MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE INTERIM EXECUTIVE BOARD OF RADDLEBARN PRIMARY SCHOOL HELD AT THE SCHOOL AT 10.00 AM ON FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2024

PRESENT	Angela Lowry	-	Headteacher
	Charlotte Stubbs	-	Chair
	Alex French		
	Catherine Griffiths		
	Mel Boden	-	SLA
	Colin Millet		
	David Bagley	-	DRB
IN ATTENDANCE	Rebbecca Wright	-	Clerk
	Alison Hicks	-	BCC
NO APOLOGIES	Justine Baker		

THE MEETING WAS DECLARED QUORATE

0021 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Members were welcomed to this meeting of the Interim Executive Board.

0022 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST/CONFIDENTIALITY/CODE OF CONDUCT

Members' attention was drawn to Paragraph 1 of the Schedule relating to Regulation 16 of the School Governance (Procedures) (England) Regulations 2013 "restrictions on persons taking part in proceedings of the Governing Body or its committees".

Members were advised that if a person had any interest in a contract, proposed contract or matter under consideration, s/he should disclose the fact and take no part in the consideration, discussion or vote in respect of the contract or matter and withdraw from the meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

0023 CURRENT FINANCIAL POSITION AND FORECAST

A presentation on the Budget Monitoring Report for 24/25 as of 5 November 2024 (Appendix 7.1) was delivered. A copy of the document was available to all.

A Member noted the report lacked the usual running commentary, which would have been preferred.

A Member drew attention to the overall spend on the report and expressed disappointment. The Chair agreed and stated it would be useful to have clarification regarding this.

A Member added that clarification on the narrative of the report was needed. It was explained that the percentage spent, was based on both committed and actual figures. Committed expenditure was driven by the contracts uploaded to system. It was explained that some of these contracts had not been updated since 2021/22.

The Chair questioned why this was and it was explained that several factors had contributed, but it was mainly due to job vacancies in the office. Staffing reports had been utilised instead.

The Chair stated that a point had been reached where it was time to stop looking backwards as the current situation did not look healthy and saying things hadn't been done was putting the school in a vulnerable financial position.

A Member asked whose role it would have been to complete these tasks. It was stated that this would be the duty of the SBM (School Business Manager). The staffing sheets were usually utilised to ensure people were being paid correctly, but that function was not being used. It was explained that a new system was in place to aid with this.

A Member doubted whether 2021/22 data should be in the report, given it was so long ago. Another Member agreed with this and questioned whether the report could be relied on as providing a true representation of the school's financial position. It was explained that the report was accurate and that many of the commitments noted were based on staffing.

A Member clarified that the school were still overspending on staffing. This was confirmed.

A Member noted that the school had committed to making savings in relation to staff, but this had not been achieved. It was explained that the staff budget was lowered to meet the schools' savings goal however, there was now a £125,000 deficit as savings had not been made.

The Chair stated that she did not find the report to be an accurate reflection of the current financial situation for the school; all Members agreed.

A Member expressed confusion about the statement that 2021/22 contracts had not being updated being followed up with assurances that the data was accurate. It was explained that the figures had been adjusted manually whilst the system had not been working.

A Member pointed out that savings within the budget data had not been achieved. It was agreed that not all savings had been achieved however, £45,000 had been saved six months in.

The Chair noted that understanding the deficit plan was more relevant to the meeting than looking at data within the Budget Monitoring Report.

A Member pointed out that if savings promised were discounted, the staffing overspend was only £7,000, clarifying further that most overspending was the result of not achieving promised savings.

A Member expressed feelings that the budget should have been set without the savings, as those inputted had been unrealistic. It was explained that all factors must be assigned an individual budget. A deficit budget cannot be set otherwise, there would be one central line stating, "deficit budget". Whenever a ratio balance was carried out, they were based only on actuals. It was noted that from a reporting perspective, it was possible to include all projected savings in a separate document.

The Chair noted that there was an agreement to form a separate financial committee, which would drive these types of discussions.

AH asked if one DRB's rationales for including savings in the budget was to avoid scrutiny from the LA. DB advised not. The Headteacher explained that the school had been working closely with DRB when formulating budgets.

The Chair appreciated this but expressed that it was of upmost importance to ensure clarity for the IEB. It was agreed that the presentation of data could be adjusted to aid with this.

A Member stated that since joining the IEB, they had seen many proposals but few actual savings, noting that 8 months through the financial year, there was still no clarity. Attention was drawn to the fact that during the last meeting, the total deficit was noted as £500,000 however, the Budget Monitoring report included a deficit of only £128,000.

A Member pointed out that the IEB had inherited the Deficit Report Plan however, the ability of the plan to fulfil its intended purpose was now uncertain. It was stated that conversations focused on clarifying a new plan would be more effective than getting stuck on the inherited position. Members agreed.

A Member noted that it was important to have progress noted moving forward, allowing for an accurate view of any overspend. It was suggested that a separate line of deficit plan achievement would be helpful. It was explained that whilst this would be useful, many variations could occur that would make this data unreliable. The example provided was that savings could be made on an unfilled vacancy; however, costs could rise, leading to the budget having to be amended. Such an instance occurred recently when the budget had allowed for a 3% pay award but the Government announced a 5.5% pay award.

A Member questioned whether it would be possible to note the inherited deficit figure from April 2024, followed by the projected deficit and the savings achieved.

A Member stated that it would be helpful to see actual figures, the recovery plan and the outcome when those two things are put together.

A Member explained that the Deficit Plan devised previously was now irrelevant because the promised savings had not been achieved.

The Chair expressed the importance of noting that financial savings had not been made and the recovery up to this point had not been achieved.

A Member asked for clarification that a deficit amount of £128,000 had been bought forward. It was explained that a high cumulative deficit was projected and budgeted high due to issues with Oracle. These issues had led to approximately a discrepancy of approximately £50,000 on the school system. This was identified when the carry forward came through and did not balance with the system. A request was sent to the LA for a detailed transaction history, to identify income on their ledger that was not on the school system. The response received was that it would be best print outs were not sent as there were legacy issues on the ledger, which usually meant that the ledgers were potentially unclear. As there was no way of confirming actual figures, the budget was devised using the figures that were available.

The Chair noted on that basis, that it was naïve to have worked for the majority of the Summer 2023/24 term, on a budget that was not based on fact. It was stated that the budget was based on facts from the school system, but the LA's ledger figures were unknown.

The Chair clarified that the deficit budget was based on internal systems with no knowledge of what was going on in the LA. This was confirmed.

A Member stressed the importance of the IEB feeling assured that they were receiving an accurate report of the school's financial situation.

The Chair stated it was of upmost importance that the focus of the IEB was the current financial position of the school and how to move forward, especially as the IEB had limited time left in the school. It was re-emphasised that the current Deficit Recovery Plan did not seem to be working. Moving forward, clear papers needed to be produced for the IEB, ensuring that everyone could be held accountable, and a revised, robust Deficit Plan implemented.

0024 **RADDLEBARN DEFICIT RECOVERY PLAN**

The Chair talked through the Deficit Recovery Plan data. Members agreed to discuss the Plan as a whole, rather than dissect line-by-line, as it had been established earlier that the Plan was ineffective.

A Member asked if the school had committed to repaying the deficit in one financial year and what impact that would have on the school. It was explained that the LA looked at school's abilities to balance their first-year budget and how deficit could be repaid beyond this. Members acknowledged the importance of timescales in relation to the Deficit Recovery Plan.

A Member questioned whether the school could stipulate a two/three-year timescale for deficit repayment. It was stated that there were some things that could not be done from a Financial Compliance point of view. A loan would be given

to deficit schools upon transition to Chequebook School and there could be a discussion to be had about what that would look like.

A Member stated that the plan seemed non-viable, unrealistic and overambitious. Concern was expressed that action did not seem to have been taken by the Headteacher at the point that she was alerted to the deficit. It was noted that there had not been a Business Manager in place at the school, but questions were raised as to why there was no contingency plan, as outlined in the schools' financial regulations. Attention was drawn to the 90% costs spent on staffing, which was noted as being 10% above the national average. The Member questioned how this was being addressed. The Headteacher explained that actions had been taken to try and resolve the deficit however, the outcomes had not been as effective as desired. Plans that had been made to bring regular income to the school were no longer viable. With regards to staffing, restructuring plans had been and remained underway.

The Chair stated that trying and hopes were not enough. There was a strong possibility that cuts would have to be made that would impact the standard of education, which was unfortunate, but the hard consequence of being a deficit school. Everyone needed to be held accountable for making savings.

A Member drew attention to the teacher's pay award and noted that the school had lost money on this. The impact of the Government announced National Insurance increase was also noted. Members agreed however, the Chair stated that as the impact would be evident during the next financial year, it could not be budgeted for and should not be focused on yet.

The Headteacher expressed that she would like some support in devising and implementing a re-structuring plan. The Chair agreed that this needed to be carried out and agreed to an internal financial meeting.

ACTION: Headteacher / Chair

The Chair and SLA discussed the holding of a meeting to further discuss the deficit. It was agreed that a revised Financial Recovery Plan would be drafted prior to this meeting, wherein it would be presented to Members.

ACTION: Chair / SLA

0025 **RADDLEBARN BCC COMPLIANCE RETURN – AUTUMN 2024**

The Chair explained that the school had been late sending the Compliance Return to the LA, partly due to challenges getting the out-term report. This needed to be signed off and moved forward.

It was noted that DRB had received an e-mail chasing the Compliance Return, who had explained that the matter would be being discussed during the meeting. The Chair requested that the e-mail be forwarded to her, explaining that she would follow up on this.

ACTION: Chair

0026 **PROVISION OF CHEQUEBOOK TRANSITION SUPPORT – NOVEMBER 2024 – MARCH 2025**

David talked through a presentation on the Provision of Chequebook Transition Support.

Members were informed that deficit schools would be transferring from May 2025 forward and that in-year deficits had not been taken into account by the LA. If a school transferred in April 2025, they could end up going months with a fraction of their budget, meaning schools could find themselves with significant cash flow issues even if they were not in deficit. Loans would be available but there was not much clarity surrounding this.

DRB had put together a cashflow template which they would be sending to the LA and questioning whether it would be acceptable.

The change of HR/payroll was covered, with Members informed that a tender had been put together by DRB for HR/payroll transaction, which would be shared with schools. This ticked all required boxes meaning that schools could send the tender out when looking for quotations. It was noted that there was a difference for Raddlebarn as a maintained school. The pensions administration would still need to be done for the LA, which needed to be considered when tendering for HR/Payroll. It was clarified that the school could not source HR/payroll until they had made the transition to Chequebook.

The Chair asked if there was any guidance on this from Birmingham City Council. It was explained that weekly drop-in sessions were being held. Meetings regarding transferring mid-year were recommended, due to the potential challenges this could cause to year-end. The biggest challenge would likely be loan administration.

A Member acknowledged that this would be difficult for Birmingham City Council, as well as for schools, as it was a new process for them, too.

A Member asked if consortium within the school regarding HR/payroll had been discussed. This was explained as being all in conversation currently. The question had been asked as to whether there would be discounts for consortiums as a group.

A Member drew attention to the LA's recommendation that schools look at the DfE's guide for HR/Payroll. Registration for receipt of the guide was open until 6 December 2024, with no commitment required from the school. All providers denoted in the guide would have been vetted. The Headteacher acknowledged the usefulness of this and confirmed that she would sign up to receive the guide.

ACTION: Headteacher

0027 **RADDLEBARN AUDIT ACTION PLAN**

The Headteacher provided an update on Raddlebarn's Audit Action Plan, explaining that this had been formulated with SLA input.

Members were informed that the audit had classified Raddlebarn as a medium risk school. Many of the areas needing improvement were common, appearing in many schools. It was explained that consistency had been an issue due to staff absences/changes in recent years. Members discussed how consistency could be ensured.

A Member noted the importance of having a monitoring process in place to ensure actions within the plan could be achieved.

A Member expressed concern that there were 21 recommendations on the financial audit, stating that this could mean poor financial management. The Headteacher explained that there had been a run of issues with SBMs within the school. A temporary Business Manager was employed after the resigning of the initial employee however, had also chosen to resign. A new SBM was employed however was currently on long-term sick leave. The Headteacher stated that she had consulted with both the IEB and DRB to aid with this as she was not a trained SBM. The SLA was in place and the Headteacher expressed that this had been highly productive. Further reassurance was provided that the audit had not found Raddlebarn to be a high-risk school.

The SLA emphasised that having no SBM had impacted the school greatly leaving the receptionist attempting to run the office and fulfil the SBM role. The Headteacher was also attempting to fill this role, when possible, but this was difficult to balance. The SLA assured Members that progress had been made but it would be a timely process. If the IEB were agreeable, the SLA suggested increasing visits to once weekly, rather than fortnightly. Understanding was expressed that 7 high, 10 medium and 4 low actions seemed problematic on paper, but Members were assured that all efforts were being focused on putting policies, procedures and contingencies in place to ensure improvement.

It was noted that if the school had been deemed high risk, a return audit within 12 months would have been arranged, and this had not happened.

A Member expressed understanding of the current situation but stated they had never known a school to receive 21 recommendations. Several Members expressed that they had experienced this, and did not deem this number to be of severe concern. It was added that schools are not provided with a list of what they should be doing and sometimes, it was only upon completion of an audit that these things were bought to light.

The Chair questioned whether there was any news on when the SBM would be returning to work. The Headteacher confirmed that there was no known return date.

A Member requested clarification on point 13 of the plan. It was explained that the school had to use DRB as an external provider as there was no one within school who could fulfil this role.

A Member requested clarification on Stan's Café. The Headteacher stated that they are an external provider who rented the Oak Building. Utilities were paid to the school, coming to approximately £3,000.

0028 **SLA WITH DRB**

[DAVID BAGLEY LEFT THE MEETING AT THIS POINT]

Members discussed the roles of DRB and SLA, as external organisations.

Members were informed that the SLA Strategic Finance Manager came into the school to support with the financial audit as well as policies and procedures. The current arrangement for visits had increased to three per month from the original one every fortnight. There was a possibility that visits could increase to one per week from April 2025. A fee for this had not yet been agreed. The SLA Strategic Finance Manager agreed to put a proposal forward for this.

ACTION: SLA

A Member suggested the possibility of re-negotiating SLA in April 2025, reducing DRB's input. It was noted that there were some crossovers in the roles of SLA and DRB.

It was clarified that the current SLA agreement ran from September 2024 – March 2025 and was a stand-alone contract. The usual procedure was that contracts aligned with the school's financial year.

A Member questioned whether the IEB would look at tendering for this agreement, and the Chair confirmed.

A Member asked how long DRB had worked with the school. The Headteacher confirmed that the partnership had begun in 2018.

A Member questioned what DRB do during their visits to the school. The Headteacher confirmed that DRB are involved with implementing a simplified loader.

A Member noted the cost of DRB, describing it as expensive when looking at the amount of hours the school were getting, with the total coming to £70 per hour excluding VAT. The Chair stated that this seemed to be in-line with market value.

Several Members expressed support for the suggestion of tendering for this agreement.

A Member stated that it would be effective to seek organisations specialising in school finance as opposed to global finance. The Chair stressed the importance of the presence and stability of this type of service for the school and expressed that it was needed urgently.

A Member suggested a cost breakdown of the DRB services being paid for to identify if there were any services that were not needed and could be taken out.

The Chair asked Members if they were happy for her to go back and discuss this with DRB. Members clarified that they wanted assurance that the school were in a stable agreement.

ACTION: Chair

A Member asked if the IEB would look at tendering in the future. The Chair confirmed that this would happen at the appropriate time.

0029 **TEACHING STAFF PROJECTION**

Members attention was drawn to the data regarding the Teaching Staff Projection (Appendix 9.1).

A Member agreed that staff deployment was an area that needed to be reviewed. The Chair stated that a separate meeting between herself and the Headteacher would be necessary for the discussions.

The Chair suggested that it could be productive for an IEB Member to meet with the Headteacher, with the aim of identifying natural wastage and/or restructuring options.

A Member agreed but further added that conversations around staff projections should also be had with DRB.

The Chair noted that discussions with DRB would be in greater detail. Members were asked if they deemed it appropriate for recommendations to be made in terms of staff savings, which the school are then tasked with implementing. The board agreed.

The Chair clarified that step one would be discussions with DRB, and step two would be the staff projection. The board were agreeable to this.

Members were asked if they were happy for the Chair to pick the matter up with the Headteacher and her team. All were agreeable.

ACTION: Headteacher / Chair

0030 **SUPPORT STAFF PROJECTION**

It was agreed that discussions regarding support staff projections would be addressed in the meeting between the Headteacher and the Chair, detailed in the above item.

ACTION: Headteacher / Chair

0031 **ESTABLISH A REGULAR MEETING OF THE IEB**

Members agreed to discuss the regular meeting of the IEB at the end of the meeting.

0032 **SCHEDULE OF CONTRACTS**

Members agreed to defer this item to a future meeting, where the Chair requested a discussion about which contracts were paid for via Pupil Premium funding.

0033 **RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT OFFER VIA DFE**

Members discussed the school's eligibility for a Resource Management offer from the DfE, due to its financial position.

A Member noted that a Resource Manager may do no more than the IEB are currently. The Chair pointed out that the Resource Manger could have been recommended due to compliance.

A Member acknowledged that a Resource Manager would be an avenue of support for the school however, another Member questioned whether it would result in too many voices.

A Member noted that an external voice could be helpful in providing a new perspective.

The Chair ultimately agreed that the possibility of a Resource Manager should not be ruled out but that the IEB should focus on completing all internal exercises before re-visiting and making a decision.

The Chair drew attention to the school log-in section of the DfE website, explaining that this offered access to a wider range of information and resources. **The Headteacher was asked if it would be possible for the IEB to be granted access to this section of the website, allowing them to access relevant information when needed.** The Headteacher agreed to look into this.

ACTION: Headteacher

0034 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

A member informed the board that the Birmingham Audit Team had commenced SEN themed audits during the current half-term. An e-mail containing information about this will be sent to the Chair and Headteacher.

ACTION: DRB

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Clerk requested Governors to identify any agenda items for the meeting on 3 December 2024 and the following were agreed:

- Presentation of the Revised Financial Recovery Plan
- Audit Action Plan Update

0035 **RESOLVED:** That the future meetings of the IEB be held on the following dates:

- 18 November 2024
- 3 December 2024
- 16 December 2024

The meeting closed at 12: 00 pm.

Signed… Alexander French (Nov 4, 2025 07:53:49 GMT) ……

(Chair of Interim Executive Body)

Date 16 December 2024

Raddlebarn IEB 081124 mins

Final Audit Report 2025-11-04

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