FOUR HILLS EDUCATION TRUST

FINANCE & RESOURCE COMMITTEE MEETING – AUTUMN MINUTES

MONDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2025 AT 5.15PM

TYPE OF MEETING	Finance & Resource Committee	Microsoft Teams
PRESENT	Darren Booth - Associate Mark Stanyer Ann Lombardi Kirsty Osman Tricia Gurney	
CLERK	Tricia Gurney	
IN ATTENDANCE		
QUORUM	Number: 2	QUORATE: Yes

1.	**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** KO welcomed the trustees.
2.	**APOLOGIES** Received from — Reason — Consent Yes / No Jas Dhillon — Work Commitments — Yes
3.	**DECLARATION OF INTERESTS –** Non declared
4.	**ELECTION OF CHAIR -** Jas Dhillon
5.	**CONFIRMATION OF CLERK TO THE BOARD –** School Business Services to be confirmed as clerking provider.
6.	**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP & TERMS OF REFERENCE** The Finance Committee reviewed and unanimously ratified its Terms of Reference (ToR), confirming they are fully aligned with the Trust's constitution and adhere to the latest Academies Financial Handbook. All members confirmed their understanding of the established roles and responsibilities. Regarding membership, [TG] is currently serving as a full voting member, pending the of additional trustees. For meeting administration, the Committee agreed to enhance its reporting procedures: while reports are currently submitted via approved minutes, this will

transition to a full, detailed report prepared by the Governance Clerk, effective immediately, to provide the main Board with a more comprehensive summary of the Committee's work.

7. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING & MATTERS ARISING

None as this is the trusts first meeting since opening in September 2025

8. FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE OVERVIEW

8.1 CFO briefing on trust financial responsibilities and ATH compliance.

The CFO delivered a detailed briefing on the Trust's financial responsibilities, emphasisng the essential components of strong financial governance and full compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH) 2025. The briefing focused on ten critical areas of responsibility required to ensure the Trust operates legally, ethically, and efficiently.
Key Areas of Responsibility (In line with ATH 2025):

#	Area of Responsibility	Compliance Requirement Summary
1.	**Financial Probity and Integrity**	All operations must be conducted with honesty, transparency, and in strict adherence to statutory requirements.
2.	**Compliance**	The Trust must fully adhere to all requirements of the ATH 2025, including its funding agreements, company law, and charity law. Policies must be updated promptly in response to Handbook changes.
3.	**Governance and Oversight**	The Board of Trustees holds ultimate responsibility for financial management. The CEO, as the Accounting Officer, is personally accountable to the ESFA for regularity, propriety, and value for money.
4.	**Budgeting and Financial Planning**	Prepare, review, and approve annual budgets aligned with strategic objectives. Financial returns and budgets must be submitted to the DfE by published deadlines.
5.	**Financial Monitoring and Reporting**	Maintain robust systems for monitoring, reconciling, and reporting all funding streams. Monthly management accounts must be produced and circulated to the CEO, Finance Committee, and Board of Trustees, with clear explanations for variances and associated action plans.
6.	**Internal Control and Risk Management**	Implement and maintain effective internal controls, including strict segregation of duties (SOD), and a comprehensive risk management framework. Regular reconciliations and a complete audit trail are mandatory.
7.	**Value for Money (VfM)**	Demonstrate that public funds are used economically, efficiently, and effectively. This requires the use of benchmarking and regular reviews to ensure the Trust secures best value.

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8.	**Audit and Scrutiny**	Arrange for independent internal scrutiny and conduct an annual external audit. The Trust must act promptly on all audit findings and recommendations.
9.	**Statutory Returns and Record Keeping**	Submit all required statutory returns (e.g., annual accounts, budget forecasts, VAT, payroll) accurately and on time. Financial and governance records must be retained for a minimum of seven years.
10.	**Transparency and Publication**	All required financial information and relevant policies must be published promptly on the Trust's website and submitted to government platforms.

In summary, the briefing confirmed that the Trust must maintain strong financial governance, transparent reporting, effective risk management, and ensure full compliance with all statutory and regulatory requirements set out in the Academy Trust Handbook 2025. For review ahead of the next meeting, the Financial Management Policy V2 and a comprehensive Finance and Resource Briefing pack (aligned with Segregation of Duties principles) have been uploaded to the Governor Hub.

8.2 Confirm process for regular management accounts circulation.

Full details available within the Financial Management Policy. The CFO confirmed the process for preparing and circulating the monthly management accounts. This process is non-negotiable, as it is essential for demonstrating we meet the robust monitoring and reporting standards required by the Academies Trust Handbook (ATH). Full details are documented in the Financial Management Policy.

Our Monthly Mandate: Preparation and Content

As the CFO, I prepare a complete set of management accounts and supporting financial reports every month. These reports are designed to give you, as the committee and board leaders, the comprehensive insight you need.

The accounts package specifically includes:

- **Detailed Income & Expenditure Analysis:** Providing you with both **Month-to-Date (MTD)** and **Year-to-Date (YTD)** performance figures.
- **Comparison Report:** This clearly highlights the difference between our **actual financial results and the approved budget**.
- **Capital Funds/Projects Status:** An important update on the progress and expenditure of all our active **capital projects**.
- **Cashflow Forecast:** A forward-looking view to ensure we are maintaining adequate liquidity.
- **Mandatory Commentary and Analysis:** Crucially, this section ensures compliance. It provides **clear explanations for all significant variances** from the budget, **identifies any significant financial risks** we are tracking, and details the **action plans** we are deploying to mitigate those risks.

Circulation for Governance and Oversight

Once prepared, the entire package—including the mandatory analysis—is formally circulated monthly to two key parties:

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	1. The **Finance Committee**, for your detailed review, challenge, and recommendation to the full Board. 2. The **Chair of the Board of Trustees**, ensuring the highest level of governance is immediately informed of the Trust's financial health. This procedure ensures timely, accurate, and compliant reporting, allowing the Board to effectively discharge its ultimate financial responsibilities under the Academies Trust Handbook. **8.3** Review scheme of delegation for financial decisions The CEO delivered a briefing focused on core financial compliance and the review of the Scheme of Delegation (SoD). **Key Compliance Points:** 1. **ATH Financial Duties:** The Trust's core duties—**Regularity, Propriety, and Value for Money (VfM)**—were reaffirmed as central to all financial operations. 2. **Management Accounts Process:** The CFO confirmed that a **full, compliant set of monthly management accounts** (including commentary on variances, risks, and action plans) will be formally circulated to the **Finance Committee** and the **Chair of Trustees** every month, ensuring timely oversight. **Scheme of Delegation Review:** • The Committee was directed to review the SoD (provided in the briefing pack) to ensure **absolute clarity on all financial authorisation thresholds**. This is necessary to maintain strong internal controls and compliance with the ATH. • The briefing concluded with a prompt to **identify any training needs** among Committee members, particularly concerning ATH essentials, to support continued high-quality financial governance.
9.	**BUDGET POSITION** **9.1 Summary of approved budget and current position.** All trust budgets have been successfully built and are now uploaded to the new Access finance system. These budgets were fundamentally based on the figures originally submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) during the academy application process, with only minor adjustments made to reflect specific changes, primarily in staffing. While two schools currently forecast a small in-year deficit, this position is expected to be temporary. The trust anticipates receiving the surplus funds to be transferred from the Local Authorities (LAs), which will ensure all schools are placed in a positive financial standing, leading to an anticipated overall trust surplus at year-end. **9.2 Key variances and reasons.** Non identified. **9.3 Actions to address variances.** The CFO explained It was too early to identify any variances; therefore, we will continue to regularly monitor budgets and bring any significant variance to the attention of the board immediately.

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9.4 Budget Strategy Parameters (FY 2026/27)

The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) presented the Budget Strategy Parameters for Fiscal Year 2026/27, which are designed to provide a robust, evidence-based, and sustainable foundation for all budget calculations, ensuring alignment with the Trust's strategic objectives. It was agreed that these ten key parameters must be formally documented and agreed upon at the start of the budget-setting process.

Key Budget Parameters

The following parameters will guide the development of the FY 2026/27 budget:

- **1. Pupil Number Forecasting & Core Funding:** Budgets must be driven by robust, evidence-based forecasts for pupil numbers, as this directly determines the core General Annual Grant (GAG) funding.
- **2. Income Streams:** Inclusion of the latest and most reliable estimates for all income sources (including DfE grants, Pupil Premium, lettings, and donations).
- **3. Financial Performance Analysis:** Reviewing past financial performance is essential to identify trends, variances, and inform future projections.
- **4. Strategic Alignment:** All budgeted income and expenditure must align directly with the Trust's strategic and educational development objectives.
- **5. Efficiency and Value for Money:** Identifying potential efficiency savings and demonstrating clear **value for money** across all areas of expenditure.
- **6. Budgetary Principles and Assumptions:** Establishing clear, Trust-wide assumptions, including the pupil number methodology, projected inflation rates (both pay and non-pay), efficiency targets, and contingency levels.
- **7. External Factors and Risk Management:** Considering the impact of external factors, such as national pay awards, general inflation, changes to the funding formula, and regulatory changes, to mitigate financial risk.
- **8. Reserves and Grants:** Full accounting for carry-forward reserves and unspent grants, ensuring strict compliance with all grant conditions.
- **9. Central and Shared Funds:** Clear planning for the use and allocation of centrally managed funds (e.g., shared services and central contingency).
- **10. Financial Metrics and Reporting:** Setting clear key financial health indicators and risk metrics for monitoring both at the individual school level and across the entire Trust.

Budget Forecasting Cycle (FY 2026/27)

The committee noted and agreed the proposed timeline for the budget cycle:

Stage	Timeline
Budget Forecast Cycle Start	February
Draft Budgets Prepared	April – May
Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) Review & Recommend	June
Budget Forecast Return (BFR) Submitted to DfE	Mid-July (TBC)

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	Trust Implementation	August (in readiness for the new academic year)

10. MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

10.1 Review income vs budget – highlight major movements.
10.2 Review expenditure vs budget – note cost pressures.

The Finance Committee undertook a thorough review of the Income versus Budget and Expenditure versus Budget analyses, confirming that the consolidated budget had been effectively shared and discussed with the trustees. A key point of discussion was the funding streams, and the governors were provided with a detailed breakdown of all totals they had specifically requested. Furthermore, the Trustees were highly supportive of the new access software, praising it as a powerful tool that provides live data at their fingertips, enhancing their ability to monitor financial performance.

10.3 Confirm payroll position and any staffing cost issues.
Current Position: There have been no significant changes to the forecasted staffing costs across the Trust and payroll remains in line with our budgeted expectations.
Discrepancies Identified: We have identified some discrepancies across job roles and pay scales. These are not currently impacting the overall staffing cost forecast but will require attention to ensure consistency and fairness.
Planned Actions: A review of job roles and pay scales will be undertaken after the secured period of TUPE, with the aim of ensuring alignment of posts and pay scales across the Trust. All new posts have already been aligned to the correct scales.
Summary: No immediate financial risk has been identified, but work is planned to address discrepancies and ensure ongoing compliance and equity in our staffing structure.

10.4 Check cash flow position and bank reconciliation status.

The Finance Committee reviewed the current Cash Flow Position and Bank Reconciliation Status.

The cash flow remains stable and is operating within budgeted expectations. No immediate liquidity risks were identified. It was noted that short-term administrative delays arising from the new system implementation and data consolidation have not materially affected supplier payments or payroll scheduling.

Monthly bank reconciliations are currently in progress within the new finance system. All supporting reconciliation documentation is anticipated to be ready for signing by the end of the week. To maintain assurance, Control Account reviews (covering bank, payroll, VAT, and suspense accounts) are being completed concurrently with the reconciliation pack.

System Implementation & Data Consolidation

The new finance system has been successfully implemented, though this has caused a temporary delay in some financial tasks while staff complete the necessary training. A significant step toward efficiency is the ongoing work with the HR provider to transition from six separate payroll/HR data files to one consolidated file. This change will eliminate manual reformatting, reduce the risk of errors, and is expected to significantly speed up month-end processing in future cycles.

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	The Committee noted and accepted the report on the stable cash flow position and the progress of the bank reconciliations and system transition. **10.5 Discuss forecast to year-end and any sensitivities.** It is currently too early in the financial year to make any firm assumptions about the year-end outturn. At this stage, the budget remains in line with expectations, and there are no significant variances to report. No material sensitivities or risks have been identified at this point. We will continue to monitor key variables (such as staffing, funding, and major contracts) and provide updates as the year progresses. **Next Steps:** As more actuals are recorded and trends become clearer; we will update the forecast and highlight any emerging risks or opportunities. **10.6 Reserves Position & Deployment Plan — current level vs policy, planned deployment/replenishment and Board recommendation.** The Committee considered the Trust's Reserves position and the Reserves Deployment Plan (which addresses the current level versus policy, planned deployment, and replenishment). The Reserves Policy has been successfully uploaded to the Governor Hub for all Governors' reference. However, the completion of the full Reserves Position and Deployment exercise is currently pending until the Trust has received all anticipated surplus funds.
11.	**INTERNAL FINANCIAL CONTROLS** **11.1 Confirm financial procedures are documented and up to date.** The Committee received confirmation that a review of financial procedures for all finance staff has been successfully completed and fully documented, as stipulated by the Internal Controls Schedule. This review covered the following critical areas: • Procurement • Financial Management • Purchasing Procedures and Thresholds • Segregation of Duties • Fraud Prevention • Budget Monitoring • Documentation • Access Finance System These documented measures ensure robust financial governance and maintain ongoing compliance with all statutory and regulatory requirements. Further details regarding these controls can be found within the Internal Controls Schedule, which has been uploaded to the Governor Hub.

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	11.2 Check segregation of duties and access controls are in place. The Committee reviewed the Trust's framework for Segregation of Duties (SoD), noting that the robust controls are strictly enforced across all financial processes to prevent fraud and ensure full compliance with the Academies Handbook 2025. Key Controls in Practice: • Transaction Input vs. Authorisation: To ensure robust internal control, the roles of input and authorisation are strictly separated. Financial transactions are input by Finance Administrators or School Business Managers, but all transactions and payments must be formally authorised by the Headteacher (or equivalent). The inputter is explicitly prevented from approving their own entries. • System Access: Access to the finance system is strictly role-based. While the CFO and CEO have full access for high-level oversight and authorisation, operational tasks are separated. Users like Finance Administrators can input data but are restricted from authorising payments. • Banking and Payments: All payments (cheques, BACS, withdrawals) require dual authorisation. This is enforced at the Trust level (by the CEO, CFO, or Chair of Trustees) or at the school level (Headteacher, Business Manager, or Finance Administrator). Payment runs prepared by the CFO also require the CEO's secondary authorisation before release. • Reconciliations and Reviews: Monthly reconciliations, performed by the CFO, are subject to independent quarterly review by a Trustee or the CEO. All reconciliations are signed and dated as formal evidence of this review. • Procurement: Segregation is maintained throughout the procurement process using clear approval limits. No single individual can both initiate and approve a transaction, and all decisions are fully documented and subject to audit. The Committee concluded that the Trust's segregation of duties arrangements are robust, clearly documented, and fully compliant with the Academies Handbook 2025, providing strong assurance to the Trustees over financial integrity and risk management. **1.3 Review Fraud Prevention Measures and Whistleblowing Arrangements** The Committee confirmed that the Fraud and Cyber Policy and the Whistleblowing Policy are currently fully compliant with the Academies Trust Handbook (ATH) and DfE requirements. Assurance is maintained through regular training provided to both staff and Trustees, and ongoing oversight by the Audit & Risk Committee. **11.4 Note any Recent Audit Recommendations or Control Issues and Follow-up Actions** No recent audit recommendations or control issues were noted beyond the required update to the Whistleblowing Policy detailed above. The Trust continues to ensure all controls are robustly applied and monitored. Action: Kirsty will update the Whistleblowing Policy and upload the revised version to the Governor Hub.
12.	**RISK MANAGEMENT** **12.1** Review key financial risks from the trust risk register.

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12.2 Review resource risks (HR, estates, ICT).

12.3 Confirm mitigation strategies and responsible owners.

12.4 Note any changes to risk ratings or new/emerging risks.

The Committee undertook its scheduled review of the Trust's key financial and resource risks, confirming mitigation strategies, and responsible owners, and noting emerging risks. The Trust's Risk Register and Management Policy are established, with regular updates and version control in place.

Risk Area	Status / Finding	Mitigation Strategy & Owner Confirmation
Trust Risk Register	**KKP** (Kirsty, I assume, given previous minutes) has provided feedback, and the necessary changes will be implemented.	An updated version of the Risk Register will be issued tomorrow. **Fully Compliant** status confirmed.
Financial Systems	**Financial Risk:** Identified as a risk within financial systems.	**Mitigation:** Robust **financial control procedures** are in place to mitigate this risk.
HR / Union Interventions	Risk of industrial action or union involvement.	**Mitigation:** Strategy confirmed to proactively **engage with HR** to manage and resolve potential issues.
Funding Challenges (Financial)	**Funding is a concern.** Specifically noted: uncertainty around the **CIF phasing out** and the need for a replacement funding stream.	**Mitigation:** The Trust is **actively seeking additional funding**, with the **School Condition Allocations (SCA) funding** identified as the best immediate option.
Woodlands Conversion Date	The continued delay in Woodlands not having a confirmed conversion date is a **specific financial concern**.	This risk will remain on the register for close monitoring.
Central Team Capacity	**Resource Risk:** The need for effective support to schools and the strain on central capacity was flagged.	**Mitigation:** The Trust needs to be creative with anticipated surpluses to fund the recruitment of a **Director of Education** and a **Finance Administrator**.

13. COMPLIANCE AND AUDIT

13.0 External Audit Timetable and Key Deliverables

The Committee formally noted the appointment of **Mitchell Charlesworth** as the Trust's External Auditor and confirmed the audit process and timetable for the year.

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13.1 Audit Timetable and Communications

The external audit process is structured around the following key communication points:

- **Pre-Year-End:** Auditors will contact the Trust by telephone before each year-end for preliminary discussions, with agreed actions confirmed in writing.
- **Pre-Audit Planning Meeting:** A meeting will be arranged within **three weeks** prior to the expected start date to discuss the planned scope and timing, with written confirmation to follow.
- **Post-Audit Completion Meeting:** A meeting will be held within **four weeks** of completing the on-site audit work to discuss any significant findings, also confirmed in writing.

Ongoing Communication: Additional contact will be made as needed throughout the process regarding audit and other matters.

13.2 Review internal scrutiny plan and its link to Audit & Risk Committee.

The Trust confirmed that the **internal scrutiny plan** is formally linked to the work and oversight of the Audit & Risk Committee.

Key Deliverables and Reporting

The auditors' key deliverables focus on providing assurance over the financial statements and compliance:

- **Audit of Financial Statements:** The auditors will report to the Members whether the financial statements present a true and fair view of the Trust's affairs and whether they have been properly prepared in accordance with UK GAAP, the Companies Act 2006, Charities SORP, and the Academies Accounts Direction.
- **Consistency Checks:** The auditors will confirm that the information in the **Trustees' Report** (including the strategic and directors' reports) is consistent with the financial statements.
- **Reporting by Exception:** Auditors are required to report if adequate accounting records have not been kept, if the statements are not in agreement with records, if disclosures on directors' remuneration are missing, or if necessary, information/explanations were not received.
- **Audit Opinion:** The auditors will issue an opinion on the financial statements and will report any material misstatements or significant deficiencies in internal control.
- **Reporting to DfE:** The auditors have a statutory duty to report matters of material **significance** to the Department for Education (DfE) if they arise during the audit.

Key Contacts for the audit team are confirmed as: Engagement Partner **Alex Makinson**, Senior Statutory Auditor **Rob Hall**, and Audit Team Contact **Emerald Thomas**.

The Committee agreed that the minutes will reflect the necessary challenge and decisions required to provide robust audit evidence.

13.3 Ensure minutes will reflect challenge and decisions for audit evidence.

13.4 AAD Disclosures Planning

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The Committee acknowledged its responsibility for ensuring that Academies Accounts Direction (AAD) disclosures are prepared in full compliance with ESFA requirements.

- **AAD Compliance:** It was confirmed that the external auditor will assist the Trust in preparing the accounts in accordance with the latest AAD guidance.
- **Disclosure Ownership:** The Committee agreed on the importance of assigning clear ownership for disclosures in high-risk areas, including the reserves narrative, going concern assessment, leases, related party transactions (RPTs), and the regularity statement.

Actions Item	Action	Owner	Due Date
13.3.1	Develop and finalise a comprehensive AAD Disclosure Checklist and timeline.	Finance Team	[Insert Date]
13.3.2	Assign specific owners for the preparation of all statutory AAD narratives and disclosures (e.g., Reserves, RPTs).	Finance Team / Executive Lead	[Insert Date]
13.3.3	Ensure meeting minutes clearly reflect appropriate challenge and decision-making on key audit points to provide robust evidence of governance.	Executive Lead	Ongoing

14. POLICIES FOR APPROVAL

14.1 Reserves Policy

Discussion: The committee reviewed the Reserves Policy, noting its role in ensuring financial resilience and safeguarding against unforeseen risks.
Decision: Policy approved without amendments.
Action: Publish updated policy and communicate to relevant stakeholders.

14.2 Procurement Policy & Pipeline

- **Discussion:**
  - Reviewed Procurement Policy with emphasis on achieving value for money and compliance with ATH thresholds.
  - Considered the Procurement Pipeline for the next 12–18 months, highlighting upcoming high-value procurements, route-to-market strategies, and conflict management measures.
- **Decision:** Procurement Policy approved.
- **Action:** Confirm compliance checks and update pipeline monitoring process.

14.3 Gifts & Hospitality Policy

- **Discussion:** Committee reaffirmed the importance of propriety and transparency in managing gifts and hospitality.
- **Decision:** Policy approved with minor clarifications on reporting thresholds.
- **Action:** Circulate updated guidance to all staff.

14.4 Pay Policy

- **Discussion:** Reviewed Pay Policy to ensure HR compliance and affordability within current budget constraints.
- **Decision:** Policy approved.
- **Action:** HR to implement and communicate changes.

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	14.5 Executive Pay Policy • **Discussion:** Considered Executive Pay Policy in the context of market benchmarking and organisational affordability. • **Decision:** Policy approved; no amendments required. • **Action:** Confirm publication and notify relevant governance bodies. **Resolution** The committee resolved to approve all policies listed under Agenda Item 14.
15.	**HR AND STAFFING** **15.1 Review Current Workforce Structure (Planned vs Actual)** • The committee reviewed the current workforce structure and noted that there are no significant variances between planned and actual staffing. The structure remains aligned with the forecasted budget. However, discrepancies across job roles and pay scales were identified, requiring attention to ensure consistency and fairness in line with the Academies Handbook's principles of equity and transparency. • It was noted that a headteacher post is currently advertised at Millbrook, but this is expected to have minimal impact on the forecasted budget. • The central team currently comprises only the CFO and CEO, which was recognised as unsustainable given the Trust's growth ambitions and statutory obligations. Both roles are under considerable operational pressure, and the workload continues to increase. To maintain compliance with governance and staffing requirements, and to safeguard wellbeing, the committee recommended expanding the central team by appointing a **Director of Education** and a **Finance Administrator**. These roles will support strategic development, compliance, and operational efficiency. TG will draft a budget scenario to model the financial impact of these proposed appointments. **15.2 Recruitment and Retention Updates (Including Hard-to-Fill Roles)** • The committee discussed recruitment and retention challenges, particularly for hard-to-fill roles. Strategies to improve recruitment outcomes and retention were considered, ensuring compliance with safer recruitment requirements under the Academies Handbook. **15.3 Pay Progression and Affordability Within Budget** • The committee confirmed that pay progression remains affordable within the current budget, with a 4% inflationary increase already built into the forecast. This aligns with the Handbook's requirement for affordability and transparency in remuneration decisions. **15.4 Absence Trends and Financial Impact** • Absence trends were reviewed, and no significant patterns or financial impact were identified at this time. The committee noted that absence monitoring remains a key compliance requirement and will continue to be tracked through HR systems. **Actions Agreed** • TG to draft a budget scenario for proposed central team expansion. • HR to continue monitoring pay progression and absence trends. • Recruitment strategies to be reviewed for hard-to-fill roles.

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	Compliance Statement • The Finance Committee confirms that all discussions and decisions under Agenda Item 15 comply with the Academies Trust Handbook 2025 and ESFA guidance. Staffing plans, pay progression, and recruitment processes uphold principles of propriety, affordability, and transparency. Appropriate records, including TUPE schedules, pay policy approvals, recruitment evidence, and management account extracts, will be maintained to provide a clear audit trail.
16.	**ESTATES AND PREMISES** **6.1 Review Condition Survey Status and Key Maintenance Priorities** • The committee reviewed the recent condition survey, which identified several urgent works across the Trust's schools. Key issues include life-expired roofs, non-compliant fire doors, outdated lighting, and other priority repairs. The total Year 1 capital requirement for all schools is **£2,265,759**, with the most urgent needs relating to: • Roofing: £600K (ALB & WR) • Fire Safety (Doors – all schools): £140K • Gas Meter Replacement: £5K (ALB) • The committee noted that these works are essential to maintain compliance with statutory health and safety obligations and the Academies Handbook requirements for safeguarding and estate management. Immediate next steps include preparing funding applications and updating the capital strategy to prioritise compliance and risk mitigation. • For full details and the school-by-school breakdown, members were directed to the complete report available on **Governor Hub**. **Actions Agreed** • Estates team to prepare funding applications for urgent works. • Update capital strategy to prioritise compliance and health & safety risks. • Ensure documentation of decisions and funding bids is retained for audit purposes. **Compliance Statement** • The Finance Committee confirms that all discussions and decisions under Agenda Item 16.1 comply with the Academies Trust Handbook 2025 and ESFA guidance. The committee has ensured that estate management decisions prioritise statutory compliance, health and safety, and value for money. A clear audit trail will be maintained, including condition survey reports, funding applications, and capital strategy updates.
17.	**ICT AND OPERATIONAL RESOURCES** **17.1 Review ICT Strategy and Planned Refresh Cycles / Major Investments** The committee reviewed the Trust's ICT strategy, as presented in the . The strategy prioritises secure, reliable, and scalable systems to support teaching, learning, administration, and operations. Key pillars include a cloud-first approach for core services, standardised device management, and a strong cybersecurity posture aligned with DfE and GDPR requirements. Refresh cycles are set at four years for end-user devices and five years for network infrastructure, with each school's ICT RAG audit informing short- and long-term planning. The Trust aims to be fully cloud-based and non-reliant on physical file storage servers by Q2 2026. Planned investments include a device refresh in 2026 (approx. £100,000 across all schools), a cloud MIS upgrade (with migration to Arbor for applicable schools in Q1 2026),

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	and ongoing cybersecurity enhancements. All ICT investments are governed by the Trust's Finance Management Policy and comply with statutory controls and procurement regulations. **17.2 Confirm Cybersecurity Compliance and Identified Risks** The committee confirmed that the Trust is fully compliant with DfE standards for filtering and monitoring, with real-time monitoring in place. Acceptable use policies for staff and students are reviewed annually, and external audits are conducted by the Trust's IT service provider. The Trust maintains continuous monitoring and annual audits to ensure ongoing compliance and security. Key risks identified include evolving cybersecurity threats (rated amber), which are mitigated through ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The Trust's cyber security strategy includes multi-factor authentication, regular patching, secure backups, staff training, incident response planning, and a strict prohibition on paying ransomware demands. **17.3 Note Major System Changes (Finance/HR/MIS) and Readiness for Implementation** Major system changes were noted, including the completion of the finance system implementation in Q2 2025 and readiness for operation. The MIS migration planning phase is complete, with implementation scheduled for Q2 2026 for applicable schools. Training and data migration plans have been approved, and readiness for implementation is confirmed. Risks associated with MIS migration delays and finance system integration complexity are rated amber and are being managed through vendor SLAs, phased rollout, dedicated project management, and contingency planning. **Actions Agreed** • Approve ICT investments and controls, with costings and timelines as outlined in the ICT summary report. • Estates and IT teams to monitor risk register and mitigation plans. • Trustees to endorse the consolidation strategy for MIS platforms and oversee strategic investments. **Compliance Statement** The Finance Committee confirms that all discussions and decisions under Agenda Item 17 comply with the Academies Trust Handbook 2025 and ESFA guidance. All ICT investments, procurement, and system changes are governed by statutory financial controls, the Trust's Finance Management Policy, and Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Continuous monitoring, annual audits, and robust documentation will be maintained to provide assurance of compliance, transparency, and value for money.
18.	**ANY OTHER BUSINESS**
19.	**DATES AND TIMES OF NEXT MEETING** tbc
20.	**CLOSE**
Signed by Chair (electronically via Governor hub)	
Meeting Ended: 19:25	

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