

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust  
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely on Wednesday, 1 April 2020 at 4.30pm.

**Present:**

Mr S Slater (chair), Mr S Harper, Mrs P Livesey, Mr R Oldham, Rev M Sherwin, Mr L Trigg.

**Also Present:**

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

**Apologies:**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs V Bennett, Mr T Sutcliffe.

**237. Declaration of Interests:**

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

**238. Chair Power to Act – Report on Actions Taken:**

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

- A letter, on behalf of trustees, had been sent to all ULT staff to thank them for their hard work and continued support for their school during these difficult times.
- A letter had been sent to all ULT staff to advise them that decisions around the redundancy scheme had been put on hold given the current impact on staff due to concerns around the coronavirus and to also allow trustees time to review and reflect on the responses received from staff.
- Approval for the Education committee, due to have been held on 17 March, to be replaced by a special meeting of the trust board on that date.
- He had contacted all ULT headteachers to check on their own health and wellbeing and to thank them for all they were doing to keep their schools open for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers.

It was resolved –

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

**239. Trustees' Board Minutes:**

Minutes of meetings of the Trustees' Board held on Wednesday, 12 February and Tuesday, 17 March 2020 had been previously circulated.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of both meetings be received and approved, subject to the following amendments:

12 February 2020 – Mr L Trigg was also present

17 March 2020 – apologies for absence had been received from Mr L Trigg

## 240. Matters Arising:

### a) New School

The CEO reported that the proposed Admissions policy for the new school had been submitted to the DfE as required. The local authority had provided a catchment area map which showed an overlap with the catchment area for Tynsel Parkes School. A copy of the map had been previously circulated to trustees and the chair confirmed that it would be necessary to discuss the catchment area with governors of Tynsel Parkes School before the S10 consultation took place.

The CEO further reported that meetings of the project board continued with the intention still of opening the new school in September 2021. However, trustees were advised that the implications of the coronavirus and restrictions on construction work could result in a delay to the completion of the new build.

The chair reported, that as previously discussed, concerns had been raised with the local authority regarding the need for a dedicated parking and drop-off area for disabled pupils being transported to the new school.

It was resolved –

- i) That the update on the new school be noted and that approval be given for the chair and CEO to meet with governors of Tynsel Parkes School to discuss the overlapping catchment area.
- ii) That trustees formally request the local authority to include in the plans for the new school a dedicated parking and drop-off area for disabled pupils being transported to school.

### b) Growth of ULT

The CEO was pleased to report that following a meeting of Richard Clarke First School's governing body, a decision had been taken for the school to join the ULT on a permanent basis. The Regional Schools Commission had been informed and the appropriate documents had been forwarded for completion. The CEO had been informed that if all forms were able to be completed before the end of April then it could be possible for the school to join from September. However, whilst every effort would be made to complete the forms, trustees were advised that the implications of the coronavirus could result in this not proving possible. They would be kept updated.

It was resolved –

That trustees welcome the decision of the governing body of Richard Clarke First School to join the ULT on a permanent basis.

### c) Redundancy Policy

Further to the report given by the chair of the trust board earlier in the meeting, the CEO gave an update on the responses received from ULT staff regarding the change to the redundancy policy. A copy of which had been previously circulated. The decision to put this matter on hold had been well received by staff. The CEO further reported that the decision would also allow for time to seek further advice from lawyers and HR support with this continued to be given.

It was resolved –

That the redundancy policy update be received and noted.

#### **241. Coronavirus and ULT Schools:**

This matter had been discussed at the recent meeting of the trust board held on 17 March and the CEO confirmed that all ULT schools had business continuity plans in place and remained open to support vulnerable pupils and children of key workers. The number of pupils attending each of the schools varied and the possibility of establishing a hub school at some point in the future remained under review. The CEO assured trustees that all preventative measures to ensure the health and wellbeing of all concerned were in place and in accordance with national guidance. The CEO further reported that school safeguarding policies were also being updated to reflect the revised working practices.

Discussion followed around the impact on schools of the coronavirus and trustees were pleased to note that all schools offered remote learning opportunities for pupils and that parents were supportive of the work being done by schools and the communication systems in place.

It was resolved –

That trustees place on record their thanks to all ULT teaching and non-teaching staff for everything being done to support pupils and parents at this difficult time.

#### **242. Ofsted Inspections:**

The CEO again reminded trustees of the good Ofsted inspection report for Picknalls First Schools and reported that some of the issues that were a particular focus during the inspection were being shared with other first schools to help them prepare for any future inspection. The CEO further reported that notification had recently been received for an Ofsted inspection of Windsor Park Middle School but had subsequently been postponed due to the coronavirus. A revised date was awaited.

It was resolved –

That the Ofsted inspection update be noted.

#### **243. CEO Report:**

A copy of the CEO's report had been previously circulated and particular reference was made to the following matters:

##### a) School Performance

An update was given on external/internal quality assurance of schools, including a report of the pre-Ofsted inspection of Ryecroft Middle School undertaken by Barbara O'Brien Education Ltd. This had highlighted strengths of the school but also areas for development and the CEO was working with the headteacher to identify improvement strategies. Regular meetings had been programmed for all ULT schools to help the CEO quality assure school performance and to provide support and challenge as necessary.

##### b) Stakeholder Engagement (JCB)

The CEO reported that a continued focus was given to developing stakeholder engagement and, as part of this, was pleased to report that following an approach to

JCB by the headteacher of Oldfields Hall Middle School, a number of CAD stations had been offered to ULT schools.

c) ULT Policy Log

A copy of the ULT policy log had been previously circulated and the CEO confirmed that it had been considered at the recent meeting of the Finance committee. The policy log had subsequently been updated to reflect committee responsibility for the various policies.

d) Governor/Trustee Recruitment

The CEO reported that a number of schools had requested trustee support with the recruitment of new governors. The CEO further reported that two very experienced governors were retiring at the end of the school year:

- Dr Mari Jary – Thomas Alleyne’s High School
- Mr Ian Johnstone – chair of governors, Windsor Park Middle School

Discussion followed and trustees recognised the need to develop a recruitment strategy for the appointment of both governors and trustees. The CEO also reminded trustees of the need to appoint a link trustee to Oldfields Hall Middle School following the resignation of Mrs Bell.

e) Trust Capacity Fund

The CEO reported that the Trust Capacity Fund bid for £301K had been unsuccessful but was working the chair of the trust board to prepare a bid in readiness for the next round of applications. Trustees would be kept updated.

f) PR and Marketing Strategy

The CEO reported that full discussion had taken place at the recent meeting of the Finance committee to consider the work being undertaken with Sero Creative, a company with experience of marketing schools in MATs. A number of strategies had been put forward and trustees informed that Sero could support individual support strategies or assist with the production of a document that would enable a full programme of work to go out to tender. Consideration was being given to an option of requesting Sero to initially help to re-write the ULT vision, which would then help identify other PR and marketing strategies, and was to be discussed further at the next meeting of the headteacher professional board.

g) NGA/SEND Reviews

The CEO reported that ongoing consideration was being given to the NGA and SEND reviews but work was currently on hold due to the coronavirus.

h) Headteacher Performance Management

The CEO reported that a programme of meetings was in place to undertake the mid-year headteacher performance reviews and consideration was being given to the implications of the coronavirus resulting in targets not being met. HR support was being given to this matter and national guidance also awaited. Trustees would be kept updated.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO be thanked for her informative report and that it be received and noted.
- ii) That trustees fully support the work being undertaken with Ryecroft Middle School and the need for an action plan to identify improvement strategies.

- iii) That trustees place on record their thanks to JCB for the support being given to ULT schools.
- iv) That trustees support the development of a recruitment strategy for governors and trustees and also place on record their thanks to Dr Jary and Mr Johnstone for the many years support that they had given as a school governor.
- v) That trustees fully support the development of a PR and marketing strategy and that this matter be kept under review.

#### **244. Appointment of External Auditor:**

Trustees were informed that this matter had been discussed in detail at the recent meeting of the Finance committee and Mr Trigg, committee chair, went through the detail of the three tenders that had been received. Copies of which had been previously circulated. The companies were:

- Dains Accountants
- Mazars LLP
- Mitten Clarke Audit Ltd

The committee chair confirmed that full consideration had been given to the pros and cons to each of the tenders whilst mindful of the criteria on which they were being assessed. He informed trustees that no recommendations for appointment had been made at the meeting and a request made for the CFO to seek references to be considered at this meeting of the trust board. A reference submitted on behalf of Mazars LLP had been previously circulated.

Full discussion followed and the discrepancies around price and quality of work offered was recognised. Trustees were of the view, however, that the strongest bid based on the quality of audit offer had been received from Mazars LLP, although not the cheapest in price. The reference submitted on behalf of the company was very positive.

Trustees were informed that the cheapest bid had been submitted from Dains Accountants although it had limited experience of working with MATs and, despite several requests, no references to support the bid had been received.

It was resolved –

That trustees recommend to ULT members that Mazars LLP be appointed as the external auditor.

#### **245. Safeguarding:**

The CEO reminded trustees that, as discussed earlier in the meeting, school Safeguarding policies had been updated to reflect national guidance and new ways of working to ensure the continued safety and wellbeing of pupils.

It was resolved –

That trustees note that safeguarding policies have been updated as necessary to comply with national guidance and new ways of working and request that this information is also made clear on the ULT website.

## **246. Education Committee:**

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of a meeting of the Education committee held on 28 January 2020 and the CEO reminded them that the meeting of the Education committee planned for 17 March had been postponed to allow for a special meeting of the trust board. Mr Oldham, committee chair, outlined the key issues considered at the meeting, much of which had already been discussed earlier in this meeting. He also referred to other matters discussed, including:

- School performance – the CEO was discussing strategies with the headteacher of the high school to bring about improvement in the Maths department and post-16 outcomes. The committee would continue to review the impact of the improvement strategies and would support and challenge as considered appropriate.
- Teaching School – a comprehensive report on the work of the teaching school had been received. It had been agreed that only a summary report was required for each meeting of the Education committee and that a comprehensive report be provided for the last meeting of the school year and to which the headteacher would be invited to attend.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Education committee meeting held on 28 January 2020 be received and accepted.

## **247. Finance Committee:**

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of a meeting of the Finance committee held on 5 February 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Finance committee had recently been held on 25 March 2020. Mr Trigg, committee chair, outlined the key issues considered at both meetings, much of which had already been discussed earlier in the meeting, including in particular the appointment of external auditor:

- Name of Committee – committee members had received a copy of the Financial Handbook and noted the ongoing reference within the handbook to the audit role of the Finance committee. It was therefore recommended that the committee name be changed to Finance and Audit committee.
- Central Funds/Top Slice – consideration was given to the current top slice of schools' budgets and the central services currently offered. The committee recognised that the current level of top slice was not sustainable and had recommended an increase to 3% with effect from April 2021 to give schools a one-year notice period. A review of service level agreements was also to be undertaken to offset the top slice increase.
- Consolidated budget – the committee had considered the consolidated 5-year budget and noted that there were no real concerns for the next three years, although savings would be necessary to reduce the anticipated deficit in the final two years. Schools were to be asked to submit plans, for consideration at future meetings of the Finance committee, to show how savings could be achieved.
- Staff appointments – the committee had noted the staff recruitment pro-forma to be completed by headteachers to seek approval from the CEO before appointing staff. This process had been agreed by trustees as part of the revised redundancy scheme.

It was resolved –

- i) That the minutes of the Finance committee meeting held on 5 February 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 25 March 2020 be received and noted.
- ii) That approval be given to the change of committee name to Finance and Audit committee.
- iii) That approval be given for headteachers to be advised of a likely increase in the top slice to 3% with effect from April 2021.

**248. Other Business:**

Email Communication with Trustees

Discussion took place regarding current email communication and the clerk confirmed that communication with trustees was through use of both their personal email address and their ULT email address. The clerk reported that, if at all possible, all future information should be through use of the ULT email address only. All documentation would continue to be placed in Office 365.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees support the future use of the ULT email address and, if possible, for a consolidated report to include all meeting documentation to continue to be sent with reminders of meetings.
- ii) That personal email addresses continue to be used for information only and to alert trustees to any communication through the ULT email address.

**249. Date of Next Meeting:**

It was resolved –

That the next remote meeting of the Trustees' Board be held on Wednesday, 13 May 2020 at a time to be confirmed.

Signed.....  
S. Slater

Date.....  
13 May 2020