

**Draft Minutes**  
**Arbour Vale School Local Governing Body (LGB) meeting**  
**2 July 2020 at 4 pm**

**Present:** John Wise [Chair] (JW)  
Neil Sykes [Principal] (NS)  
Prav Bassi (PB)  
Lee Clarke (LC)  
Matt Downey (MD)  
Josie Jones (JJ)  
Motomori Labode (ML)  
David Winkler (DW)

**In attendance:** Kayleigh Franklyn (KF) (OHCAT Management Accountant)  
Susanne Wicks (SW) (Clerk)

**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

JW opened the meeting and welcomed all present to the formal LGB meeting of the term.

JW welcomed the new governors, David Winkler and Josie Jones, to the meeting and at his request, everyone introduced themselves and gave brief details of their background.

JW congratulated PB on her appointment to the school with effect from September.

**2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Sarah Brooks, Deputy Principal.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations were made.

**4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 APRIL 2020**

The minutes of the LGB meeting held on 23 April 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

**5. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

- i NS confirmed that he has aligned the headings of the SDIP with the portfolios and that the latest version is available on GovernorHub. NS offered to provide an A3 paper copy to those who would like it for ease of reference.
- ii Governors confirmed receipt of the updated pupil progress report from SB.
- iii ML confirmed receipt of an update on the SaLT provision from NS.

## **6. LGB: SIZE AND PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITIES**

JW pointed to the reports circulated prior to the meeting and explained the rationale for the proposed increase in size and structure of the LGB, to reflect the size of the school and the number of students.

JW explained that by having a lead and deputy for each portfolio area, the work can be shared, Governors will be better informed on the strengths and areas for development of the school and will build their knowledge of the strategic direction of the school. The suggested structure would also mean that Governors can meet more members of staff, who will benefit from their involvement with the LGB.

Governors approved the structure which would take effect from September 2020.

NS explained that portfolio meetings would take place during the two weeks before and after each half-term which would allow enough time for Governors to write their report and submit it to that term's formal LGB meeting. NS advised that members of SLT will contact the lead and deputy Governor for their portfolio to arrange a meeting early in the term.

In response to a question from JJ, JW confirmed that there is guidance available to support Governors in their portfolio role, and Governors may also wish to consider the appropriate areas of the School Development Plan and relevant policies. SW undertook to share the portfolio guidance and template report form. Both NS and JW welcomed any ideas to improve the form.

## **7. PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

NS introduced his report and welcomed comments and questions. Matters discussed are detailed below.

NS described the incredibly hard work done by staff during the Covid-19 pandemic and described his pride in all staff, particularly in terms of how much they have learned during this time, including the need to create a virtual learning environment which can be used as and when needed in the future, and to work more closely with families.

NS advised that the transition back to school in September will be challenging, not least due to the need to read and disseminate the guidance and instruction given by Central Government setting out what schools must do to ensure children can come back to school and be safe and well. NS confirmed he had read the latest briefing and noted that the school is already doing much of what is required but there will be more to do to ensure the school is fully compliant in September. JW expressed his confidence that the school will do everything required.

PB asked what platform the school prefers for online learning. NS replied that the preferred system is See-Saw and explained why it will work for this school, noting that it can be used for homework and project work, but more importantly can provide a home-school link to support learning outside of school.

IC advised that the Skills Hub has been supported by colleagues in Nightingale Community Academy in using Microsoft Teams and noted the benefit in being part of a Trust, to get that support from other schools.

JW reminded Governors that staff spent a huge amount of time over the Easter break dealing with free school meals, and NS reported the lengths to which some members of staff had to go to ensure families received the benefit of the vouchers. He confirmed that the FSM programme would continue through the summer holidays.

PB asked how those young people following accredited courses would be supported to catch up next year and NS pointed to the DfE guidance's section on catch-up provision. He reported that there are some KS4 students undertaking accredited courses, for whom support will be given to re-engage them and smooth the transition back into a learning environment. NS advised that staff have put a great deal of work into developing a broad curriculum, and whether a young person undertakes a formal, semi-formal or informal route, they will have access to the core subjects, as well as a range of others, such as Humanities.

JJ asked about the increase in student numbers and NS explained the additional numbers were mostly in Early Years, Year 1 and Year 7. He advised that the latter may well have attended a mainstream primary school with SEN Base. NS noted that whilst it's positive to have such a demand for places, this does create extra work for staff. NS outlined the plans to use Arbour Vale House for post-16 students with moderate learning difficulties, to develop their life skills, independence and vocational skills, supporting them to become more active in their local community. He reported that the works to the building are progressing well and should be complete by September, although the upgrade to the kitchen area may not be done until October. Planning consent will not be granted until 31 October, but permission has been given for the school to use the building, although NS has raised concerns about any possible impact on the validity of the school's insurance policy. Colleagues in Central Services are looking into this on the school's behalf.

JW invited each Governor to comment and ask questions about the appropriate section of the report. Matters discussed are detailed below.

### Teaching & Learning

JW asked if the data presented to the April meeting of the LGB had been moderated. NS replied that it had not but described the need for the school to consider carefully how they use the data to ensure targets set are sufficiently robust. This year would be an exception as the school anticipates three harvests each year and there had only been two. NS explained that he and SB were considering undertaking a baseline assessment when children return to measure the impact of the lockdown and to re-set their 'flightpath' accordingly. He explained that the baseline could be set for each child's understanding in subject areas in the new curriculum, so the school can then measure and demonstrate progress through the term. NS emphasised that the school should be able to observe and evidence an upward trajectory in terms of progression through the year, with the data reviewed termly and interventions put in place where needed to ensure each child makes

progress. PG agreed that the baseline must be robust to ensure the projections are accurate.

NS described the Personal and Holistic Learning Objectives to be set for each child, based on their needs and learning style. He acknowledged that they may need to be revised in the light of the impact of the lockdown, but learning would be accelerated through targeted interventions if needed.

#### Finance and Resources

KF undertook to meet with ML and JJ, to give them a briefing on the school's budget.

JJ asked about additional costs to the school related to Covid-19 such as cleaning and PPE. NS confirmed that there were no costs for basic cleaning equipment, but that the school had covered the costs of PPE which were not significant and which he was glad to do to promote staff health and wellbeing, particularly as they go above and beyond when caring for the students in this school.

JW noted the measures in place to protect children and staff and asked how families are made aware of them, to give them confidence in sending their child to school. NS outlined the weekly contact he has had with parents and reported on the short survey he had undertaken about their plans for next term. 75–80% have confirmed they will send their child back to school and around 18% are undecided which is unsurprising given the raft of ever-changing guidance coming from Government. NS advised that a very small number of parents would wait and review the situation /guidance before sending children back to school and sought the support of the LGB in not imposing any punitive measures upon them. NS described the need to work with parents and keep up regular communication. PB confirmed that, as a parent, she had received a lot of communication from the school but noted her concern about the risk to children using pupil transport which is operated by the local authority and not the school. NS reassured Governors that he would be discussing this with the relevant officers and would ensure that children would be safety taken to and from school.

DW offered support to the school in putting together resources that will reassure families about the 'new normal'.

ML relayed some negative feedback he had heard about the school from families who are struggling to cope with their child at home and noted the need for the school to ensure that parents get the message that their highest priority is the health and safety of children and staff. NS expressed his sympathy for parents trying to cope during this very difficult time and advised that pupil numbers in school have increased but emphasised that he would not put staff or students at risk, particularly with a cohort so susceptible to infection. He described the risk assessment process in place and how the gradual admission of children has been managed, observing a strict hygiene regime and social distancing where possible. Governors agreed that the decision to admit more students must be based on risk but noted that it would be beneficial to get the right message out to parents. JJ offered her support in this regard.

### Child Protection & Safeguarding

IC commended the amazing work being done by the DSL and her team and pointed the LGB's attention to the Safeguarding and Wellbeing Offer which encompasses much of the work that they do day to day, with a Covid-19 specific annexe. IC noted that early help referrals have increased significantly during this time, to support parents with strategies they can use at home.

IC confirmed that she and the DSLs in all schools meet on a weekly basis to keep in touch, offer support and share resources and undertook to meet with the DSL as soon as possible.

### Business Development and Marketing

JJ sought further information on surveys carried out with stakeholders and asked if the local authorities that commission places at the school would be included. NS replied that although they would be deemed stakeholders, the responsible body for issues such as compliance and health & safety is the OHCAT Board of Trustees. JW suggested that JJ may wish to make contact with the School Council and Governors agreed that representatives from the School Council should be invited to future LGB meetings for the first 10-15 minutes to participate in relevant discussions.

### Human Resources and Organisation Development

LC reported that he came into school just before the lockdown and following on from that meeting, he had planned to have further discussions about the levels of agency staffing. He noted from the reports that the levels of agency staff in school have dropped which is positive. He also noted that the recruitment process is robust and successful, and asked what is and can be done further to retain staff, particularly in the light of challenges that will face them in September. NS reported that staff may leave the school when they have secured a new role, often a promotion. He confirmed that he is keen to ensure staff are developed through high quality CPD but noted his concern that the induction process may need some improvement and looked forward to PB's feedback.

In terms of staff wellbeing, NS gave details of the range of support on offer through the school and OHCAT. He flagged that the key challenge in retaining teaching assistants (TA) is the level of pay the posts attract which is driven by national pay scales, on which the school have very little discretion, although he seeks to ensure that all TA are equally remunerated. He also advised that TA are offered the chance to apply to undertake the OHCAT teacher training programme, which is a two-year course facilitating an entry to teaching. This year there were 12 applicants, of whom there were four or five very good candidates with degrees in relevant fields.

Report received.

## **8A. FINANCE AND FUNDING - MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS (MAY – PERIOD 9)**

KF apologised for delay in sending out the finance papers to the LGB and gave a detailed introduction to the management accounts report to May 2020.

Governors noted that the school's finances are performing well against the budget with no concerns. There are 308 students on roll compared with 312 in the budget but there have been higher numbers throughout the year. KF flagged that staff costs are under budget by £145k due to vacancies which have not been filled, mainly due to the lockdown. Similarly, the training and development budget is underspent, as well as the curriculum and premises budgets. She also pointed out that the Pupil Premium Grant has not all been spent and noted the school is investigating how best to deploy the funding to support those pupils.

KF summarised the forecast year-end position of a £57k surplus, increasing the reserves to £11k, and emphasised how positive this is when compared with last year's position. JW welcomed the update and thanked the very hard work of those involved in turning around the school's budget, which was facing a £1.4M deficit not too long ago. He particularly noted the school's financial health rating of 'Good' and gave particular thanks to NS and KF. In response, NS acknowledged the support given by the OHCAT Finance Team.

NS reported that the financial year should end with an improved carry-forward and additional cash reserve days. He explained that the reserves position is 16 days against a target of 45-60 days as set out in the Trust's reserves policy. He noted that this school's budget is much larger than many other schools' in the Trust, so it is a challenging target. NS alerted Governors that much of this year's savings have been achieved by not filling vacant positions which is not sustainable going forward, and some posts have already been filled.

Governors noted that many staff have opted out of the Pension Scheme which represents a saving to the employer but does give some cause for concern. NS explained that he is not permitted to give advice to employees on opting in or out of the scheme but suggested that they may have opted out as they cannot afford it.

Report received.

## **8B. FINANCE AND FUNDING - DRAFT BUDGET 2020-21**

KF presented the budget in detail, noting that it remains draft until approved by the OHCAT Trustees on 3 July 2020.

KF advised that the budget was drafted in consultation with NS and colleagues in the OHCAT Finance Team. She pointed Governors' attention to the summary on page 10 of the report, flagging that after the notional depreciation charge, the school budget is a small surplus (£3k) for 2020-21. General reserves in the period increase by £113,647 after investment in fixed assets and the contribution to the MAT reserves and total general reserves at August 2021 are £351k, or 14 days of expenditure (target: 45-60 days). KF also flagged that while there is no financial health grade (FHG) indicator requirement for academy trusts, the FHG calculation applied to Orchard Hill College is being adopted across the MAT; for ABV, this budget delivers a FHG of Good for 2020-21 (from good forecast at Aug-20). Due to the low level of reserves, the internal RAG rating is assessed as Amber.

KF advised that the 2020-21 budget is based on 325 students and NS confirmed that 325 places have already been agreed which is a measure of the reputation of the school. KF reported that the main commissioner of places is Slough District Council and explained how the funding is allocated to the school. She pointed out that staff costs account for 75% of the budget and JW commented that, in his experience, many schools' expenditure on staffing is much higher than that, and congratulated colleagues on this achievement, a comment echoed by PB.

MD queried the depreciation charge on the building, given that the Trust does not own the premises due to the school's involvement in a PFI contract. KF explained that depreciation is included to protect the cost structure and build general reserves. NS added that he had already discussed this with the Director of Finance at OHCAT as he had asked the same question and explained that it is important to build up the reserves to account for the lifecycles of the building, the fixtures and fittings and other costs for which the school is responsible, such as IT.

NS described the huge amount of work done to reach the financial position and extended thanks to KF for her support. In response, KF gave credit to NS and the SLT for the work they have done to achieve a balanced budget for the forthcoming year. JW thanked all involved for the clear and helpful reports circulated to Governors.

Report received.

## **9. SAFEGUARDING AND WELLBEING OFFER**

NS presented the document, noting that it has been amended and reviewed in the light of the pandemic. He explained that the Offer summarised everything done by the school, how colleagues work with families and the early intervention given, which has been crucial as the school works with so many agencies supporting families.

IC noted that each and every school does something slightly different and OHCAT are encouraging DSL to identify, promote and celebrate what is being done in their school.

## **10. RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION**

NS reported that the statutory deadline for the introduction of the RSE curriculum had been deferred to the summer term 2021 and undertook to bring further information to the next meeting. He confirmed that consultation will be undertaken with parents / carers. The clerk undertook to add this to the agenda for the November meeting.

## **11. GOVERNOR VISITS**

No visits had taken place due to the lockdown.

## **12. GOVERNOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

Governors agreed to meet in the first half of each term to undertake learning and development. NS and JW invited any suggested items to be covered and Governors requested a briefing on the operation of the PFI contract and some information on the virtual learning platform. It was agreed that the first informal meeting should focus on the development of Governors' understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

## **13. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Governors noted the policies and procedures approved via authority delegated to the Chairs of the OHC&AT Boards on 5 April 2020.

NS reported that he has asked SLT to produce a one-page summary of policies of which they are responsible for which could feed into portfolio meetings, which will be ready for September. JW reiterated his previous request for Governors to familiarise themselves with policies and procedures relevant to their portfolio areas.

## **14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

No matters were raised.

## **15. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Governors agreed the following dates for 2020-21:

Formal Meetings: 26 November, 25 March, 24 June (4pm start)

Informal Meetings: 24 September, 28 January, 13 May (4pm start).

## **16. CONFIDENTIALITY**

No items were deemed confidential.

## **17. CLOSE OF MEETING**

JW thanked everyone for their time and contribution and wished all present a good summer break. At the Governors' request, NS undertook to pass on their thanks and best wishes to all staff.

The meeting closed at 6.30 pm.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **John Wise, Chair**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>SUMMARY OF ACTIONS</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>4</b>	JW to sign and scan minutes of previous meeting to clerk.	n/a
<b>6</b>	Clerk to share portfolio guidance.	Complete
<b>7</b>	Clerk to share the DfE guidance on full opening for special schools.	Complete
<b>8</b>	KF undertook to meet with ML and JJ, to give them a briefing on the school's budget	Sep 2020
<b>8</b>	Clerk to ensure that School Council are invited to future LGB meetings and that this is added to the agenda.	2020-21
<b>9</b>	NS to share the Local Safeguarding and Wellbeing Offer with the clerk to circulate to the LGB.	n/a
<b>10</b>	RSE to be added to the agenda for the November LGB meeting.	Sep 2020
<b>12</b>	Governors to notify JW and NS of any suggestions for items to be covered at their informal LGB meetings.	n/a