

Uttoxeter Learning Trust (ULT)

Minutes of the Meeting of the Members' held in a virtual setting on Wednesday 13 July, 2022 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:

Prof. Barnes (Member)
Mr. Slater (Member – Chair of Trust Board)
Mr. Welton (Assistant Director LDBE)
Dr. Clark (CEO)
Mr. Storer (CFO)
Mr. Davies (Clerk to Trustees)

1 Welcome:

All attendees were welcomed to tonight's meeting by the Chair. As not everybody in the meeting was known to each other, a moment was taken for individuals to introduce themselves and the role they were carrying out within tonight's governance forum. Documentation had been circulated in advance of the meeting along with a clear and purposeful agenda.

The meeting was quorate.

2 Apologies:

There were no apologies on this occasion.

3 Declarations of Interest:

Mr. Storer declared the following interest in relation to items that were likely to be discussed at tonight's meeting:

- ULT Central Team.

Prof. Barnes and Mr. Welton also made declarations linked to their professional roles – Prof. Barnes with her role as a Member within the Staffordshire University Academies Trust (SUAT) and Mr. Welton in terms of the collaboration work he carries out with the ULT as part of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Lichfield Diocese. Attendees noted all of these stated declarations.

4 Minutes of the Previous Meeting:

Members were asked to formally ratify the Minutes from two meetings. The first set of minutes related to the Members' meeting that taken place on 07.12.21 and the second set of minutes related to the AGM which was held on 28.04.22.

Resolved: That both sets of minutes be ratified with immediate effect.

The Chair will now need to add her electronic signature to both sets of minutes with copies of these signed minutes held by the ULT for reference and audit purposes.

Resolved: That the Clerk facilitate this process, liaising with the Chair as needed.

As a general point of context for tonight's meeting, it was reported that the ULT is looking to expand and grow to align with the expectations as set out in the Schools White Paper. It was reported that there are currently nine schools within the ULT framework with approximately 2700 students currently benefitting from the educational experience that is on offer.

5 Matters Arising:

The CEO took the opportunity to update Members on some key matters arising from the shared minutes. The following overarching points were noted:

07.12.21

1.1 – Redundancy Scheme

The CEO confirmed that a revised offer in relation to redundancy benefits was shared with colleagues employed before January 2020. Following the issue of this revised offer, the CEO was pleased to confirm that agreement has been reached with all staff which has avoided the need to invite colleagues to individual meetings. Everybody present at tonight's meeting felt this was a really positive outcome for the ULT given the nature of the prolonged staff consultation that has taken place. It was also reported that the consultation with The Richard Clarke First School began on 06.07.22 with updates to be shared in due course.

1.2 – Growth of the ULT

It was reported that the growth and expansion of the Trust is progressing well. There are currently nine schools in the ULT structure with the latest school (Bramshall Meadows First School) set to open its doors to local families from September.

In terms of future expansion, the leadership of the ULT is fully engaged with a number of schools in Stone who may in time become part of the ULT structure. Having delivered an initial presentation to eight schools in February, 2022 additional presentations have since been delivered to individual schools and their LGBs. Members look forward to hearing how the ULT gets on with these growth-focused activities.

There was a question at this point around the Regional Schools Commissioner and the extent to which they have been involved in any discussions around possible growth/expansion.

It was confirmed that a strategy focused meeting was held with this key stakeholder in March 2022 where support for the ULT's future growth plans was secured.

1.3 – Central Team and Impact of Trust

Attention was drawn to the 'Impact of the ULT' document that had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The Chair of the Trust Board confirmed that the supplied narrative could easily have been extended but he wanted to ensure that Members could quickly and easily pull out the key impacts that the ULT has delivered to its communities over the course of the last 12 months. There have been many notable successes which is testament to the work of all key stakeholders who want to see the ULT go from strength to strength in the months and years ahead. Members welcomed the shared narrative.

Members were also informed that the Trust Board has requested similar impact statements from Governing Boards at a local level. This is an activity that will be carried out on an annual basis as it is crucial the ULT (at whatever level of the structure) can demonstrate impact on a sustained basis.

It was also reported that significant strides have been made around streamlining governance practice. Governor Hub is now used to facilitate Trustee meetings and also ensure a more consistent approach is being taken at a local level.

Members welcomed all of these developments that were shared. The Chair focused for a few moments on the SIAMs inspection and what additional actions are being taken around SIAMS-Readiness in ULT schools given the disruption to education from the pandemic.

The CEO confirmed that whether it is an Ofsted or SIAMS inspection, the daily practice of schools should be at a given level that there should be no surprises with any form of external validation. That said, Members were reassured that the ULT has put in place various checks and balances in this area including having a Trustee with a specific area of strategic responsibility around Christian Distinctiveness. Steps have been taken to include the Christian ethos in appraisal targets and a Headteacher within the ULT has been instrumental in offering SIAMS update training for Governors at a local level. The vision of the ULT also has a strong Christian focus and an SLA with the Diocese also ensures the necessary professional development around SIAMS is being secured. Overall, it was felt that the Covid experience has actually brought the ULT community much closer together. This experience over the last two years has provided an excellent backdrop for collaboration, understanding and the sharing of Christian values between students, parents and staff across the ULT community – long may this continue.

There was some discussion around the flexibility of the staffing resource across the ULT with the extent to which individuals can be redeployed across schools if a particular risk needs to be mitigated. The CEO confirmed a number of examples within school SLTs where this flex has already been applied but acknowledged there is always more that can be done in this area. Whilst the disruption of the pandemic on academic learning is clear with SLTs wanting to maintain a consistent and stable workforce in the short-term, initiatives such as encouraging staff to engage on common points of interest across the Trust; developing the ULT's own teaching college in line with future expansion and setting up secondment/work shadowing/coaching opportunities should all facilitate the empowerment of the existing workforce where talent is given every chance to flourish. For the CEO, this will be a key priority in the months/years ahead.

In terms of the development of the Central Team, Members were given the latest update as to how additional capacity has been secured this year. Whilst all proposed new roles are yet to be filled, it was clear to Members how Trustees will support the growth of the ULT using a stepped approach which will include increasing the overall top slice from January 2023. It was also confirmed that in time the ULT will be looking to appoint to other roles to align with the intended expansion – for example, Director of School Improvement and Chief Operating Officer. Members were also pleased to hear that the Trustees are keeping this mode of expansion under regular review to ensure the necessary economies of scale can be secured and the ULT can also benefit from analysing other MAT structures to glean any best practice.

1.4 – Ryecroft CE Middle School

The CEO confirmed that there have been a number of issues that have needed to be resolved at Ryecroft over the course of the last 12 months. These changes have included a restructure of the SLT, resolving a number of premises-related issues and progressing the sole use of the IT suite supported by an update to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The CEO confirmed she is happy where the ULT has got to on each of these issues.

28.04.22

2.1 – Recruitment of Trustees and Members

Members were informed that whilst a number of Trustees have stepped down from their roles over the course of the last 12 months, two new Trustees have been appointed in the form of Mr. Haswell and Mr. Harper. It was confirmed that both individuals possess specific skills sets that will benefit the ULT over time and both Mr. Haswell and Mr. Harper are now actively contributing to Trustee meetings.

Looking forward, it was confirmed that at least one more Trustee is required. It was also acknowledged that new Members need to be appointed. Attendees at the meeting shared possible contacts that they would look to follow up outside of tonight's meeting to establish whether there is any initial interest. From this point and if positive soundings are received, the necessary pen portraits can then be secured.

Resolved: That attendees follow up on their contacts, confirming whether anybody is interested in these vacant posts.

6 Safeguarding Update:

The CEO confirmed that Safeguarding continues to be strengthened across the ULT. Recent initiatives have included a Trust wide review of HR files and the Single Central Record (SCR); Chairs have received a CPD input around Safer Recruitment; LA reviews of Safeguarding were completed and all schools have completed the S157 Safeguarding audit online tool; an external review of Safeguarding has taken place at one of the ULT schools and all pupils enrolled from Ukraine are receiving school-based support via the Minority Ethnic Achievement Scheme (MEAS). Members welcomed this update.

7 Minutes from Trust Meetings:

It was confirmed that Minutes of the Education Committee; Minutes of the Finance and Audit Committee and Minutes of the Trust Board are available online for Members to consider at their leisure. The following sets of minutes were listed on tonight's agenda:

Type	Date
Education	23.11.21 + 01.02.22 + 14.03.22 + 27.04.22
Finance and Audit	06.10.21 + 01.12.21 + 08.02.22 + 24.03.22 + 11.05.22
Trust Board	13.10.21 + 08.12.21 + 10.02.22 + 28.03.22 + 17.05.22

Members noted this information.

8 CEO Report:

The CEO was asked to comment on any key headlines from her CEO Report that had been shared in advance of the meeting. The following key points were noted:

1.1

The Report outlined those schools that are preparing for or have recently been subject to an Ofsted inspection. Overall, the judgements have been extremely positive with some really positive narrative in the accompanying reports. Members congratulated everybody that has been involved in securing these successful outcomes. The CEO added what additional support is being provided around The Quality of Education as other schools across the ULT prepare for a likely inspection.

1.2

The CFO provided a brief narrative around CIF Bids including those bids that have been successful, those bids that are being appealed and those bids that are being considered for resubmission in 2023. Members were informed that the process around CIF Bids and loan applications has been tightened at a Trust level to ensure the necessary due diligence is applied by Trustees before any proposed project is given the green light. This action is particularly important given the cost-of-living crisis and the heightened scrutiny that needs to be taken when considering school budgets and revenue reserves.

1.3

Looking specifically at budgets, the CFO confirmed that the 3 Year Budget Forecast Returns have been completed for the ULT and individual schools. Members were given an indication of some of the financial drivers that have been used in the budget setting process with any reported figures only representing a point in time given the possible expansion of the Trust and additional income coming into the Budget that was not part of the original forecast. The appointment of a full-time CFO role should enable further due diligence to be applied in this area.

1.4

Some time was spent looking at the applications for places for the new School and also projected pupil projections for the coming years. Members were reassured that the Trust leadership is very conscious of the adverse impact of falling pupil numbers with an additional level of scrutiny to be applied to this area from September.

Overall, Members welcomed the level of detail and strategic insight provided by the CEO. It is clear the Trust has got through a significant amount of work in recent months and everybody should be congratulated for their efforts.

9 Finance Update:

Aside from the budgetary update linked to the CEO Report, the following updates were noted:

- The rationale behind increasing the top slice from 3% to 4% from January 2023 was shared with members.
- The CFO explained how the ULT will engage with the ESFA where deficit budgets are being forecast in individual budgets. This rationale was shared with Members.
- The engagement that the CEO and CFO have had with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors over their budgets was shared. Trustees have also met on another occasion to consider budgetary implications in relation to a successful CIF Bid. This should give Members some reassurance as to the on-going levels of financial scrutiny that are applied.
- The levels of reserve that the ULT and individual schools hold were shared with Members along with a rationale surrounding any future investment plans.
- It was confirmed that Trustees have accepted the LA recommendation in relation to the indexation of the Teachers' Pension Scheme. All actions that need to have been taken around this issue are now complete.

Resolved: That the CFO be thanked for his update and the on-going diligence that is applied around the academy finances.

10 Risk Register:

The CEO confirmed that the Risk Register is a live document that is reviewed at every Trustee meeting. Various updates around areas of risk and the associated mitigation have been added to the document since the last meeting which Trustees were invited to consider at their leisure. Members were also informed that there will be an expectation from September that schools keep Registers up to date at a local level with challenge linked to areas of risk to be captured in the minutes of meetings. The CEO also alluded to a discussion at the last Trust Board where the alignment between the concept of time and risk status had been discussed – again a useful strategic-based discussion.

Members had no specific questions with the Register and were happy with the level of due diligence applied in this area.

11 Trustee Appointments:

The appointment of Trustees has already been referenced in these minutes.

12 Any Other Business:

There was no additional business on this occasion.

13 Confidentiality:

Trustees were asked to identify if there were any items/materials which needed to be excluded from any Agenda, Minutes, reports or other papers discussed at the meeting which would normally be made available for inspection following the meeting.

Trustees were also asked to identify any items included on the Agenda which require recording in a Confidential Appendix to the Minutes.

Resolved: That it be identified that no items needed to be recorded in a Confidential Appendix to the Minutes.

There were no items/materials identified for exclusion.

14 Dates and Times of Future Meetings:


The meeting schedule for 2022-23 has already been finalised.

The following dates were confirmed:

- 15.12.22 – Members' Meeting
- 30.03.22 – AGM
- 06.07.23 – Members' Meeting.

All that was left to do was for the Chair to thank all attendees for their contributions to today's meeting,

The meeting was brought to a close.



Chair

Date 1/9/2022

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on Wednesday 13 July, 2022 at 5.30 p.m.**

Action Matrix

Minute	Owner	Action Required	Action Update
4	Clerk	Share minutes with Chair so they can be signed.	
5	Members	Follow up on any network contacts who might be interested in a Member/Trustee role with the ULT.	

Date of next meeting: Thursday 15 December, 2022 at 5.30 p.m.