

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a joint meeting of the Trustees' Board and Members held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 13 January 2021 at 5.30pm.

Present:

Member and Trustee – Mr S Slater (chair of Trust Board)

Trustees – Mrs V Bennett, Mr S Harper, Mrs P Livesey, Mr R Oldham, Rev M Sherwin, Mr T Sutcliffe, Mr L Trigg.

Members – Prof E Barnes, Mr G Handforth, Mr G Morley, Mr S Rayner.

Also Present:

Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Dr S Clark

Chief Finance Officer (CFO) – Mr A Storer

Clerk to the Uttoxeter Learning Trust (ULT) – Mr R Sheldon

1. Welcome to Meeting:

The chair welcomed everyone to this special joint meeting which had been arranged primarily to consider, and formally approve, the external audit report and financial statements. As agreed, members had also been invited to give them the opportunity to review and discuss the ULT's finances. The opportunity had also been taken to include other appropriate agenda items.

2. Declaration of Interests:

A declaration of interest was given from Mr A Storer (Business Manager at Thomas Alleyne's High School) in advance of discussions around the ULT redundancy scheme.

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

3. Re-appointment of Trustees:

The clerk had reminded members that the term of office for some trustees had recently come to an end and that it was therefore necessary for them to be formally re-appointed.

Members resolved –

- i) That the following trustees be appointed for a four-year period with effect from 5 January 2021:
 - Mrs V Bennett
 - Mr R Oldham
 - Rev M Sherwin
 - Mr S Slater
 - Mr T Sutcliffe
- ii) That CECET be advised of the re-appointments to ensure that the number of trustees appointed by CECET remained as 40% of the total number of trustees.

4. Finance Matters:

Trustees and members had been previously circulated with the following documents:

- Audit Completion Report (year ended 31 August 2020)
- Annual Report and Financial Statement (year ended 31 August 2020)

The chair reminded everyone that both documents had to be formally approved and submitted to the ESFA by 31 January 2021.

The chair further reported that he had carefully read both documents and was concerned that both contained a number of significant errors which required amendment before they could be submitted to the ESFA. The CFO outlined some of the key findings from the audit report, referring in particular to the significant findings. He confirmed that action was already being taken to address the issues but that it would be necessary to review the financial procedures as previously approved by trustees. This related in particular to the required payment of legal fees and compliance of agreed procedures. A recommendation had been made for greater flexibility around the process to appoint the company supporting this process. Members recognised the benefits of revising financial procedures to enable greater flexibility.

Discussion then took place regarding the financial statements and the chair highlighted some of the significant errors that he had identified. Discussion took place and all agreed that the statements should be returned to Mazars to ensure that they were amended as necessary. Particular reference was made to the level of school reserves as highlighted in the statements and concern was expressed that they didn't truly reflect the Trust's financial situation. This was due to the inclusion of fixed assets relating to each of the schools and it was felt that the wording around the fixed assets should be revised to show greater clarity around the actual level of reserve funding held by each school. The CFO also confirmed that the fixed assets of buildings and land relating to church schools, and not owned by the Trust, had not been included in the figures.

The chair finally reported that the necessary letters to accompany the audit report and financial statements reflected a number of recommendations that had previously be made by trustees.

It was resolved –

- i) That the audit report and financial statements be returned to Mazars and that the CFO be requested to work with them to ensure that all necessary changes were made to both documents.
- ii) That a further special meeting of the Trust Board be held to formally approve both documents and to ensure that they were submitted to the ESFA before 31 January 2021.

5. Covid-19 Issues:

The CEO had previously circulated a report to provide an update on everything being done by schools to ensure that they could remain open for children of key workers and vulnerable pupils, whilst ensuring the safety of staff and pupils, and to provide remote learning for those pupils not attending school. Local and national guidance continued to be followed by all schools and risk assessments continued to be updated to reflect ever changing guidance. The CEO further reported that the situation regarding children able to attend

school differed from the first lockdown during the previous year and that the number of children currently attending was significantly higher. This was having an impact on workload to ensure their safety and the number of teaching staff available for face-to-face teaching and learning and the number of staff also available to provide remote learning for those children not in school. Letters had been sent to parents to advise them of the guidance relating to which children could attend school.

Copies of school risk assessments had been previously circulated to trustees and the chair reported that he had spoken with all headteachers regarding the risk assessments and to also thank them for all of the work that they were doing. Discussion took place regarding the individual school risk assessments and trustees noted the difference in the level of detail contained in the assessments. In response to a question asked, the CEO confirmed that headteachers had not previously shared their school's risk assessment with others but arrangements had now been made for this to happen to enable the sharing of good practice. The CEO also confirmed that no updated local or national guidance had been received in response to the new variant of Covid-19.

Full discussion followed regarding the work being done by all schools to ensure compliance with guidance and trustees and members also recognised their responsibilities to ensure the health, safety and well-being of pupils, staff and carers whilst maintaining a quality education for all Trust pupils. Consideration was given in particular to the following issues:

- Vaccination – a suggestion was put forward that a letter be sent to the Secretary of State for Education to request that teachers be given higher priority for receiving the vaccination.
- School attendance – the chair reminded trustees that, despite increasing numbers of children attending school, they had a legal requirement to ensure that any child entitled to attend was able to do so.
- Parental support – the CEO was pleased to report that the vast majority of parents continued to show support for the work being done by schools to ensure the safety of those children attending school and the remote learning available to those children not able to attend.
- Face coverings – full discussion took place regarding the wearing of face coverings by both staff and pupils and the CEO confirmed that all schools continued to operate within the guidance received. A suggestion was made that consideration be given by the Trust to strengthening school guidance for pupils wearing a face cover particularly in class.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees and members continue to place on record their thanks to headteachers and staff for all of the work they continued to do at such a challenging time.
- ii) That school risk assessments be received and noted but that the CEO be requested to remind headteachers of the benefits of sharing their assessments with each other to ensure that best practice could be followed by all schools.
- iii) That schools should continue to following guidance for the wearing of face coverings in school but that trustees also recommend that face coverings be worn by pupils in school, but that the recommendation should also be age-appropriate.

6. Review of Redundancy Scheme – Next Steps:

The chair reminded trustees that this matter had been discussed at the last meeting of the Trust Board and consideration given to the updated report received from the CEO. Further advice had been received regarding the decision to revise the redundancy scheme, particularly with regard to the TUPE transfer agreement at the time of schools initially joining the Trust. Advice had also been given to re-engage further with professional associations before finally implementing any changes.

The chair reported that, in his view, further advice and support should be given by someone who has already gone through a similar process before going ahead with the planned changes.

It was resolved –

That the chair and CEO be requested to identify where further appropriate support could be given from and that the matter be discussed at a future meeting of the Trust Board.

7. Other Business:

a) Richard Clarke First School

The CEO was pleased to confirm that approval had been given for Richard Clarke First School to join the ULT and that it was hoped to complete the necessary joining process for it to take effect from 1 April 2021.

b) Ryecroft CE Middle School

The chair reported that he had been informed that the headteacher was to resign at the end of the school year and that he and the CEO were to meet shortly with the chair of governors to discuss future arrangements for appointing a replacement headteacher. (The chair reminded trustees of the need for confidentiality regarding this matter until the school community had been informed).

8. Date of next Meeting:

The chair reminded trustees of the need to arrange a further short meeting to approve the audit report and financial statements, which would be held within the next week or so. The date would be circulated as soon as possible.

S. Slater
Signed.....

10 February 2021
Date.....