



Northern Arch

LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Finance, Resources and Audit Committee
held at 5.00 pm, Thursday 27th March 2025, at Longfield Academy, Longfield Road,
Darlington DL3 0HT

MINUTES

Directors present:	Emma Chawner (Chair), Tim Fisher (CEO), Mavis Lord and Geoff Liddle.
In attendance	Lisa Marron: Chief Operating Officer Glen Hart: Chief Financial Officer Nikki Wade: Strategic & Development Officer Sarah Jones: Operations Business Manager Laura Hawksby: Trust Governance and Policy Officer

Item	Description of discussion	Action
	PART A: Procedural items	
1.	<u>Welcome, Introductions and confirmation quorum present</u> The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting. It was confirmed that a quorum was present.	
2.	<u>Apologies for absence and their acceptance</u> There were no apologies for absence.	
3.	<u>Notification of items of urgent other business</u> None	
4.	<u>Declaration of Personal and Pecuniary Interests</u> None	
5.	<u>Approval of minutes/review of actions/matters arising – Finance, Resources and Audit Committee 11th December 2025</u> Draft Minutes of the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee held on the 11 th December 2024 had been shared with Directors prior to the meeting, a copy of which is held on file. All actions had been completed or included for this meeting of the Committee as requested by Directors.	

Registered office address
Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Vane Terrace, Darlington, DL3 7AU:
Company Registration Number 07533271
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denotes support and challenge provided by Governors

	Governors RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee held on the 11 th December 2024 were confirmed as an accurate record and should be signed by the Chair.	Chair/ Governance & Policy Officer
	PART B: Business Items for Discussion	
	Finance & Resources	
6.	<p><u>Money ADEMSS Report</u></p> <p>The Management Account summary as of the 31st January 2025 was shared with the Directors of the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee.</p> <p>The Schools and Colleges are forecast to make a surplus at year end. The College Teaching /Support staff pay agreements have now been finalised and have been included in the budget. The current strategy is to increase the reserves position at all establishments as per the reserves' strategy and also for each establishment to be self-sufficient. There is further work ongoing in Longfield and Hurworth to achieve this position. Both schools have made in-year provision for an IT refresh to comply with Windows 11 and work will be undertaken over the summer.</p> <p>The increased other income related to the additional grants for nursery support and additional SEN (Special Educational Needs) funding has been received from the Local Authority. The Rydal Academy has also been successful in a grant from Darlington Borough Council to extend the provision of their Breakfast Club.</p> <p>GAG income has increased due to an increase in allocation in year for pay awards resulting in a higher per pupil rate. The full impact of the National Insurance calculations was not yet known as there was uncertainty over this allocation of funds, which will be distributed on a national basis.</p> <p>A key action for the Trust Finance Team is to undertake a wider review of catering in terms of the subsidy. The Trust is also reviewing energy spend across their education establishments. Savings will also be achieved through the current installation of solar panels across the schools in the Trust. Other pressures on the budget included drop in pupil numbers, alternative education spending and SEN (Special Educational Needs) support provision. <i>Directors requested that the financial pressures are reflected on the Trust Operational Risk Register.</i></p> <p>The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) advised of the budget assumptions for 2025/26, 2026/27 and 2027/28 and <i>Directors confirmed that they had assurance that the budgets are within realistic parameters and estimates.</i></p> <p><i>Directors requested with regards to traded income that catering and Longfield Trading should be included in budget assumptions. Directors also requested that the Finance Team should look at the pattern of GAG over the years and also nationally, and apply a realistic uplift.</i></p> <p>Pupil numbers were identified by the Trust and Directors as the biggest current risk. <i>Directors questioned what was being done by the Trust to address this and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) explained that a post within the Trust for marketing /admissions/ pupil numbers was currently being created.</i></p>	<p>SDO</p> <p>CFO</p>



7.	<p><u>Management Accounts</u></p> <p>The full set of management accounts had been shared with Directors as part of the papers for this meeting. Directors also advised that assurance was received on a monthly basis with the receipt of management accounts to the Chair of Trustees and all Directors of the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee.</p>	
8.	<p><u>Management Accounts Timetable</u></p> <p>Directors noted for information the management reports timetable for 2025. The final audit for Mowden Schools up to the period ending 31st March 2025 was due to be carried out in the first week of May 2025.</p>	
9.	<p><u>DfE Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool</u></p> <p>The DfE (Department for Education) Financial Benchmarking and Insights tool was noted for information.</p>	
10.	<p><u>School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool Checklist</u></p> <p>The School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool checklist that had been submitted to the DfE was considered by Directors. Directors requested further detail on the responses to question 24 and 46.</p> <p>The COO explained that in relation to Question 24 - an estates strategy was due to be taken to the Trust Executive Team for their consideration.</p> <p>It was noted that in relation to Question 46 – a review of the accounting system is planned for future replacement, however Directors were assured that the reports currently produced are accurate.</p>	
11.	<p><u>Actions arising from the School Resource Management Advisors Report</u></p> <p>Actions arising from the School Resource Management Advisors Report were considered including the Trust moving towards more investment in infrastructure and Directors emphasized the need to maintain a high level of outcomes for the pupils/students within the Trust, whilst ensuring staffing cost savings.</p>	
12.	<p><u>Environment ADEMSS Report</u></p> <p>A report on Estates was provided to Directors with no major issues identified. There has been insurance claims for a leaking pipe which has caused an issue within an area of Hurworth School. Directors questioned if there had been any costs which the Trusts' insurance would not be able to cover and the Operations Business Manger confirmed that the replacement of the pipes as this was due to natural wear and tear, with all other elements of the claim covered. Directors asked if this would come out of the in-year budget and it was confirmed that was correct.</p>	



	<p>The current procurement timeline was noted by the committee. It was noted that large procurement contracts were underway for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>QE iMac devices</u> - the tender evaluation was expected week commencing 5th May 2025 and approval to the successful tender would be sought from members of the Finance, Audit and Resources Committee before the next meeting of the Committee in accordance with the Finance Policy. • <u>Cleaning tender for in house cleaning provision across the 3 schools</u> – the exercise is being carried out using the YPO (Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation) framework with the tender evaluation to be carried out week commencing 22nd May 2025 and approval to the successful tender would be sought from members of the Finance, Audit and Resources Committee before the next meeting of the Committee in accordance with the Finance Policy. Directors questioned whether the tender would be for one year or three years and requested that the full contract cost be included in the tender approval request. <p>A Schools IT refresh would be required across Hurworth, Rydal and Longfield as there is a need to refresh I.T to remain Windows 11 compliant. The tender route has not been selected and will be brought back to June meeting of the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee for consideration.</p> <p>The results of the CIF (Conditional Improvement Fund) bids are due in May 2025. The approvals would be requested at the June meeting of the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee.</p> <p>Directors noted and confirmed that they had given approval outside of Committee to the QE Desktops purchase tender in February 2024.</p> <p>Approval at the meeting was sought regarding the QE photocopier contract and the Chief Operating Officer (COO) circulated the copier tender results at the meeting. QE had retendered via the CPC framework and 3 companies had been considered.</p> <p>Directors RESOLVED that the Ricoh tender be approved.</p> <p>Directors noted that Health & Safety Audits would be brought back to the next meeting of the Finance, Resources and Audit Committee.</p>	<p>COO/ CFO</p> <p>COO/ CFO/OBM</p> <p>COO</p> <p>COO/SDO</p>
13.	<p><u>Gender Pay Gap Report</u></p> <p>The Gender Pay Gap reporting snapshot as of the 31st March 2024 was noted by Directors and would be placed on the Trust's website. The overall Gender Pay Gap reflects workforce composition rather than pay inequalities. Through equality objectives, the Trust seeks, wherever possible, to encourage participation and recruitment to underrepresented roles.</p>	



14.	<p><u>DfE Letter to Accounting Officer March 2025</u></p> <p>Directors noted that the Education and Skills Funding Agency will close on 31st March 2025 and its functions will transfer to the Department for Education on the 1st April 2025.</p>	
15.	<p><u>Policies</u></p> <p>Directors asked if the Central Services and Appeal process policy was statutory and it was confirmed by the Strategic Development Officer that it was not. Directors therefore RESOLVED that this policy was therefore no longer required.</p> <p>Directors RESOLVED that the following policies be approved, subject to any small further feedback received from Directors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Finance Policy b) Reserves Policy c) Investment Policy <p>Directors requested that the Terms of Reference for the Finance, Resources & Audit committee be included as a reference document at each meeting of the Committee.</p>	Governance & Policy Officer
Audit & Risk		
16.	<p><u>Risk Management Update</u></p> <p>The Strategic Development Officer provided a risk management update. The Trust are in the process of reviewing and aligning the format of the Academy Risk Registers, and also the Trust Risk Management policy and procedures.</p> <p>The Academy Head Teachers/Principal have, along with their leadership teams, identified what they feel are the highest priority risks faced by each Academy and these will be fed into the Academy Risk Registers and where appropriate Trust Risk Register.</p>	
17.	<p><u>Trust Risk Register</u></p> <p>The current Trust Risk Register was considered by the Directors and noted the key risk was student numbers. Existing and future control actions are detailed in the register.</p>	
18.	<p><u>Internal Audit Update</u></p> <p>The Chief Financial Officer provided a summary of action taken and timescales for completion of amber areas identified from the external audit.</p> <p>Other areas of internal assurance were also updated upon: procurement, VAT, IT & cyber security, web-site compliance, data protection/information management and risk management.</p> <p>The Trust was noted to be compliant in all areas of the Academy Handbook schedule of 'musts' as detailed in the Trust's control document for this schedule.</p>	



19.	<u>Internal Audit Tender</u> Further information would be brought back to the next meeting of the Finance, Resources & Audit Committee.	COO/CFO
20.	<u>Fraud Statements/Data Breaches</u> There have been no instances of fraud or data breaches since last reported to Directors. Further to Minute 14 (11 th December 2024) learning points from the minor data breach were brought back to the Committee. No further action was required.	
<u>Part C: Concluding Items</u>		
21.	<u>Approval of documents for inspection</u> Directors RESOLVED that the agenda, approved minutes and supporting documents be made available for public inspection with the exception of information concerning identifiable pupils and/or teachers/staff and tender information due to commercial sensitivity in relation to Minute 12 above in accordance with Articles 125 a.) b.) and c.)	
22.	<u>Date and time of future meetings</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuesday 17th June 2025 at 5.00 pm (updated since meeting to Tuesday 24th June 2025 at 5.00 pm, QE) 	
The meeting concluded at 6.40 pm		

Action Log

5.	Minutes - 11 th December 2024 to be signed by Chair	Governance & Policy Officer
6.	Financial pressures accurately reflected on the Trust Operational Risk Register	SDO
	Traded Income – Catering & Longfield Trading to be included in the budget assumptions	CFO
	Pattern of GAG received and nationally – to be considered in future profiling.	CFO
12.	School's IT refresh – tender route brought back to the next meeting of the Committee	COO/CFO
	Results of CIF bids and any approvals	COO/CFO/OMN
	Health & Safety Audits brought back to the next meeting of the Committee	
15.	Terms of Reference for the Committee to be included on each agenda as a reference document	Governance & Policy Officer
19.	Internal Audit Tender – Further information brought back to next meeting of the Committee	COO/CFO



These Minutes were approved by the Finance & Resources Committee of Northern Arch Learning Partnership as follows:

_____ (date) 
signature (chair): _____

name: MRS E-C- CHANNER

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