

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 10 February 2021 at 5.30pm.

Present:

Mr S Slater (chair), Mrs V Bennett, Mr S Harper, Mrs P Livesey, Mr T Sutcliffe, Mr L Trigg.

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

Apology: An apology for absence was received from Rev M Sherwin.

319. Declaration of Interests:

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

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

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

- He had attended recent meetings of the HPB and SRB and continued to thank, on behalf of the Trust Board, headteachers, staff and governors for all the excellent work they continued to do during the pandemic.
- At the HPB meeting, headteachers had been asked to focus, through agreed catch-up plans, on strategies put in place to narrow the gap.
- Also at HPB, headteachers had been informed of trustee expectations for staff to wear face coverings whilst in school, although reminding them it would be a local decision.
- He and the CEO had met with the chair of governors at Ryecroft Middle School to discuss the impending headteacher vacancy. Agreement had been reached to move forward with the appointment of an executive headteacher, initially on an interim basis.
- He and the CEO had met with the teaching unions and had informed them that a decision around changes to the redundancy scheme had been put on hold given the current pressures in schools, and to also enable trustees to seek further advice on the implications of any change.
- At the recent meeting of the Finance and Audit committee the CEO pay review had been undertaken, following completion of her performance management appraisal. He had communicated the outcome of this to the CEO and also requested the CFO to carry out the necessary actions.
- He and the CEO had met with Staffordshire County Council's portfolio holder for Education to seek his support in accessing DfE funding to enable the ULT to refurbish some of the school buildings. The chair further reported that it had been a positive meeting.
- He, Julie Rudge and the CEO had met with the local authority to discuss a number of issues in relation to the building of the new school, including possible implications of the nearby sub-power station. Necessary action would be taken to resolve any issues of concern.
- He had signed-off the external audit as agreed at the Trust Board meeting held on 26 January.

- He had received a formal request from the chair of governors at Thomas Alleyne's High School for the appointment of Dr M Jary as an associate governor. He had replied to him to confirm that the matter would be considered at this meeting.

It was resolved –

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

321. Trust Board Minutes:

Minutes of meetings of the Trust Board held on 9 December 2020, 13 January and 26 January 2021 had been previously circulated.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of those meetings be received and approved.

322. Matters Arising:

Meeting held 9 December 2020:

- a) Richard Clarke First School (Minute 301(b) refers)
The CEO reported that formal consultation with staff had been undertaken and had been very positive. Work continued to try and ensure that the school was able to join the ULT from the agreed date of 1 April 2021. The CEO was also pleased to report that agreement had been given for Tom Thumb nursery to remain on-site as part of the school but further details around the transfer of the nursery were still being explored.
- b) Trust Capacity Fund (Minute 301(d) refers)
The CEO was disappointed to report that the Trust Capacity Fund bid had been unsuccessful. Should the Fund continue in the future then consideration would be given to submitting a further bid.
- c) Trust Improvement Plan (Minute 307 refers)
The CEO reported that work to update the Improvement Plan continued and that it would be submitted at a future meeting of the Trust Board for formal approval.

Meeting held 26 January 2021:

External Audit (Minute 317 refers)

The CFO confirmed that the approved audit report and financial statements had been submitted to the ESFA. The CFO further reported that the issues that had been identified by the auditor had been considered by the Finance and Audit committee and that the ULT's Financial Policy and Procedures Manual had been revised accordingly.

323. CEO Presentation – Designing a Sustainable Business Development Strategy:

The CEO informed trustees that this item had been included on the agenda to enable her to give a formal 10-minute presentation on a theme undertaken as part of the NPQEL. It was also a requirement for the presentation to be recorded and trustees gave their approval for this. Trustees noted that it was necessary for the CEO to complete two projects and that the first presentation, centred around school improvement, had been given at the recent meeting of the Education committee.

The CEO took trustees through her presentation which had been prepared to show a business development strategy to support the ULT expansion by developing back-office services through utilising existing support staff roles across the Trust. The strategy focussed on the IT review that trustees had previously authorised and a copy had been previously circulated. In going through the strategy, the CEO highlighted the three possible options that had been put forward for trustees to consider, but recommended that consideration be given to approving option 1 – a hybrid solution that blends the personal commitment of key Trust employees with the wider resources and expertise of a Managed Service Provider (MSP).

Having completed the presentation, full discussion followed and trustees raised a number of questions around the proposed hybrid model. They included:

- Project Team – in setting up a project team who would it report to? The CEO suggested that the ULT's IT manager would be part of the team and that it should report to the Finance and Audit committee.
- Managed Service Provider – what would be the length of any service level agreement? The CEO suggested that any SLA would initially be for a minimum of one year, subject to review. Discussions were already being held with a number of possible providers.
- Top-Slice – this was to be increased to 3% from April 2021 but would this be sufficient for the IT proposals? The CEO reported that, even with the increased top-slice funding, it would be insufficient to meet future IT costs. Schools would therefore need to understand the financial implications of a centralised approach.

Trustees also gave consideration to the possible role of the MSP, particularly in relation to developing ULT strategy. It was felt that it would be beneficial for the approved MSP to support the initial strategy but that its on-going development should be a key role for the ULT's IT team. Trustees also considered that an initial one-year SLA may be too short to be of full benefit and could also be costlier as a result.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO be thanked for her presentation and the report prepared with regard to the IT review.
- ii) That trustees approve the adoption of the recommended hybrid model but that the CEO be requested to obtain further details around this particular model, including the financial advantages or disadvantages of a shorter or longer SLA.
- iii) That the Finance and Audit committee be authorised to consider this matter further on behalf of the Trust Board.

324. Finance Report:

a) Internal Audit

The external audit had been discussed earlier in the meeting and the CFO further reported that all school internal audits had also been completed. He was pleased to confirm that they had been largely positive, with no items of fraud identified. The CFO also reported, however, that the internal audit reports highlighted a number of recurring themes, including in particular reference to local governing bodies approving the Trust's Financial Policy and Procedures Manual. The Finance and Audit committee continued to monitor this and to ensure that schools took the necessary actions to comply with

internal audit recommendations. The CFO would also remind headteachers that trustees were responsible for approving the Trust's Financial Policy and Procedures Manual and that governing bodies were required to accept it as presented.

b) Land and Buildings Return

The CFO confirmed that the land and buildings return had been completed and returned to the ESFA within the agreed timeframe.

c) Performance Accounts

The CFO reported that the January figures were currently being finalised and that a report would shortly be prepared for trustees. He further reported that the Management Asset Toolkit was being used to help benchmark KPIs to show comparisons with other MATs and schools. Once completed a report would be made available to trustees.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CFO be thanked for his financial report and that it be noted.
- ii) That trustees look forward to receiving benchmarking data to show how the ULT and its schools compared with other MATs.

325. CEO Report:

A copy of the CEO's report had been previously circulated and read. The CEO reported that most of the issues outlined in the report had already been discussed earlier in the meeting and referred in particular to the following matters:

a) Hutchinson Memorial First School

The school had closed recently due to an outbreak of Covid-19 but the CEO was pleased to report that it had now re-opened.

b) Remote Learning Programmes

All schools had published information about their remote learning offers on their websites and a Trust-wide survey of the quality of remote learning was being prepared for parents and pupils. Trustees would be kept informed of survey outcomes.

c) Staff Appraisal

The CEO reported that she and the chair of Trust Board had recently met with the professional associations to discuss appraisal arrangements. Support had been given for appraisal to continue on the understanding that current circumstances did not disadvantage staff in relation to meeting agreed targets. Trustees welcomed the continuation of staff appraisal particularly as it gave staff the opportunity to meet with senior leaders.

d) New School

The CEO confirmed that the necessary S10 consultation was to be held during the next half-term and she was also liaising with other MATs who had already successfully opened new schools to help follow proven best practice.

It was resolved –

That the CEO be thanked for her informative report and that it be received and noted.

326. Safeguarding / Covid-19 and ULT Schools:

The CEO reported that schools continued to review and update risk assessments as necessary and were also sharing good practice to address any safeguarding risks through remote learning.

The CEO also reported that schools had been advised of trustees' recommendation for all staff to wear face coverings whilst in school. Schools were also planning for the re-opening of schools, hopefully with effect from 8 March 2021, and that the NEU had published a plan to support this, with emphasis on the use of rotas and the wearing of face coverings in the classroom. The wearing of face coverings had also been recommended by Independent Sage. This had been discussed at the recent meeting of the Headteacher Professional Board, with consideration given to the different face masks available – particularly FFP2 and FFP3. The cost of purchasing both types of masks were being obtained although it was recognised that the FFP2 masks were significantly more expensive. It was considered, however, that they may offer greater protection in light of the new variants of Covid-19 which were more transmissible.

Full discussion followed around the various masks currently available, the costs associated with each type of mask and the specific purpose of the different varieties. Trustees recognised, however, the continued importance of staff wearing a mask/face covering.

Finally, the CEO reported that there were no specific safeguarding incidents to bring to the attention of trustees.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CFO be requested to obtain further details of the cost of purchasing appropriate face masks for all staff.
- ii) That the CEO be asked to remind headteachers of trustee expectations that all staff should wear face coverings whilst in school.

327. Education Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of the Education committee held on 24 November 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Education committee had recently been held on 26 January 2021. In the absence of the committee chair, Mr Sutcliffe (vice chair) outlined the issues that had been considered. He referred in particular to the presentation given by the CEO in relation to her school improvement project, focussing on supporting schools in implementing Covid-19 recovery plans to narrow the gap in learning and place pupil progress in Mathematics in Y6 in line with the top 20% of schools, taking account of adjustments to national benchmarks as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The committee had also looked at school catch-up plans and trustees welcomed the work being done by schools to narrow the gap between different groups of pupils.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Education committee held on 24 November 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 26 January 2021 be noted.

328. Finance and Audit Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee held on 2 December 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee had recently been held on 3 February 2021 and Mr Trigg, committee chair, confirmed that the key issues discussed at the meeting had been discussed further during this meeting.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Finance and Audit committee meeting held on 2 December 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 3 February 2021 be received and noted.

329. Headteacher Salaries:

Trustees had been previously circulated with a report to outline how headteacher salaries were calculated and the current salary ranges in place for all ULT headteachers. Trustees noted that all salary ranges were in accordance with recommendations of the School Teachers Pay and Conditions document, but that there was scope for review at such time as it was necessary to recruit a new headteacher. Discussion followed and trustees considered in particular the roles of the Trust Board and local governing bodies in determining headteacher salary ranges.

It was resolved –

- i) That the report on headteacher salaries be received and noted.
- ii) That at the time of recruiting a headteacher, the Trust Board would be responsible for determining the appropriate starting salary and salary range, but that the local governing body would authorise any movement in the salary range in line with the performance management process.

330. Ryecroft Middle School – Appointment of Headteacher:

As reported earlier in the meeting, the chair confirmed that, in discussion with the chair of the local governing body, agreement had been reached to appoint an executive headteacher initially on an interim basis. He was shortly to meet with the CEO to agree the detail of the executive headteacher post. The appointment would be from within the Trust and a report had been previously circulated to show possible salary range options, depending on who was subsequently appointed as executive headteacher. The chair further reported that he had taken advice from HR and that it would be possible to negotiate a starting salary with the appropriate person at the time of appointment.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees support the appointment of an executive headteacher.
- ii) That the report on salary options be received and noted and considered further at the time of an appointment being made.

331. School Governance Structure:

Trustees had been previously circulated with a report to show the various local governing body structures for schools across the Trust. The report highlighted the different sizes of local governing bodies and the clerk advised that it would be appropriate for trustees to review this to ensure some consistency. It would also be an opportunity to ensure that a local governing body had the appropriate skills set from within the agreed composition. The clerk further advised trustees that many of the local governing bodies had a number of vacancies and that the composition could be reduced through the non-filling of those vacancies. Further reductions could be achieved, if necessary, at a point in the future whenever a vacancy arose. The clerk also advised trustees that some schools still had local authority appointed governors which was not appropriate for academies. He suggested that consideration be given to removing that post from the governing body and that the person currently holding that post be immediately re-appointed as a co-opted governor, if they wished.

It was resolved –

- i) That the report on school governance structures be received and noted and that the CEO be requested to arrange for this matter to be discussed at the next meeting of the School Representation Board.
- ii) That the post of local authority governor be removed, where appropriate, but that the person currently in such a post be offered the role of co-opted governor, on the basis of the skills and experience they would bring to the governing body.
- iii) That, as reported earlier in the meeting under Chair’s Power to Act (see Minute 320), trustees approve the appointment of Dr M Jary as associate governor at Thomas Alleyne’s High School.

332. Risk Register:

Trustees had been previously circulated with an updated copy of the risk register and the CEO outlined the key changes that had been made to the register.

It was resolved –

That the updated risk register be received and noted.

333. Policy Approval:

The CEO reported that there were no policies to be approved at this meeting.

334. Date of Next Meeting:

Trustees were reminded that the next termly meeting of the Trust Board would again be held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 31 March 2021 at 5.30pm.

Signed.....
S. Slater

31 March 2021
Date.....