

## **Uttoxeter Learning Trust Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely and in Oldfields Hall Middle School on Tuesday, 17 March 2020 at 5.30pm.

### **Present:**

Remote - Mr S Slater (in the chair), Mrs V Bennett, Mr S Harper, Mr R Oldham, Rev M Sherwin.  
In school – Mrs P Livesey.

### **Also Present (in school):**

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

### **Apology:**

An apology for absence was received from Mr T Sutcliffe.

### **Welcome and Introduction:**

The chair welcomed, and thanked, trustees for their attendance at this special meeting of the trust board, replacing the meeting of the education committee due to have been held. He confirmed that the meeting had been arranged remotely to enable trustees to participate in the meeting without the need to attend the meeting venue. The agenda for the meeting was to focus on the Coronavirus, and implications for all schools in the ULT, and the response from staff with regard to the letters sent to them concerning the revised redundancy policy.

### **234. Coronavirus and Safeguarding:**

The CEO had previously circulated a copy of a letter that had been sent to parents of all pupils attending ULT schools with regard to the coronavirus and guidance given in line with national guidance. Discussions around business continuity plans had been held at the recent meeting of the Headteacher professional Board (HPB). Trustees were informed that all schools were currently experiencing a high level of staff absences and isolation and for this reason a decision had been taken by the headteacher of Thomas Alleyne's High School to partially close the school (with the exception of Y11 and Y13) with immediate effect. The CEO confirmed that this course of action mirrored decisions being taken at other local and national schools.

Discussion followed and trustees emphasised that their priority was to ensure the health and well-being of staff and pupils and that any decisions to partially close or fully close a school should be taken by the headteacher and local governing board. The CEO and chair of the trust board to also be kept informed. The CEO reported that all schools were working in accordance with their Business Continuity Plans and would continue to focus on facilitating pupil learning and the safeguarding of the more vulnerable pupils and arrangements for this were being determined as necessary by all schools. These arrangements were being shared to ensure that there was some commonality across the schools.

Discussion also took place regarding the schedule of future meetings and the CEO outlined those meetings due to be held in the immediate future. Trustees agreed that meetings for the foreseeable future should be held remotely, through the use of conference calling, Office 365 and skype etc. The CEO would work with IT technicians to ensure that the necessary arrangements were put in place.

Trustees were pleased to note that Mrs Bennett, speaking as a parent of children attending ULT schools, was pleased with the communication from schools to keep parents fully informed and that she had no concerns around the actions being taken in the best interests of all pupils.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees fully support the actions being taken by headteachers and local governing boards to ensure the health and well-being of staff and pupils.
- ii) That a letter be sent, on behalf of trustees, to all ULT staff for all of their hard work during such extreme circumstances.
- iii) That the CEO be requested to continue to explore options to best support remote meetings for both trustees and local governing boards, but that the schedule of meetings be reviewed and meetings postponed if considered appropriate.

### **235. Redundancy Consultation:**

The CEO had previously circulated a summary of responses received from ULT staff regarding the change to the redundancy policy. There was a noticeable difference between the responses received from support staff and teachers and also between the first schools and middle/high schools. The CEO further reported that there had been a discussion earlier that afternoon with lawyers Trowers and Hamlins to seek their views on the proposed changes to the redundancy policy.

Mrs Groom, Insight HR, went through the detail of the telephone conversation and referred in particular to the key issues raised by the lawyers:

- TUPE – possible risk should staff challenge the decision against the basis of TUPE transfer.
- Trade union collective bargaining – possible risk as the direct consultation with staff by trustees could be seen as undermining the legislation around the collective bargaining process with trade unions.
- 3 month response period – possible risk should any final decisions be taken before a three month notice period has been allowed for staff to challenge the proposal.
- Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) – should a decision be taken to dismiss and re-engage staff this scheme allows for staff to access pension benefits if aged over 55 and that the ULT would have to pick up the pension strain. Mrs Groom reported that this advice differed from the advice given by Staffordshire County Council.

Discussion followed and the chair of the trust board reminded trustees that a full and proper consultation process had been followed. Trade unions had been involved at all stages and had not challenged any part of the consultation process other than a request to extend the consultation period, which was agreed. Mrs Groom reported that she would obtain clarification around some of the issues raised by the lawyers and would get back to trustees as quickly as possible.

It was resolved –

That, taking into account the current impact on staff due to the concerns around the Coronavirus, the CEO be requested to write to all staff to inform that no decisions would be taken at this moment in time and would also enable trustees to review and reflect on the information received.

**236. Any Other Business:**

a) Windsor Park Middle School

The chair reported that Windsor Park Middle School had received notification of an Ofsted inspection to be held during this week. However, a decision had subsequently been taken to postpone it due to the current uncertainty facing all schools. The inspection would be re-arranged.

b) School Trips

The chair reported that a number of foreign visits, and others in this country, had been arranged by schools but recently cancelled due to Coronavirus. Whilst many of the cancellations would be covered through insurance there could be some costs that could fall on the schools or parents.

It was resolved –

That trustees fully support decisions taken by schools in the cancellation of school trips and would look to offer financial support where necessary.

c) Record of Thanks

Trustees thanked the CEO for everything that she was doing to support all ULT schools at this time of uncertainty due to the Coronavirus.

Signed.....  
S. Slater

Date.....  
1 April 2020