

Trustees Board Minutes

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| Meeting | Trustees Board | Date | Tuesday 8 March 2022 |
| Location | Executive Boardroom, Broadstairs College | Time | 2.03pm |
| Membership | Tammy Mitchell (CEO), Jonathan Clarke (Chair), Graham Razey (GR), Peter Troke (PT) attended via Teams, Bernadette Lax (BL), Peter Goldsack (PG), <i>Chris Argent (CA)</i> , Michael Ashley (MA), Paul Wilson (PW): Suzy Hollett (SH) attended via Teams from 2.20pm | | |
| In Attendance | Chris Legg, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Sharon Hollingsworth, Director of Governance (DG) Francesca Lashmar (FL) – Executive Support Officer | | |

**Italics denotes absence*

| | ITEM | COMMENTS | ACTION |
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| 1 | Welcome and apologies for absence | The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. CA was not able to attend and sent apologies. SH was joining the meeting late as agreed. | |
| 2 | Declarations of Interest | There were no additional declarations to the meeting other than those declared as standing items. | |
| 3 | Minutes of the meeting held 7 December 2021, including any confidential minutes | The minutes from the meeting held on 7 December 2021 had been circulated to Trustees prior to the meeting. The minutes and confidential minutes were reviewed and approved as an accurate record. The signing of the minutes will be undertaken by the Chair following the meeting. APPROVED – Minutes from the meeting held 7th December 2021 | |

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| 4 | Matters arising not covered by this agenda | There were no matters arising. | |
| 5 | Chairs Communication | <p>The Chair noted that the last few years had been an exceptional and the Trust is in a very good place. The profound effect on staff and students as a result of the pandemic was acknowledged.</p> <p>NOTED: The Chairs Communication</p> | |
| 6 | CEO Mid-Year Report to include the Health and Wellbeing Report | <p>The CEO presented the Mid-Year report.</p> <p>Pupil numbers have been a vulnerability in the past. Bysing Wood Primary numbers have been rising in year which will help with the financial position and they have received more parental first choices. Briary Primary have also more parental preferences this year but are still vulnerable. Holywell and Queenborough both full for September. The CEO noted that Palm Bay, the new school joining the Trust, had the highest parental preferences in Kent; a hugely popular, over-subscribed school.</p> <p>The CEO noted a small number of pupil exclusions within the Trust; behaviour is challenging for a small number across all schools – this is reflected across the county. The CEO drew the Trustees' attention to one extreme case, with a pupil displaying significant levels of aggression but is not excluded at this time as it would be detrimental to the child. The Trust is working with KCC on alternative options for the small number of students who are excluded. This is a challenge due to the lack of therapeutic care places in Kent. The volume of children requiring CAMHS or mental health support has grown. In addition, the rise in Covid cases in staff has been challenging for our small schools in the Trust, requiring senior leaders to cover classes. Network meeting attendances have been good, nevertheless, and these have included a focus on health, wellbeing and safeguarding.</p> <p>The CEO highlighted the positive outcomes for school improvement and the focus on reading to help prepare the school for Ofsted. The CEO referred the Trustees to Appendix 1 Queenborough Ofsted report and asked them to note the exceptional content of report and comments made on the quality of the school. The self-evaluation remains the same and the</p> | |

CEO believes they are still outstanding; the report does not say it is not. The inspection judgement will be updated.

The Trust self-review is ongoing; we are working with other Trusts and identifying best practice to learn from. We are being asked to advise and support after sharing our model, which is encouraging.

Review of Strategic plan; good strides towards targets – a tribute to Heads commitment to school improvement despite the challenges with staffing cover.

Management information system changes will enable consistent presentation of data – not Trust driven.

Attendance still a challenge – the gap between disadvantaged and all remains a concern. It is not surprising that Holywell attendance is higher – the demographic is less disadvantaged. Attendance levels match areas of deprivation/disadvantage. There is a political agenda to raise the importance of attendance.

Personal development is a focus for this year.

Leadership/Management work was shared in November and we continue to have positive outcomes.

The CEO highlighted the recruitment of eight new governors onto local boards. It is good for middle and senior leaders to experience governance and adds to the diversity of boards.

Trust growth strategy

The CEO continues to work with schools on conversion and noted a White Paper is due to be released soon by mid-May. It will have clear multi academy trusts direction. Not all church schools will be able to convert due to historical land registry and convenance issues. By 2030 all schools are to convert to an academy. Not many have refused. This is a great opportunity to grow as a Trust and welcome more schools. Rapid growth, however, is not an option – steady growth is recommended by the Regional Schools Commissioner.

There was discussion around those schools remaining in standalone academies which are financially stable. They have indicated that EKC Group Trust was their preferred option should they choose to convert but they have not decided to do that and we have not agreed to take them.

The Chair noted that it was key to attract the right schools to convert. Targeted marketing and getting the balance right will be a challenge. The CEO noted that working with schools under a certain size will not be part of our strategy as they are not financially viable. There will be potential for a Trust with a model dedicated to supporting small schools.

The Chair asked about the Trust taking schools which may not fit. The CEO responded that the Regional Schools Commissioner had mentioned sponsorship of failing schools but the CEO is not aware of any in the vicinity. It was noted that protecting the profile of new entrants is important as well as saying 'no' and that getting out a strong message is important. The CEO noted that we have said 'no' before.

A Trustee asked if the Arbor system was going to take progress and attainment data. The CEO confirmed that this was to be for pupil data only, attendance, behaviour, attainment, progress and other soft data. It is a national system which has grown in competition with Capita but is more intuitive and easy for classroom practitioners to use. It is recommended by East Stour. Schools made their decision from a range of systems presented to them. It is also cheaper.

It was noted that, although it is encouraging to hear parental preferences are higher but looking at the Trust finances we are £85,000 under where we would be if the schools were full. The budget looks healthy due to one off payments. It was asked what the Trust is doing about the schools which are under numbers.

The CEO responded that Bysing Wood is a two full form entry school so has potential for healthy growth, the figure is based on 210 children which we do not need as we are not staffing for that. We will have challenges as the school is growing – 29 children have joined

in year due to local housing. Long term Bysing Wood will be financially viable; the challenge is managing the finances whilst it grows. A strategy is in place but it will not be easy.

Briary Primary has a reduced number in KS 1 managed by reducing teacher numbers. We could be 60 children with two teachers, we are keeping classes under 30 until building work is completed.

Health & wellbeing report:

The CEO noted we are good at taking care of our people. The parent, pupil and staff surveys will be available at the next meeting.

A question was asked around working from home (WFH) and flexible working and what the position is around this legal entitlement to apply. The CEO responded that WFH was temporarily permitted during Covid, where only vulnerable or key worker children were in. When the children came back, the staff, including office and support staff, came back. At the moment no one is working from home. A piece of work is being carried out around flexible working (maternity, etc) which fits the business to assist with future recruitment. A high number of part time teachers means a lack of continuity for the children and needs careful structuring. Working from home PPA time can also be unhelpful as it reduces the opportunity for collaboration. It is a balance, finding a model which enables retention and support of staff, but is not detrimental to learning. It was noted policies should apply to all staff rather than just office or support staff.

The CEO responded to a question about staff turnover that the Trust had lost a few support staff (Teaching Assistants) who have gone to work in supermarkets due to pay or retirement.

There was a question about the Bysing Wood Primary Leave of Absence policy. The CEO explained that this is a time off in lieu policy for staff who can apply to have leave during term time – this probably happens unofficially in other schools – for example, to attend their child’s sports day or first day at school.

It was noted that EKC Group states it as a right as part of our wellbeing policy and that ad hoc arrangements lead to unfairness.

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| | | <p>The Chair asked if there is a plan to join policies up to ensure a consistent approach. The CEO has put it onto the Head Teacher agenda to share best practice so schools can adopt best practice by choice rather than being directed by the Trust.</p> <p>The Chair noted the uptake on people going to the portal. The CEO noted the challenge is to keep numbers up but that will take time and ownership by schools to keep the portals updated.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTED: CEO Mid-Year and Health and Wellbeing Reports</p> | |
| 7 | Trust Reserves Policy | <p>The CFO presented the policy, highlighting the section on the development of the MAT's reserves policy. The CFO explained the approach taken to decide the amount of reserve required to be put in place which is directly in line with the scale of the school. There is currently £800,000 in reserves and, by the end of coming financial year we should still be around this level.</p> <p>It was asked who will take the decisions about when reserves need to be spent. The CEO responded that these are the central reserves that do not include the roll over from the school; a proportion of the overall reserve which acts as an emergency fund, looked after by the Trust. No school should go under the £25,000 per form entry. Anything over that is for the school to spend. It will take some schools a while to get to that point. It is not the intention of the Trust to interfere in daily expenditure. The reserve money is still the property of the school, but we would advise them not to go under that figure. The CFO added that, broadly when we report, we are already in the position to have met that, just not at individual school level. One school would not bail out another. We would not insist on that as a Trust, but schools have signed up to look after each other.</p> <p>It was noted that this approach is designed for any number of schools.</p> <p>The CEO explained the next steps for the policy is that it will be shared with stakeholders. The Policy had been scrutinised by the Trust Finance Committee and it has been out to</p> | |

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| | | <p>Head Teachers for consultation and will be sent round to local governing bodies. Until such time a school has the need to dip in, it keeps the whole organisation solvent. Trustees agreed that it was a good piece of work.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RESOLVED: Trust Reserves Policy</p> | |
| 8 | Trust Leadership Development Plan 2021-2022 Mid-Year Review | <p>The CEO presented the review.</p> <p>A question was asked around the 76 and 71 dials. The CEO responded that this was a question around how much of the training you would use in your job. If the training is being used more than every other day, that is a positive. The dial is a learning and development toolkit developed nationally to measure impact of training and whether it is a valuable use of your time.</p> <p>The sorts of evaluation questions asked following training were discussed. Huge range of relative benefit – anything less than 50%. Only if we compare it internally with last year – the fact they turn up and complete evaluation is broadly positive.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTED: Trust Leadership Development Plan 2021-2022 Mid-Year Review</p> | |
| 9 | Director of Governance Report | <p>The DG presented the report, highlighting the following items:</p> <p><u>Trust and Committee Membership, Terms of Office</u> Member, Patrick Hollis stepped down from his role in December. There is one Trustee vacancy on the Trust board. Replacement's for both positions are being considered by the Members.</p> <p>BL joined GR on the panel to undertake the mid-year CEO review. DG recommended that BL be invited to continue in this role if Trustees agreed and BL is willing to do so.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AGREED: BL to serve on the CEO Review Panel alongside GR</p> <p><u>Calendar of Trust Board and Committee Meeting Dates 2022-23</u></p> | |

The draft calendar of meeting dates was presented for information and agreement. The calendar was worked up in line with the Trust cycle of business. Any known issues with attendance to be raised with DG.

AGREED: The Trust Calendar of Meeting dates 2022-23

Draft Terms of Reference for Local Governing Body

Since the last meeting, it had been flagged to the DoG that Local Boards do not have up to date Terms of Reference (ToR). Research has been undertaken to work up the presented ToR. Alan Horton, Chair of Briary Primary School and Holywell Primary School had reviewed the ToR and provided some feedback. A remote working group is proposed to look deeper at the ToR with any changes being tracked in the document ahead of it being presented for Trustee approval at the next meeting. Trustees were invited to feedback.

It was generally agreed that the ToR should be in line with Scheme of Delegation – maybe a short working group would negate potential challenges for the local governing boards. The CEO noted it would be nice to invite the two new Chairs to the working group, also. It was noted that having everything put together in one document which is consistent across the Trust was helpful. The DoG will liaise with the Chair of each local governing body to arrange a meeting to review the document and/or invite feedback.

A question was asked about new appointments to the Board asking whether suggestions for new Trustees is required. The CEO explained that there are a few people being considered but it might be helpful to discuss outside the meeting.

AGREED: The DoG to form a ToR working group and bring the resulting document to the next meeting, for approval.

Schools Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool 2022 (SRMSAT)

The presented SRMSAT had been completed by the DoG and CFO, there were no reported issues. The Trustees were comfortable with the Return and its submission to the ESFA.

Celebrating Trustees and Governors for National Volunteers Week

The DoG highlighted an upcoming feature in the next Trust newsletter; 'Meet the Trustees' and proposed to take a photo of Trustees to include in the feature with a few words.

AGREED: Photograph to be taken following the meeting.

DoG

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| 10 | Management Accounts | <p>The CFO presented the management accounts. These show the Trust is performing well in terms of income due to increased high needs and nursery income plus catch up funding in response to Covid. This has mainly been spent on staffing. Non-pay is running behind budget profile. Overall, the Trust is in reasonable shape. We have just completed Q2 forecast which is a similar forecasted position to Q1 and is broadly in line with budget.</p> <p><i>Part of this item is considered confidential and will form confidential minutes Part A</i></p> <p>The CFO stated that the final year-end position is expected to be positive with a strong cash position; £1.25 million in bank. Pay cost as a percentage of income forecast is circa 80% for the end of the year. We need to ensure staffing remains below this; we do not have a huge top slice as other Trusts do which enables a greater proportion of income on staffing. The CEO noted that we were coming out high compared with other Trusts which charge more at centre and, therefore, get to spend less on pay costs.</p> <p>It was asked if additional tutoring in schools has an impact. The CFO advised that the Trust has spent £100k on extra tuition which will have an impact.</p> <p>The CFO noted that high needs provision increases pay costs as it gets spent exclusively on people. The CEO added that all 4 schools have above average EHCP/high needs compared with other Trusts. The ESFA do not take this into consideration. If you are able to spend a greater proportion of your income on people and are still viable, that is a positive. If our bottom line is healthy, it is used as a measure of success. They use high salary costs as a reason not to convert.</p> <p>The CFO confirmed the next set of management accounts will contain the Q2 forecast.</p> <p>NOTED: The Management Accounts</p> | |
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| 11 | Feedback from Committee Meetings | NOTED: The minutes from the Finance Committee meeting held 26 January 2022. | |
| 12 | Any other business | No items raised. | |
| 13 | Matters considered confidential | Part of item 10 was considered confidential and will form confidential minutes Part A | |
| 14 | Date and time of next meeting | 13 July 2022 at 2pm | |

There being no further business the meeting closed at 3.36pm



Signed:

Print: Jonathan Clarke

Dated: 13 July 2022