

**MINUTES OF THE 101st FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
WEDNESDAY 14 JULY 2021 AT 16.15**

Present: Dick Whitcutt (DW) - Chair, Richard Perry (RJP), Douglas Mitchell (DMI), Stewart Harris (SH), Angela Entwistle (AEE), Rachel Brannagan (RB)

Absent:

In Attendance: Jane Kiddell (JKD) (Minutes)

Start Time: 16.15

1. Apologies for absence

The only absentee was Tony Bothwell (TB) due to work commitments.

2. Declaration of interest

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Last meeting

DW noted from the previous minutes that ATA are still waiting for a further response from Wandsworth Parks Service with regards to the possibility of relinquishing the Openview facility.

DW spoke about the letting opportunities which are still an option regardless of the final decision over Openview.

DW asked RJP about the final accounts for the redevelopment works undertaken by Wandsworth and RJP confirmed that this was covered in his report.

RJP added that he would update colleagues about the IT upgrades considered for this year and in particular in respect of the ransomware attack.

DW raised concern about the £67k of underfunding to issues with the Year 7 Admissions' process last year and asked if anyone had spoken to Wandsworth about this. RJP said that all of the authority schools had been affected in the same way. DW asked about the places which were not filled in the 6th Form. RJP explained that in the lead up to the new academic year, ATA have a good number of internal Year 11 students who reach the criteria for entry to the sixth form; however, ATA are less certain of the number of external students who have been offered a place to study at ATA. Although these students accept their place initially, they tend to accept places at other schools too and make their final decision shortly before the start of the academic year. So, we can never be absolutely certain of numbers until the first day. COVID-19 has also had an impact with many young people more reluctant to move schools.

DMI told colleagues that the current Year 13 is a particularly small year group with 75 students, so ATA have increased the number of internal students, but, as a result of COVID, ATA had attracted fewer external students as they have decided to stay at their current school. ATA are preparing for a similar scenario this year where ATA will see more students from its Year 11 cohort and far fewer external students joining the Academy. The IB cohort will not be affected as this remains a fairly stable number each year.

It is hoped that for the 2022 enrolment processes, students will be able to visit the Academy, which they have not been able to do for the past two years, and this will make a positive difference to the number of students who wish to study here and ATA will maximise the current Year 11 to try and make sure that 6th Form places are filled.

DW asked RJP about the Charging and Remissions Policy, which was circulated at the previous meeting and RJP confirmed that he had received no further comments. RJP therefore confirmed to colleagues that this has now been updated on the website.

The previous minutes were agreed and signed.

4. Matters Arising

RJP raised the exit questionnaire and confirmed that he had enclosed the questionnaire together with a summary of the results and asked colleagues if they had any comments.

DW commented that he thought the questionnaire was good and was very impressed with the responses. He also commented that the Information is useful for gauging the reasons why staff have left the Academy.

DW queried some particular questions and RJP said that the aim was to elicit responses across a number of areas and to then focus on any that stand out. DW asked about the question that related to whether or not staff felt that they had received adequate training and development. He noted that the responses to this had not been included in the summary of results. RJP explained that it could be included but ATA provide staff with as many training and development opportunities as it can and this is far more than most schools.

5. Capital Developments

RJP reported that he was still waiting for the final accounts from Wandsworth for the expansion programme. RJP had chased Wandsworth on 6 June and again before this meeting. RJP hoped that he will have a response for colleagues soon and will therefore be able to close this matter for the end of year accounts.

DW commented that the Appendix 2b showed more expenditure than the 5% contribution that was originally agreed with Wandsworth. RJP explained that the Academy had contributed more than the required 5%, but that this was always in the plan for what it wanted to achieve as an outcome.

RJP advised colleagues about the Openview facility, which had been discussed at the last meeting as one of the areas which was a great facility to have and one that helps make ATA stand out from other local schools but which remains an area that could be a focus for cost saving. This became more apparent during lockdown when ATA was unable to use this facility and made greater use of facilities onsite instead. There is a lack of grassed teaching spaces and/or an all-weather playing surface; however, aside from these, the onsite facilities are good. RJP added that the time saved travelling, when PE lessons take place onsite, also provides for greater curriculum time for the delivery of lessons.

DMI gave the educational rationale for using ATA's onsite facilities in favour of Openview. The focus is on the delivery of the curriculum and the students are able to learn and consolidate skills more securely in the full one hour and forty-five-minute lesson onsite. ATA are also able to monitor the quality of lessons more regularly, which is something that ATA cannot assess fully when the students are offsite. DMI was reassured from the Head of PE that ATA can arrange provision differently and the move from Openview to Ashcroft wouldn't affect the curriculum negatively. There are two sports that ATA can't offer, these being hockey and rugby - although rugby is being slowly phased out of schools' curriculum because of health concerns. Maybe touch rugby is something that can be introduced to the curriculum next year instead. With regards to hockey, upgrading the facilities onsite, by creating an all-weather playing surface, would allow ATA to deliver the teams sports, which are currently catered for offsite.

Athletics can continue to be held at Wimbledon Park.

The financial cost to the Academy of operating Openview is roughly £50K per year, after ATA take into account the costs of running the facility and the letting income taken from other users. This figure does include the cost of a bus driver and maintenance of a sinking fund for eventual replacement of the bus and the AstroTurf area. Openview represents a significant cost to the Academy when also factoring in that students have less time for their lessons.

ATA have not replaced the bus driver and are cautious about doing so for September. RJP told colleagues that the situation at the moment is that there is no intention to drive the students around in September and DMI feels that students travelling on the bus to Openview gives out the wrong COVID message and that he would rather be cautious and protect the health of the students and staff members.

RJP advised colleagues that he had a meeting with the Chairman of the Spencer Club and said that ATA would be unlikely to use Openview between September and December. The Spencer Club were keen to have this confirmation as they have had interest from other schools, including independent schools. RJP is due to meet with the Spencer Club again and, in fact, ATA had received a direct enquiry from an Independent school who would like to use the facility, together with four or five other schools (mainly independent schools lacking such facilities) that would like to use it also. This could lead to the Academy still feasibly holding the lease but covering all costs through the letting income received, effectively becoming a managing agent. This could potentially generate a small surplus as a management fee but RJP would need to ensure that this was feasible under the terms of the lease.

After some questioning regarding the financial model from DW, RJP commented that he would be looking at a situation where all running costs were fully covered by the letting income received from other hirers and that the Academy would still be able to use the ground for sporting fixtures etc.

RB commented that were the site to be used by a number of other schools then safeguarding policies and practices would need to be reviewed. Regardless of any change in practice, ATA is required to give notice and can perhaps test the water to see how a revised approach runs and still have the facility available, if ATA choose to use it.

RJP advised colleagues about the Cyber-attack which happened on the 8 May and the way in which it had impacted most of ATA's operating system and back-up arrangements. Whilst the primary back-up source was impacted, the second layer of back up, which was a tape back-up, actually allowed ATA to restore the data from the week before the attack, although this took a considerable time to do.

DW asked about the back-up system and asked if it does not have a firewall.

RJP explained to colleagues that the back-up facility is still held locally rather than remotely and runs off separate servers in a separate location. However, the attack impacted all of the servers. RJP told colleagues that, going forward, the back-up should be held on the Cloud System and that this has been a learning point going forward.

ATA need to have a more robust system in place so any potential future attacks are minimised and identified quickly.

The attack was designed to cause disruption and thankfully was not about money. There have been other attacks on schools and hospitals which were designed to disable rather than seek ransom monies. It was difficult to understand why the attack took place because ATA possesses limited information to gain from such an attack.

RJP updated colleagues with proposed improvements and has listed 4 key areas including upgrades to the server operating systems facility, which will ensure that everything upgraded is automatically up to date, fully patched and which will therefore leave the Academy less vulnerable to attack. The cost to implement this would be £15k per annum, due to the number of devices ATA has. Also, there is a product called Bullwall Ransomcare, which provides an additional line of defence to IT systems at risk from increasingly sophisticated Cyber-attacks. The product provides an automatic alert facility and instant shutdown of the infected hardware allowing the remainder to continue in full operation. This costs £22k for a 3-year protection arrangement. Aside from cloud-based back-up, the Academy would also need to implement a more secure remote access system for staff and student use of systems when at home.

6. Revenue Funding 2020-2021 Update

RJP gave colleagues the usual financial update for ATA at as at 31 May 2021. RJP advised colleagues that ATA had committed a similar percentage of expenditure at this stage of the year compared to previous year.

The level of expenditure is just under £8M compared to £7.5M at the same stage last year, but this represented 76.4% of expected income compared to 75.8% the previous year.

ATA has had some additional income including £86K of catch up premium, £24K of Free School Meals monies and funds to support the, mass testing costs for students. All of these are welcome additions that ATA are anticipating for this year. Cost savings include the current non-replacement of the bus driver; delayed replacement of a science technician and a saving on invigilation costs together with a reduction of exam costs which will help reduce ATA's anticipated year-end deficit.

7. Revenue Funding 2021-22

RJP advised Colleague about the requirement to submit another return to the DfE which is the Academies budget forecast return outturn and covers a detailed breakdown of the final figures from last year's accounts; the actual figures for the current year up to March; an estimate for the remainder of the academic year; the detailed estimates for the new academic year 2021/2022 and a secondary part which is a summarised three year forecast which includes the 2021 forecast and predications for the two years thereafter.

RJP has produced this and would circulate it to colleagues after the meeting so they have the draft figures before submission.

The figures incorporate detailed staffing costs for next year based on joiners and leavers. There is mention of a 1.5% pay award in local government to be backdated to April 2021, but this has yet to be agreed. The Trustees would normally implement such an award from the following September. The government has confirmed there is not likely to be a national award for teaching staff beyond a very minor provision for the lowest paid.

The 3-year projection going forward when compared to the 5-year plan that RJP circulated last year, indicates that ATA will have £2.1m left in reserve from a position of what was £4.5m in August 2020. The 5-year forecast last year was showing a figure of £2.2m at the same stage. The biggest concern is that the Academy is projected to spend in the order of £0.5m per year in excess of the likely income.

8. Trading Company

RJP advised colleagues that turnover will have been impacted once again this year because of the pandemic.

9. Administrative and Staffing Matters

RJP told colleagues he has upgraded the Staff Procedures and Disciplinary policy which includes more wording and is happy to take comments from colleagues if they have any or questions.

RJP reported on the Foundation Pension Plan. This was now at the stage of signing off on the valuation report. The agreement was reached last time to implement a recovery plan over a 7 Year term, based on a £507K deficit as at 31 March 2021 which with interest included across the term makes the calculation £546K and the annual cost to ATA would be £61K.

10. Any Other Business

None.

Signed:



Date:

13 October /2021

Richard Whitcutt

Chair of Finance and Resource Committee