

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE FINANCE AND STAFFING COMMITTEE
OF LOSTOCK HALL PRIMARY SCHOOL
Tuesday 4th March 2025
5.00p.m.
Venue: School**

GOVERNORS IN ATTENDANCE:	Ben Sleeman (BSL)	Parent Governor
	Dave Morgan (DM)	Chair
	Clare Heyes (CH)	Co-opted Governor
	Graham Hamilton (GH)	Headteacher
	Mike Duzinkewycz (MD)	Parent Governor
APOLOGIES:	Robin Muir (RM)	Parent Governor
OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:	Tina Carruthers (TC)	TLP Finance Business Partner <i>(Left at 6:32pm)</i>
	Marcus Heath (MH)	TLP Director of ICT & Network Operations <i>(Left at 5:27pm)</i>
	Rachael Palmer (RP)	SBM
	Elizabeth Dockry (ED)	Deputy Headteacher
	Boo Edleston (BE)	Clerk

MINUTES – PART ONE

The meeting commenced at 5:03pm.

ITEM		ACTION
1.	<p>PRESENTATION FROM MARCUS HEATH TRUST ICT DIRECTOR</p> <p>A copy of the PowerPoint presentation is available for Governors to study in more detail within the documents for the meeting on GovernorHub.</p> <p>MH gave a comprehensive presentation about the current position of the Lostock Hall IT infrastructure, focussing on the servers, storage, network, facilities and the hardware that is on site.</p>	

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He reviewed the current position and highlighted the challenges as the school leaves the previously held IT support package supplied through Cheshire East and moves to a True Learning Partnership (TLP) Trust based support package.

He shared that the school has now started to receive dedicated weekly visits from one of the Trust's technicians and outlined how in addition to this, they have a helpdesk system in place that allows LH to log calls as required in the event of a noted IT difficulty.

MH outlined the next steps forward to ensure LH's IT remains both compliant and fit for purpose. Key elements highlighted included:

- The development of the wireless infrastructure – developing the use of Cloud based applications that are stored and backed up remotely.
- The move toward greater use of Microsoft 365 as this is a more secure and compliant platform to work from.
- This move will also allow for the IT at LH to be more sustainable and ensures that staff can access school systems remotely if required.
- The compliance and security a cloud-based system gives was also highlighted and the need to maintain both cyber security and remain compliant within the Department of Education's standards for Networks.
- The incorporation of Bromcom was discussed as the school has now integrated this for all its Management Information System (MIS) with the move away from the previous SIMs system at the start of the year.
- The flexibility of Google classroom was highlighted and the need to ensure the school begins to migrate toward the full adoption of these tools for teaching and storage.
- Concerns were discuss relating to the current server which is now over 5 years old and the fact it is reported as unreliable at times in its ability to back up. This lack of functionality means the move to integrate cloud-based storage within the school is moving forward at speed.
- Further difficulties with the out-dated flat network were highlighted and this supported further the need for a large financial investment in the infrastructure on site before any new hardware was purchased.
- Some hardware is currently still be run on Windows 7 which is now obsolete, so staff are having to work on two different laptops to access the full suite of programmes they need to deliver curriculum and meet compliance with Bromcom/MIS.
- Bromcom is successfully used now as a portal on which multi academy schools are sharing resources, so this plan aims to get Lostock onto the TLP 'sharing network' too as soon as is possible.



- Windows 365 will improve cyber security and efficient back-up solutions.
- In time all access will be achieved using a two-way authenticator which means staff will have much more flexibility around how and where they have to be to complete school-related tasks.
- A full asset register is being collated, and arrangements are being made to remove old devices.
- Barracuda is being rolled out across the Trust which offers cyber security.

Q: What is the timeline for the immediate actions your report has highlighted?

R: The IT technicians are already moving at a pace on the immediate list. Already many actions are underway.

Q: Will the staff see a noticeable improvement in their ability to deliver the curriculum in the classroom by the end of this academic year?

R: Yes. We have a 2.5-year plan. By then we are aiming to have migrated everyone onto Office 365 and be using Google Classroom. We do however need to address the wireless network first. The infrastructure needs to be correct, or any new devices won't connect to it.

Across the Trust we are currently looking at a 'Blue Printing' model where we roll things out in one school, assess how that works and take what works well and replicate that across other schools in the Trust. That way we speed up the implementation of a uniform and cohesive system across the whole trust which will then make sharing far easier between schools in the Trust. We want set templates up across all schools in the Trusts including our cyber security and firewalls.

Q: With VPN and cloud access will there be more flexibility to work remotely?

R: Yes. With cloud based and the move away from SIMS and onto Bromcom, which uses two-way authentication, comes greater freedom to work remotely.

TC added the financial implications of the investment in the new wireless network. In order to be DFE compliant it is estimated an investment of £18,500 needs to be made into the IT provision both hardware and software and related staff hours to deliver the upgrade.

Q: Where is this money coming from?

R: There are a number of options available to Governors to agree and then ratify the expenditure. Some of the expenditure could be made via the



	<p>Devolved Funding Capital (DFC), of which Lostock Hall currently receives in the region of £6,300 each year. Two years of DFC funds and some money from capital reserves would cover this expenditure.</p> <p>TC sought approval for an initial decision to be finalised regarding this expenditure.</p> <p>A discussion took place between all Governors, TC and GH regarding what other needs there currently are that DFC would be required to fund. GH highlighted some additional repairs and redecoration but acknowledged the urgency of the requirement to upgrade the whole IT infrastructure.</p> <p>Governors agreed that the school needed to look at where to draw funds from to ensure best use of existing monies. The exact funding source for the project was not finalised.</p> <p>Consideration was given by the chair of the need to balance both the maintenance and development of the physical environment of the school and against the digital infrastructure.</p> <p>Recommended that at LGB Governors are asked to approve the IT infrastructure upgrade plan as presented by MH with a clear understanding that this work must be completed during the Whit holiday to ensure least disruption to staff and pupils.</p> <p>ACTION: To include on agenda the approval of the IT infrastructure upgrade plan and associated costs at LGB on March 25th.</p> <p><i>MH left the meeting at 5:27pm</i></p>	<p>CLERK</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>APOLOGIES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>Governors received and accepted the apologies of Robin Muir (RM). No apologies were given by Sarah Simpson (SS) .</p> <p>There were no other items of business to consider.</p> <p>ACTION: Clerk to send a reminder for the upcoming LGB meeting directly to SS.</p>	<p>CLERK</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</p> <p>Governors made the following declarations:</p>	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GH's wife works for Connex Education who provide tutoring and supply services to the school. <p>There were no anticipated conflicts of interest with the business of the meeting raised by governors.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>PART ONE MINUTES AND ACTION LOG AND MATTERS ARISING.</p> <p>a) The part one minutes from the previous meeting on 12.11.24 were confirmed as a true and accurate record of proceedings. Governors approved the minutes.</p> <p>ACTION: Clerk to upload an electronically signed copy of the minutes to Governor Hub following the meeting.</p> <p>b) The Action log from the previous meeting was discussed and all items were marked as completed and item 6 for Governors to 'consider how to raise the profile of the school' was on-going.</p>	<p>CLERK</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>ELECTION OF COMMITTEE CHAIR</p> <p>BS nominated DM for the role as committee chair. This was seconded by MD and carried. DM was duly elected as Chair of the Finance and Staffing Committee.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>FINANCIAL MATTERS</p> <p>a) Management Accounts and Forecast from the Trust CFO/Financial Controller.</p> <p>TC presented the latest set of management accounts and forecasts from the Trust relating to Lostock Hall's finances.</p> <p>Documents had been uploaded to GovernorHub by TC prior to the meeting. Governors noted that the school should now finish the academic year in a positive financial position with a surplus in the region of £73,500, (based on current outrun predictions). The budget is regularly adjusted over the course of the year to account for additional grant income received and the change in the position since earlier in the academic year is mainly due to the receipt of Growth Funding for 2024/25 of £64,037 for the local authority.</p> <p>A summary of areas where there is currently variation of the actual spend against what was budgeted was supplied by TC and included within the commentary provided to governors.</p>	



As a result of the additional funding TC and GH have already agreed some additional expenditure including redecoration of two classrooms, library resources and materials to support curriculum development and additional salary costs. The retention of a teacher currently on a temporary contract up to the end of the school year is driven by the need to offer continuity for pupils, support interventions and to support staff well-being.

The governors expressed their full support in the planned utilisation of the additional funding in the areas outlined by TC and GH.

Q: Has this £64,000 additional funding resolved the deficit budget position for the next three years?

R: It resolves it for this financial year but not for the years after.

Q: What will happen to Lostock’s predicted surplus then?

R: All school within the Trust are required to deliver surpluses to ensure Trust-wide services can be maintained.

Q: Should we look to invest more this year at Lostock whilst we know we have monies available?

R: Lostock Hall is ‘the Trust’. All our schools form ‘the Trust’ and they all have to contribute to the top slice which is now struggling to meet the requirements of all the schools. The new CEO will be putting together a new methodology toward the top slice in the coming months.

Governors, GH, RP and TC held a lengthy discussion which focused on the implications of a carry forward position at the end of the academic year but will then be required requirement to make cuts to ensure a balanced budget moving forward.

Governors asked TC for clarification regarding what was capital expenditure and what was not so therefore not limited to a £1000 spend cap. TC explained anything over £1000 was categorised as capital expenditure and this was generally more long-term, larger plans and not day-to-day maintenance requirements.

Governors expressed their wishes to resolves some outstanding issues at Lostock this year, redecoration of the school was highlighted, whilst they had funds as it was not looking as if this would be the case in the years ahead. They expressed their wish to utilise the monies they had available now to benefit the pupils now.

TC expressed her understanding of the difficulties this was causing and highlighted the new CEO would be making decisions soon with regarding to spending in all Trust schools. She also highlighted the difficulties being compounded by the recent release of the funding formula that has seen many schools facing significant drops in their budgets. RP reiterated that this was



<p>echoed across the area from other school business managers. All were concerned about setting deficit budgets.</p> <p>TC highlighted to the governors that if additional monies from the predicted surplus this year were required by Lostock, then then should put together businesses cases for each expenditure and submit this to the Trust for consideration as has always been the case within the Trust.</p> <p>Q: What does the school actually need to make a difference this academic year? R: Variety of responses relating to decoration of classrooms to new interactive whiteboards.</p> <p>ACTION: To add collation of key purchase ‘wishes’ for 2025/26 by Governors to be added to Finance and Staffing agenda for June 10th, 2025.</p> <p>ACTION: TC to share a list with GB of what constitutes capital expenditure ahead of the next Staffing and Finance meeting on June 10th, 2025.</p> <p>Q: I note there is no real change in the income lines from the previous meeting. R: There has been a reduction in income from the before and after school provision and additional spending on temporary staff.</p> <p>A discussion took place relating to the school charging policy for lettings, before and after school provision, and how much external suppliers charge parents. Consideration was given to the impact such external provided clubs can then have on numbers within the school-led provision.</p> <p>Suggestions were made regarding a potential scale of letting charges based on the number of pupils attending a club.</p> <p>GH highlighted that whilst school-led provision such as before and after school clubs and school lunches need to break even, they are not there to make a large profit for the school. They are done as part of the school’s support of its community, it’s parents and its pupils.</p> <p>It was agreed to undertake an annual review of charges and letting fees to be included in each summer term Finance and Staffing meeting to ensure that inflationary considerations are built into the charges, and they reflect best value but cover costs.</p> <p>ACTION: RP to produce a revised list of costings for lettings to present at the next Finance and Staffing Committee Meeting. This to be informed by a benchmarking exercise with other local providers and taking into consideration inflationary increases.</p>	<p>CLERK</p> <p>TC</p> <p>RP</p>
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This is then to become an annual standing item on the Summer 1 agenda.

CLERK

6b) Current Three-Year Budget Forecast

Documents had been uploaded to GovernorHub by TC prior to the meeting. The Governor’s Spring Commentary was expanded on by TC. TC shared that in the data presented some basic funding assumptions had been made based on the continuation of the growth funding, but it was made clear that this is not definite, and governors should be aware this could be withdrawn.

Key in the explanation given was that the forecasts assumed a reception intake of 30. This had not been the case in September 2024 when the intake was 23. Currently it was felt that an intake of 30 for September 2025 may not be achieved, however final place allocation of places has not been made yet by the local authority. This was a key consideration that Governors needed to know as this will have a further detrimental impact on the predicted budget deficits in the years 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28.

TC highlighted that the recent release of the block funding figure to all schools (the amount of money a school receives for each child), has dropped. This coupled with inflationary increases was leading to the predicted shortfalls in budgets shown in the documents provided.

RP and TC informed governors this situation was reflected in many other schools and Lostock Hall was not alone in facing financial challenge.

Q: What implications are there for the Trust if schools are running with deficit budgets?

R: We have to continue to consider how not to be but there is a view that if all schools are in this situation the government will have to act to support education.

Q: For next year what do we need to do as the governors to help the financial position?

R: All the suggestions made within the two documents need to be considered and particularly looking at recruitment. When appointing new staff consider the links you have had with the universities. This gives Lostock the pick of the students, early access to their abilities and offers the chance to employ strong students who will future-proof education.

Further discussion related to the three-year budget plan, was undertaken. TC reiterated the deficits in the current budget forecast in Years 2 (2026/27 – predicted deficit of £63,934) and Year 3 (2027/28 – predicted deficit of £72,756). TC highlighted staff ratios and the percentage of the budget that goes toward salaries, (85% of budgeted expenditure), being the key challenge. There is a need for this to reduce with careful consideration when recruiting. The current forecast for LH to have financial deficits in Years 2 and 3 needs to be addressed. TC explained that if the school is presenting a deficit budget, then a strong business case must be given as to why this is and what is being done to reduce this.



	<p>TC added that the Head Teacher, as the Budget Holder for Lostock Hall, should develop ideas, models and the plans for staffing efficiencies, in order that a balanced budget is set.</p> <p>TC requested that GH submit his staffing plans and other measures to support bringing the budget to a balanced position by spring half term moving forwards</p> <p><i>TC left the meeting at 6.32p.m.</i></p> <p>c) Contracts register – The school confirmed that all contracts are under renewal and RP works to ensure that prior to contract renewals, quotes are obtained. Governors were reassured that RP works to ensure savings are achieved where possible.</p> <p>d) Asset Register- The new IT technician is making good progress updating all IT elements of the register however with no site manager since January some of the other elements are not up to date. The appointment of a new site manager in the previous week was shared and it was highlighted that he would be working closely with RP once he starts to update the remaining items on the asset register.</p> <p>e) School Risk Register- The Risk Register is in the process of renewal.</p> <p>f) The School’s Critical Incident Plan- The plan was reviewed by the Trust following the incident at Lostock Hall Site in January. Key learning was taken from this, and work is in progress improving the line of response. A new cascade list shared between all Trust schools is central in the learning taken from the events in January. The reinstatement of walkie talkies on site was also being considered by the Trust.</p> <p>g) To review Voluntary School Funds- It was noted that the Voluntary School Funds account is audited within the Trust’s academy accounts. There is no mandate for a separate audit. It was agreed that moving forwards, this item does not need to feature on the Finance and Staffing sub-committee agenda.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>GDPR</p> <p>There have been no data breaches or Subject Access Requests (SARS) requested since the last meeting.</p>	
<p>8.</p>	<p>PREMISES</p> <p>a) Health and Safety update</p> <p>All procedures and site compliance are in the process of being checked. With the appointment of the new site manager RP will be working with him to ensure all compliance requirements are shared and any outstanding matters rectified. The Risk Protection Agency (RPA) who provide comprehensive risk insurance</p>	



	<p>to the school have been invited by RP to visit to undertake an additional audit in May. RP also updated governors on her current one policy a week check to ensure all Health and Safety policies remain up to date and compliant .</p> <p>The Clerk highlight the need for all staff and Governors to undertake the NCSC cyber security training to ensure compliance with the requirements of the RPA policy.</p> <p>ACTION: To make all governors aware and share link to NSCS online cyber security training as a requirement of the RPA insurance cover via GovernorHub.</p>	<p>CLERK</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>STAFF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>GH reported that a wide range of training is being undertaken by staff including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole staff training in allergy awareness • Continuing curriculum specific training • One member of staff is working on their National Professional Qualification in Middle Leadership (NPQML). • One staff member is undertaking their National Professional Qualification for Special Educational Needs Coordinator (NPQ SENCO). • An Early Career Teacher (ECT) continues to attend training as part of her induction Course. • Oracy Programme Training <p>GH noted the positive impact the training has had. Staff are keen to come back and share outcomes with colleagues, and new learning and ideas continue to be shared across the school. GH also noted that the whole staff are due to take part in Trust-wide training in Team Teach in the next half term.</p>	
<p>10.</p>	<p>SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN UPDATE:</p> <p>GH followed on from his February SDP updates which were shared at the Curriculum committee meeting on 06/02/25. Against the 7 key elements of the current plan the following updates were provided:</p> <p>C1 Training plan All staff continue a varied plan of training as outlined in Item 9 which matches the goals set out in the whole school development plan.</p> <p>C2 Reduce environmental impact of the school A 6-bay covered cycle shelter for staff use has now been sited and is in use.</p> <p>C3 Enhance Provision through Collaborative Partnerships</p>	



School continues to benefit from:

1. Critical Incident support provide by the Trust – Business continuity.
2. SENCO network Trust wide
3. IT support -Trust employed a Primary IT technician based in school 0.5 days a week.

Finance

Strategic Leadership and Management

Financial commentary for February shared by Trust Finance and considered/discussed at Finance and Staffing committee 04/03/2025, Item 6.

SL & M1

Upgrade building/site – ICT

Full IT plan presented, and financial implications considered in Item 1.

SL & M2

Upgrade building/site – Internal learning environment

Refurbishment of two classrooms now costed and planned to be completed before the start of the next academic year.

SL & M3

Upgrade building/site – External

Staff cycle shelter has now been received and installed.
Quotes to repair subsurface to Ball cage/play area and replace artificial grass covering which is worn - £65, 000 – currently not financially feasible.
Quotes to repair potholes on school entrance driveway being gathered.

SL & M4 - Develop ability of school to secure grant funding

Sign posting school on Chester Road has been order and paid for but school is still awaiting installation (Trust financed).
Agreed that despite additional funding being available the school was not currently able to be part of an early adopter group for the new Government breakfast club initiative.

SL & M5

Comply with annual audits

All annual audits completed to date and others now planned before end of year. Additional audit by RPA now booked for this half term as detailed in Item 8.



	GH highlighted the continuing need to upgrade of the fire alarm system. This is to remain in the 2024-2027 SDP.	
11.	<p>POLICIES: To receive and review the following policy:</p> <p>It was noted that the following policy was approved for ratification at the LGB on March 25th</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions Policy 	
12.	<p>GOVERNOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>a) To agree link subject roles for new governors.</p> <p>As neither new governor attended the meeting, this decision was deferred to the LGB on March 25th.</p>	
13.	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</p> <p>There were no items of other business tabled for discussion at this meeting.</p>	
14.	<p>POINTS TO HIGHLIGHT/COMMUNICATE TO THE LGB AND TTLP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To communicate the school's thanks for the support for IT across the school. • To share the school's positive feedback regarding the recent employment of the IT technicians now supporting the school. • To feedback the positive impact the cycle shelter has had on staff wellbeing. 	
15.	<p>IMPACT OF THE MEETING</p> <p>Governors helped to move the school forward in the following ways during this meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors reviewed the financial performance of the school noting the surplus position and the work undertaken by the staff and the Trust working together to ensure the prudent and effective use of available funds. • Governors offered challenge to consider ways forward to ensure the financial viability of the school in a time when nationally, pupil numbers are declining. • Governors challenged the allocation of funding seeking to ensure the best outcomes for the school with the monies allocated to them to utilise to raise academic achievement and improve life chances for pupils and staff at Lostock 	



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The board demonstrated they are willing to take support from their Trust board and financial leaders from within the Trust Team to assist them to consider all alternatives to reduce future deficits. • Governors questioned the effectiveness of the spending of key grants for specific areas of the curriculum to ensure government funds are being utilised to bring about the best outcomes for all pupils. • Governors challenged the utilisation of surplus monies and worked to gain an understanding of the different expectations that are placed around the spending of monies on general maintenance and capital expenditure. • Future staffing was considered, and consideration was given to the current ratio of the budget that covers staff costs. • Advice was received from Trust Officers as to possible solutions to reduce staffing costs over time. • Governors considered the impact of falling numbers on future budgets. • The board held staff to account on the health and safety of the site, the procurement process, the renewal of contracts and the charges made to external providers when letting the school premises. 	
16.	<p>DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS: The date of the next Finance and Staffing committee meetings are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday 10th June 2025 	

Part 1 of the meeting Closed at 6.45pm.

There were no Part 2 documents from the previous meeting or Part 2 items on this agenda, so the meeting closed at 6:46p.m.