provider called GROW in February which had supported and worked with St Luke's for a number of years. Grow had provided an HR service for the Spring term, for no cost, to allow for the EPM contract to run out and the new HR contract to begin for the new financial year.</p> <p>The school had signed up to a new SLA with Clever ICT since September. They had made a huge difference to pupils' remote learning. There were plans to bring the maintenance of the school's website in-house. There were discussions in place with the ICT provider to assist the school with this change over.</p>

	Committee members were happy that the website had been cleaned up and the school was commended for its fantastic support for home schooling parents.
8.	Staffing Update
	<p>Committee members were informed that two teachers and one TA would be going on maternity leave. Two TAs had returned from maternity leave. Rebecca Abrahams informed the committee why she was considering a staffing restructure. In addition to the issue of sustainability regarding the current spend on staffing, the restructure had become necessary due to other reasons including the lack of career structure for support staff. In addition, the number of part-time staff was having an impact on the continuity of service delivery which was not positive. There was also a lack of support for teachers at the beginning and at the end of the day as support staff came in and left at the same time as the children which did not allow for a professional dialogue with the teachers. There was also a lack of subject leadership responsibility in the school and this was a disincentive to staff. She explained that with the new curriculum, it was impossible to carry out the scope of work with a small number of leaders. The restructure was expected to be in place for September.</p> <p>In order to accelerate the development of the curriculum, Rebecca Abrahams informed the committee that a School Development Plan (SDP) had been drafted and which would be shared at the next governing body meeting. Success criteria had been set within the SDP of where the school would like to get to by the end of this academic year and next year. A big part of this would be around the curriculum. As a temporary measure, Rebecca had spoken to 3 staff members and had asked them to take on leadership for some subjects. A small lump sum would be paid to them at the end of the summer term and this would go into next year's budget. She said that the conversations were met with much positivity and this would enable the school to increase the pace of improvement across the summer term by having enhanced leadership capacity at middle leader level.</p>
9.	School Policies And Procedures (For Review And Approval)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Acceptable Use Policy For Parents</u> <p>Governors were informed that this was a LGfL policy. It was noted that this policy was only for parents as the one for children had been introduced in September. A Governor asked whether the policy could be translated to make it accessible to more parents. The Headteacher said that this could be done. It was agreed that the policy would be circulated to the governing body asking them to agree it so that it would be ready when the school re-opened after half term.</p>
10.	Agenda Items For The Next Meeting
	<p>The following items were agreed for the next agenda:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Year-end Report Virements PFI Contract (Jimmy White from the LA to be invited to talk about the

	contract)
11.	Any Urgent Business
	<p>NGA Subscription – The SBM asked the committee whether the NGA subscription should be renewed. She wanted to know whether Governors were using the service. Kiran said that she had attended some of the courses. It was agreed that the subscription would be renewed.</p> <p>ICT Costs – Vidya informed the committee that it was possible for the school to apply to the DfE for its Microsoft 360 set up costs. She undertook to send Mai-Anh the link to the relevant website. Action: Mai-Anh Dien/Vidya Srivathsan</p>
12.	Confidential Items (If any)
	There were none.
13.	Date and Time of Next Meeting
	Thursday 29 th April 2021 at 5:00 p.m.

The Chair closed the meeting at 19:00 p.m.

Chair's signature: _____ **Date:** _____