

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 13 May 2020 at 4.30pm.

Present:

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

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, Mr L Trigg. (Trustees noted that Mr Trigg's absence was for health reasons and wished him a full and speedy recovery).

250. Declaration of Interests:

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

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

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

- Approval given to the CEO to work closely with Ryecroft Middle School to support the school improvement programme.
- Approval for CEO to write to headteachers on behalf of the trust board regarding COVID-19 implications for schools.
- Agreed with Stuart Harper for him to become the link trustee for Oldfields Hall Middle School.
- Approval given for the members' AGM to be held remotely, with only trustees invited to attend. The chair reported that Prof E Barnes had been elected as chair of members (replacing Mr G Morley).

It was resolved –

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

252. Trustees' Board Minutes:

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held on Wednesday, 1 April 2020 had been previously circulated.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the meeting be received and approved.

253. Matters Arising:

a) New School (Minute 240(a) refers)

The CEO reported that the project board continued to meet to plan for the opening of the new school in September 2021. However, the impact of the coronavirus on the

building of the school, and the planned housing development, had raised questions around the planned opening date. The CEO further reported that she had discussed this matter with the DfE and a recommendation subsequently given for consideration to be given to the opening date being deferred. The CEO was to also discuss this further with the local authority and Regional Schools Commission

It was resolved –

That the update be noted and trustees agree to the opening of the new school being deferred to September 2022.

- b) School Performance – Ryecroft Middle (Minute 243(a) refers)
The CEO reported that she had met with the headteacher to identify areas for support to bring about the necessary school improvement and would continue to work closely with her.
- c) JCB Equipment Donation (Minute 243(b))
Mr Harper reported that due to the circumstances around COVID-19 the delivery of the donated CAD stations had not yet proved possible. He would, however, continue to pursue this matter and ensure delivery as soon as possible.
- d) Link Trustees (Minute 243(d) refers)
As reported earlier in the meeting, trustees noted that Mr Harper had agreed to be the link trustee for Oldfields Hall Middle School. The CEO confirmed that all schools now had a link trustee.
- e) PR and Marketing Strategy (Minute 243(f) refers)
The CEO reported that SERO were submitting revised quotes for supporting the various support packages identified to improve PR and marketing strategies and quotes also being sought from other similar companies. Possible work would include a re-vamp of the ULT website. Trustees would be kept updated.
- f) Appointment of External Auditor (Minute 244 refers)
The chair confirmed that Mazars LLP had been appointed as the ULT's external auditor and had already started working with the chief finance officer in readiness for the next audit.

254. Coronavirus and Safeguarding - ULT Schools:

The chair reported that as the Government continued to outline proposals for the partial re-opening of schools, it would be likely that a special meeting of the trust board would be held to consider the impact of this for ULT schools. The CEO further reported that headteachers were currently considering the partial re-opening of their schools and currently undertaking risk assessments. Account would be taken of any local or national guidance received around the partial re-opening of schools although some concerns were being expressed regarding the lack of appropriate guidance. Letters had been sent to all parents to inform them of current arrangements. The local governing board for each school had been asked to meet and make recommendations for the partial re-opening of their school taking into account the completed risk assessments.

The CEO further reported that initial Government advice for the partial re-opening of schools for different year groups did not support a three-tier system and concerns had been raised at the middle school forum and with the Regional Schools Commission. Trustees

noted that the first schools would struggle to admit Y4 pupils (rather than Y6 pupils as suggested for primary schools) in addition to the current children of key workers, due to lack of teaching space. Trustees acknowledged that pupil transition should be a key factor when finalising school re-opening arrangements.

Discussion followed and trustees also considered the health and well-being of pupils when re-admitted to schools. They accepted that that this would always remain the key priority and that full and detailed local and national guidance would be sought before any final decisions were taken.

It was resolved –

That the arrangements for the partial re-opening of ULT schools continue to be kept under review and that an extraordinary meeting of the trust board be held, at the appropriate time, to consider individual school risk assessments and recommendations of local governing boards.

255. Performance Management:

The CEO reported that staff appraisal had been discussed at the recent meeting of the SRB, particularly given that teachers would be unable to reach attainment targets due to the current school closures. The teaching unions were in support of the performance management process for teachers being paused and, on this occasion, for pay progression to be automatic. Headteachers were seeking guidance on how to proceed. The CEO reported that not all schools had completed their mid-year reviews of teacher targets and that she was to agree a deadline date by which all schools would be expected to complete the mid-year reviews.

Discussion followed and trustees acknowledged that the school closures came about in the second half of the school year and that it should therefore be possible for mid-year reviews to be completed. Trustees also recognised that a teacher mid-year review can help recognise the quality of the work being undertaken whilst, at the same time, enabling the headteacher to put a support package in place for a teacher should it be necessary.

It was resolved –

- i) That, given that all schools were fully open for the period in question, trustees request the CEO to advise headteachers on the need, wherever possible, to complete all mid-year reviews.
- ii) That completion of the teacher appraisal process be paused until further guidance was received.

256. IT Equipment – To Support Home-Working and Distance Learning:

The CEO reported that this matter had also been raised at the recent meeting of the SRB and the CEO was pleased to report that school arrangements for distance learning were working well but all were continually looking to improve them. The issue of the availability of IT equipment for both teachers and pupils had been raised and it was recognised that not everyone had access to a laptop at home. Schools were provided with some funding to provide laptops for the more vulnerable students but resources had to be found from elsewhere to provide them for other students. Trustees noted that, for example, Thomas

Alleyne's High School was undertaking a number of fund-raising schemes to purchase necessary laptops.

The CEO further reported that most school staff were using their own IT equipment for school related activities and this could therefore have a number of safeguarding implications. A review of IT support across the ULT was necessary, including the roles and responsibilities of the IT support team. This was necessary given that the Trust had grown since the IT support package was agreed, although the quality of support provided was not in question. The CEO also reported that she was discussing with the CEO of Staffordshire University Academy Trust the implications of the shared site between Ryecroft Middle and Dove First Schools particularly regarding shared IT arrangements.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees recognise the importance of distance learning and particularly how it could be used in the future to help narrow the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils.
- ii) That approval be given for the CEO to arrange a full review of IT support available across the ULT and that trustees look forward to receiving the report for consideration at a future meeting.

257. CEO Report:

A copy of the CEO's report had been previously circulated and read. Trustees noted that all key issues from the report had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

It was resolved –

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

258. Education Committee:

Trustees noted that a meeting of the Education committee had recently been held on 28 April 2020 and the committee chair outlined the key issues considered at the meeting. He confirmed that there had been a continued focus on school performance and that other discussions had taken place regarding the implications of COVID-19 for schools and which had also been discussed earlier in this meeting. Consideration had been given to a number of COVID-19 related policies and their approval had been recommended. Minutes of the meeting would be circulated, as usual, for the next meeting of the trust board.

It was resolved –

That the report of the Education committee meeting held on 28 April 2020 be noted.

259. Finance and Audit Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee held on 25 March 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee had recently been held on 6 May 2020. In the absence of the committee chair, Mr Slater reported that the recent meeting of the Finance and Audit committee had not been quorate and that the meeting therefore continued on an informal basis. As a result, a short meeting of the Finance and Audit committee had been arranged immediately

prior to the start of the trust board meeting but had been cancelled due to the enforced absence of the committee chair for health reasons.

Mr Slater outlined the key issues considered informally at the meeting, including in particular:

- School budgets – the 5-year budget modellers had shown likely budget deficits from year three. This will be kept under review and systems put in place to ensure that schools were able to address the projected shortfall in budgets. Approval had already been given for the CEO to endorse staff appointments across ULT schools before adverts were placed. Mr Slater confirmed that any member of staff appointed by schools would be an employee of the ULT and, where possible, could potentially be asked to work at another school if it was considered appropriate.
- Redundancy Scheme – the need to re-instate the proposal to revise the redundancy scheme was recognised as a priority.

It was resolved –

- i) That the minutes of the Finance committee meeting held on 25 March 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 6 May 2020 be received and noted.
- ii) That the re-instatement of the proposal to revise the redundancy scheme be considered at a future meeting of the trust board.

260. Trustee Self-Evaluation – 21 Questions:

The chair reminded trustees that the need for an external review of the trust board had been previously recognised although he recommended that this now be put on hold given that the current focus was the impact of COVID-19 across the ULT. The chair further reported, however, that it was still important for trustees to consider training needs and the 21 questions from the self-review could be used as a basis for this. The chair undertook to contact trustees individually to discuss with them their own individual training needs and what actions the trust board could take to further improve its role. Trustees would also be asked to comment on the role of the chair. Arrangements could be made with the Teaching School to deliver any identified training courses. The expertise of trustees could also be used to deliver appropriate training courses.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees agree to put the external review on hold but that it should be undertaken as soon as it was considered appropriate.
- ii) That Mr Sutcliffe be requested to lead a training course to help trustees better understand and interpret school performance data.

261. ULT Policies:

The following policies had been previously circulated and the CEO confirmed that they had been updated to reflect discussions when considered by the appropriate committee:

- Communications Policy
- Gifts and Hospitality Policy
- Financial Policy and Procedures Manual

It was resolved –

- i) That the Communications policy be considered further to include a response time from schools in responding to any communication and to also make clear the expectation for parents with regard to school communication.
- ii) That the Communications policy be revised and considered further at the next meeting of the trust board for formal approval
- iii) That the Gifts and Hospitality policy and the Financial Policy and Procedures manual be received and approved as presented.

The following other policies had also been previously circulated and the CEO reported that they had been developed in response to the implications of COVID-19:

- **Safeguarding Policy – addendum**
The chair reported that he had looked at the addendum in conjunction with the Safeguarding policy and that it was important to ensure that it was reviewed regularly to ensure that any further Government advice or updates were included.
- **Safer Recruitment Policy – addendum**
The chair reported that he had looked at the addendum in conjunction with the Safer Recruitment policy and confirmed that whilst the addendum seemed fine he had identified a number of recommended changes to the actual policy when it was next reviewed.
- **Internet Safety Policy**
The CEO reported that the draft policy had been discussed with headteachers and no issues had been raised. The ULT's IT manager had, however, recognised the need for a consistent internet safety policy across all schools. It needed to better clarify the use of personal IT equipment and also the use of pen drives. Discussion followed and trustees suggested that MR Oldham be requested to look at the detail of the policy and to identify any possible changes. The CEO was also requested to ask MR Oldham if he would be willing to support the IT review when undertaken.
- **Bereavement Policy**
The CEO reported that this policy had been considered by the Education committee and Rev Sherwin had also looked at the detail of the policy and suggested several amendments which had been incorporated into the final version. It was recommended for approval.

It was resolved –

- i) That the Safeguarding policy and addendum be received and approved, subject to ongoing review.
- ii) That the addendum to the Safer Recruitment policy be approved as presented but that the policy itself be referred to the appropriate committee for further review.
- iii) That the draft Internet Safety policy be received but that Mr Oldham be requested to look at the detail of the policy and suggest any amendments for formal approval at the next meeting of the trust board.

- iv) That the Bereavement policy be approved as presented with thanks in particular to Rev. Sherwin.

262. Other Business:

Record of Thanks

The trustees placed on record their thanks to Dr Clark for all that she was doing to help and support the schools and the wider Trust during such a difficult time due to the implications of COVID-19.

Trustees also placed on record their thanks to headteachers and staff at all local schools for the continued support given to their pupils through distance learning programmes. Parents also valued everything that was being done for their children.

263. Date of Next Meeting:

It was resolved –

That the next meeting of the Trustees' Board again be held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 8 July 2020 at a time to be confirmed.

S.Slater
Signed.....

8 July 2020
Date.....