

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 12 May 2021 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, 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

353. Business Register:

Trustees were asked to inform the clerk if any changes to the business register were necessary. Mr Trigg reported that he would contact the clerk to outline recent changes to his details contained in the register.

354. Declaration of Interests:

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

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

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

- At the recent SRB meeting he had discussed the school recovery plans with headteachers and asked them to focus on the importance on working collaboratively and the sharing of best practice.
- At the same meeting he had also informed headteachers and chairs of governing bodies of the Trust Board decision to reduce, over a period of time, the size of governing bodies to between 10 and 12 governors. A skills analysis would be helpful to help achieve this.
- A letter of thanks, on behalf of the Trust board, had been sent to all headteachers at the end of last term to thank them for all of their continued hard work to respond to the implications of the coronavirus.
- A number of decisions had been taken with regard to the build of the new school and conversion of Richard Clarke First School to formally join the ULT. These had been discussed in more detail at the recent meeting of the Finance and Audit committee.

It was resolved –

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

356. Trust Board Minutes:

Minutes of a meeting of the Trust Board held on 31 March 2021 had been previously circulated.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting be received and approved.

357. Matters Arising:

a) Ryecroft Middle School – Interim Executive Headteacher (Minute 337 refers)

The CEO reported that, following her appointment as interim executive headteacher, Mrs Rudge was currently looking at the leadership structure for the school, including the role of head of school. Changes to the leadership team had already been made at Thomas Alleyne's High School, including the appointment of Mrs Maingay as interim head of school and Mrs Dodd as acting deputy headteacher.

The CEO further reported that Mrs Rudge was to be employed at Ryecroft for two days a week and consideration also being given to seconding governors onto the school's governing body.

b) Richard Clarke First School (Minute 339(a) refers)

The CEO reported that, due to the need for two parcels of land still to be registered, the conversion date had now been put back to 1 September 2021. The CEO further reported that a 'tenancy at will' could be agreed for the parcels of land but that registering the land was the preferred option and the deferment of the conversion date would provide more time for this to happen. Registering of the land was particularly important for the land entrance being shared with Tom Thumb nursery. There was no further action to take at this moment in time but trustees would be kept updated.

c) New School (Minute 339(b) refers)

The CEO was pleased to report that ULT solicitors continue to work with the Local Authority, which is responsible to deliver the new school, and that the Agreement for Lease neared completion. There were one or two issues still to be resolved, including the seller of the land to have a 'right to connect' and around various insurances and warranties. The CEO was confident that a way forward would be agreed in the best interests of all concerned. Confirmation had also been given from the local authority that the Bramshall Meadows housing development was in the catchment area for Windsor Park Middle School.

d) Trust Capacity Framework (Minute 339(c) refers)

The CEO reported that the input from trustees, headteachers and chairs of governors had been feedback to Ark Academy Trust and they would shortly decide on the next steps. The CEO further reported that she would arrange to meet shortly with those trustees who had not yet responded to the framework.

e) CIF Bids (Minute 341(b) refers)

The CFO reported that the outcome of current CIF bids was expected mid-June and trustees would be kept updated.

f) Articles of Association (Minute 347 refers)

The CEO reported that contact had been made with the Trust's solicitors who had agreed to assist with updating the Articles of Association. The CEO hoped to present the updated Articles to trustees for approval before end of the year.

358. IT Review:

The chair reported that this matter had been discussed in detail at the recent meeting of the Finance and Audit committee and to which all trustees had been invited to attend. The CEO took trustees through a presentation to highlight actions, and decisions agreed to-date, regarding the IT review. The CEO reminded trustees that the preferred option had been to look at a hybrid solution whereby the current IT support team could be re-deployed alongside a service level agreement with a multi-service provider (MSP). The CEO continued to meet regularly with the IT manager to discuss the options in more detail.

The chair reported that a number of key issues had been considered by the Finance and Audit committee, including in particular the importance of the ULT retaining control of IT provision and the cost to small schools which, on current proposals, were unreasonable. A summary of the anticipated costs was provided for trustees. As a result, the committee had agreed not to proceed with an MSP at this moment in time and for the CEO to identify possible short-term measures to be put in place whilst further long-term options were explored.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO be requested to determine interim IT arrangements, whilst clarifying the process for the specification and pre-tender estimates.
- ii) That trustees also agree to explore the benefits from an external review being undertaken and that to support this the CEO be requested to seek the views of the Ark Academy Trust (ULT mentor).

359. School Resource Management Self-Assessment 2020:

A copy of the completed self-assessment document had been discussed in detail at the recent meeting of the Finance and Audit committee and some of the responses to the questions asked in the document had been revised as a result. The CFO undertook to circulate a updated copy of the self-assessment document to trustees.

The CFO also referred to a new DfE website designed to help trusts/schools benchmark against comparative school financial expenditure. The CFO reported that the data was RAG rated to enable comparisons to be made against schools of a similar size. The information was available for the ULT as a whole or for individual schools and would help trustees ask appropriate questions whilst exploring the data. The CFO would arrange for all trustees to be able to access the website.

The CEO also reminded trustees of the benchmarking webinar and training materials available in Office 365 Teams and encouraged trustees to have a look at this, if they hadn't already done so.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CFO for his report on the school resource management self-assessment 2020 and look forward to receiving the link to enable them to access the DfE's benchmarking website.
- ii) That the CFO be requested to arrange a CPD session to focus specifically on the risk management tool and benchmarking.

360. ULT Finance Report:

a) Draft Budgets

The CEO reported that she and the CFO had met with headteachers individually to discuss their school budgets and look at future projections for the next 5 years. A copy of the consolidated 5-year budget modeller had been previously circulated to trustees and the CEO further reported that this had been looked at in detail at the recent meeting of the Finance and Audit committee. The CFO also confirmed that the budget modeller had been updated as requested to include a narrative to make clear any under-lying school budget issues against one-off spending decisions.

It was resolved –

That the consolidated 5-year budget modeller be received and noted with thanks to the CFO.

b) Financial Cost of Covid-19

The CFO provided an update on the financial costs associated with Covid-19 and reported that the biggest financial impact had been on Oldfields Hall Middle and Thomas Alleyne's High Schools. Necessary adjustments had been made to their budgets to offset the costs. Trustees were informed that other DfE grants, not linked to the level of school reserves were becoming available and appropriate claims would be made on behalf of all schools. Full guidance around some of the grants available was still awaited.

The CFO further reported that, as such, school budget surpluses were not as great as originally anticipated and also pleased to confirm that school lettings were starting to recommence which would further improve income levels.

It was resolved –

That the report on the financial costs associated with Covid-19 be noted, with thanks to the CFO.

361. CEO Report:

A copy of the CEO's report had been previously circulated. 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) Covid-19 Guidance

The CEO reported that, as national restrictions started to lift, further local and national guidance was awaited to make clear the impact on schools. This included in particular guidance on the wearing of masks within school and of year events. The CEO assured trustees that schools would continue to follow whatever guidance was received. Discussion took place regarding the possibility of trustees visiting their link school and the CEO recommended that trustees should not visit a school until at least 21 June when further DfE guidance on the lifting of restrictions was anticipated.

b) Summer School

The CEO reported that further guidance was awaited on the expected funding to support summer schools and that meetings were being held with headteachers regarding the importance of targeting specific groups of pupils.

c) Oldfields Hall Middle School

The CEO reported that as discussed at the previous meeting, in order to safeguard admissions to Windsor Park Middle School, discussions were being held with the Local Authority to explore the possibilities of moderating the PAN at Oldfields Hall and staggering the increase. Confirmation had been given that it was not necessary to consult on any increase in the PAN and that it was also kept at a similar level for September 2024. An increase could be agreed for 2025 if necessary.

d) ULT and School Resources

The CEO reported that the ULT's reserves and Charging policy had been updated to include processes for schools to request access to reserves and setting targets for the generation of in-year reserves, subject to approval by Trustees.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO be thanked for her detailed report and that it be received.
- ii) That trustees agree that no school visits should be undertaken until further national and local guidance was received.

362. Safeguarding/Covid-19 Update:

The CEO reported that the findings from the survey to look at the remote learning programme had been shared with headteachers and consideration was being given to any necessary actions.

The CEO also referred to a parental complaint at Windsor Park Middle School and which had been discussed at both the Education and Finance and Audit committees. No further action was necessary.

363. Education Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of the Education committee held on 16 March 2021. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Education committee had recently been held on 27 April 2021. Rev Sherwin, committee chair, outlined the issues that had been considered. In particular, Mrs Wilbraham-Jones, headteacher at Windsor Park Middle School, had been invited to the meeting to outline her school's recovery plan, and agreed improvement strategies in preparation for an impending Ofsted visit.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Education committee held on 16 March 2021 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 27 April 2021 be noted.

364. Finance and Audit Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee held on 24 March 2021. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee had recently been held on 5 May 2021 and Mr Trigg, committee chair, confirmed that most of the issues considered had been discussed earlier in the meeting. Particular consideration had been given to the IT review and arrangements for the opening of the new school and conversion of Richard Clarke First School to enable it formally join the ULT.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Finance and Audit committee meeting held on 24 March 2021 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 5 May 2021 be received and noted.

365. Risk Register:

Trustees had been previously circulated with an updated copy of the risk register and the CEO reported that changes had been made to reflect discussions at the recent committee meetings.

It was resolved –

That the updated risk register be received and noted.

366. Policy Approval:

The following policies had been previously circulated and the CEO confirmed that each of them had been reviewed by the appropriate committee and recommended for approval:

- ULT Bereavement policy
- ULT Home/School Communication policy
- ULT Reserves and Charging policy
- ULT Procurement and Tendering policy

It was resolved –

That all policies be approved as presented.

367. Other Business:

a) NGA Membership

The CEO reported that NGA membership details had been updated and could now be accessed by all trustees. Administration of the membership was being handled by Picknalls First School.

b) Pen Portraits

The CEO reminded trustees that the ULT website was being updated and that as part of this, pen portraits of trustees and governors were to be included. The template for pen portrait had been circulated by the clerk and trustees were asked to return their completed portrait at the earliest opportunity.

c) ULT Member

The clerk reported that Mr Morley, ULT member, had contacted him to ask him to remind the chair of the trust board that he was to attend his last members' meeting in July before resigning. There was the need therefore to appoint a new member.

368. Date of Next Meeting:

Trustees were reminded that the next termly meeting of the Trust Board was to be held on Wednesday, 30 June 2021 at 5.30pm.

S.Slater

30 June 2021

Signed.....

Date.....