

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 27 May 2020 at 5.30pm.

Present:

Mr S Slater (chair), Mrs V Bennett, Mr S Harper, Mrs P Livesey, Mr R Oldham, Rev M Sherwin, Mr T Sutcliffe.

Also Present:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Dr S Clark
Clerk to the Uttoxeter Learning Trust (ULT) – Mr R Sheldon

Apology:

An apology for absence was received from Mr L Trigg. Governors continued to wish him a full and speedy recovery.

1. Declaration of Interests:

There were no declarations of interest from trustees relevant to agenda items.

2. Chair Power to Act – Report on Actions Taken:

The chair reported on the following actions taken between this and the last meeting:

- He had worked with the CEO to ensure that a robust process was put in place to consider the partial re-opening of schools in line with Government advice. The agreed process had been for headteachers to work closely with staff to identify operational plans, undertake the necessary risk assessment, and for these to be shared with the local governing board. Recommendations of the local governing board would then be submitted to the ULT trust board to enable a final decision to be taken. The chair further reported that this robust system had subsequently been proposed by the NGA.
- Agreement with the CEO that any vulnerable members of staff should not be required to attend school. They would, however, be expected to work with any distance learning packages put in place by the schools. Trustees were asked to note that this was also the case for two headteachers but both continued to work extremely hard in managing their schools and supporting staff and pupils.
- Decision taken for all school risk assessments to be submitted to the local authority, regional schools commission and unions to seek their views. The chair had also requested a further meeting with the unions within the next few weeks to get an update on how the partial re-opening of schools looked outside of the ULT.
- Decision for all scientific (SAGE) reports relating to COVID-19 to be circulated to headteachers.

It was resolved –

That trustees fully support all actions taken by the chair, with thanks to him.

3. Partial Re-Opening of ULT Schools:

The chair thanked trustees for attending this extraordinary meeting of the trust board and reported that its purpose was to enable trustees to fully consider the positives and negatives of partially re-opening all ULT schools from 1 June, in line with Government advice. As employers of all ULT staff, the chair reminded trustees that it was their responsibility to take any final decisions.

The CEO fully outlined her discussions with headteachers to ensure that necessary consideration was given to all issues relating to the partial re-opening of schools and reported that this had been a challenge for all concerned given the delay in receiving local and national guidance. In addition, the guidance being received also continued to change particularly with the regard to the re-opening of secondary schools.

The CEO reported that in readiness for this extraordinary meeting of the trust board all schools had been asked to provide the following information:

- School risk assessment
- Operational plans
- Minutes of meeting of their governing board to make clear their recommendations for the partial re-opening of the school

The clerk confirmed that all documents had been previously circulated to trustees, together with any associated COVID-19 reports. Copies had also been made available in Office 365. Trustees had been asked to look at all documents if possible but to also focus in particular on the documents relating to their link school.

The CEO then referred to each of the schools in the ULT and was pleased to confirm that all had agreed plans in readiness for any partial re-opening of their school. It was made clear to trustees that this had been a real challenge for headteachers as it was unknown how many pupils would be returning to school on the agreed date. Also, the schools were still required to accommodate the children of critical workers and this number was also unknown as it was likely to increase as more families returned to work. The arrangements differed between schools given the number of pupils involved, staffing levels and the teaching accommodation available. The proposed partial re-opening dates were:

- First Schools – 1 June
- Middle Schools – 3 June
- Secondary School – 15 June (this date had been changed from 8 June, as agreed by governors, following Government advice).

The CEO also reported that although all local governing boards had plans in place for the partial re-opening of their schools, not all were of the view that this should be happening from as early as 1 June. The chair outlined what was happening in neighbouring authorities and confirmed that many of them had taken a decision that their schools would not re-open on that date, until further information had been received.

Having listened to the full explanation from the CEO and chair of the trust board on how the schools had fully prepared for any partial re-opening of their school, full discussion followed and trustees sought further information and clarification around many issues.

Consideration was given in particular to:

- Parental views – trustees questioned if the views of parents had been sought to gauge how many pupils might return to school on the agreed re-opening date. It was recognised that any change in the number of pupils returning to school would

impact on plans outlined in the risk assessment. The CEO reported that headteachers had written to parents asking them to make a decision on the return of their children to school whilst also making it clear that whatever the decision they would be expected to stick by it. This would, however, be reviewed on a regular basis. The CEO again reminded trustees that the number of children of critical workers attending schools would offer the biggest challenge around admitting other pupils and confirmed that the children of critical workers would take precedence over other pupils.

- School opening dates – trustees questioned the possible impact on the health and well-being of pupils and staff should schools open too early. The CEO and chair of trustees both confirmed that Government advice was that primary schools could partially re-open from 1 June and that secondary schools could partially re-open on 15 June (this date had changed in recent days from 8 June). Various reports had been written regarding possible implications but evidence was inconclusive around possible risks. The CEO reported that, as such, schools had taken a cautious approach when finalising plans to partially re-open, whilst mindful of Government and union advice.

The chair of the trust board reported that the recommended pupil year groups to be re-admitted to schools were not appropriate for the three-tier system as they didn't take account of the age that pupils transferred to other schools. As such, representation had been made to the regional schools commission to allow the ULT to prioritise children moving to new schools in September but this had not been agreed.

Trustees considered the local and national impact of the coronavirus and noted that there was no real evidence to show the effect of this on children, particularly transmission. However, they took into account the number of people still being infected and the reports that there could be a spike in the numbers of people infected should current lockdown measures be reduced too quickly. The recently announced test and trace measures, but not yet in place, could be of benefit in reducing possible risks and a delay in the partial re-opening of schools was considered to allow for the impact of these measures.

Trustees also recognised that it would be difficult to ensure the social distancing of the very young pupils and particularly those attending the smaller schools where there was limited space. Also, for the younger children the removal of toys and other play activities would also deny them access to the appropriate curriculum for their age.

- Distance Learning – trustees were informed of the distance learning packages that had been put in place by schools and consideration was given to how these could be further developed to continue supporting pupils both in the short term, and the longer term. The CEO agreed to discuss this further with headteachers at future meetings of the HPB.
- PPE – consideration was given to the use of PPE, and the wearing of face masks in particular, once schools had re-opened. Trustees noted that evidence around the effectiveness of wearing face masks was inconclusive and guidance remained that it was not compulsory.

- Richard Clarke First School – trustees were reminded that Richard Clarke First School was currently an associate member of the ULT and therefore still officially a local authority maintained school. As such, any decision to partially re-open the school would be for the school’s governing body to take, in accordance with local authority advice.

4. Trustee Decisions:

Having taken everything into account, including in particular the various SAGE documents, trustees resolved –

- i) That prior to the re-opening of schools the headteachers should ask parents to indicate if they would be sending their child to school and to make it clear that they would be held to that decision. This would be subject to a fortnightly review with schools also reserving the right to admit pupils for exceptional family circumstances. School risk assessments to also be updated should the number of pupils being admitted increase.
- ii) That ULT schools would not open on the 1 or 3 June as suggested by Government and that trustees await further evidence to show that there was less risk attached to the partial re-opening of schools. This decision would remain under review with a view to consideration being given to schools partially re-opening from 15 June 2020.
- iii) That once schools had re-opened there would be no requirement for staff or pupils to wear face masks although this would also be kept under review should guidance change.
- iv) That trustees place on record their thanks to the headteachers, staff and governors for all of the work that had been undertaken to enable the partial re-opening of schools.
- v) That a further extraordinary meeting of the trust board be held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) to re-assess the decision, taking account of the national picture, with a view to ULT schools possibly being able to partially re-open on 15 June 2020.

S. Slater

8 June 2020

Signed.....

Date.....