

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 8 July 2020 at 6.00pm.

Present:

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

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 Mr L Trigg.

264. Declaration of Interests:

A declaration of interest was given from Mr A Storer (Business Manager at Thomas Alleyne's High School) in advance of discussions around the ULT redundancy scheme. (See Minute 273).

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

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

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

- Approval, subject to the support of the CEO, had been given for Ryecroft Middle School to admit Y5 pupils into school before the end of the school year.
- Approval given for headteachers to write to parents to inform them of arrangements for the full re-opening of schools in September. A meeting of the Trust Board would be necessary before the start of the new school year to approve school risk assessments.
- A request had been made for the Teaching School to contact JCB and Rolls Royce to encourage teacher training opportunities given the anticipated number of job losses in those companies. The chair had also written direct to Rolls Royce.
- A group of schools working in close association with each other were seeking options for joining a multi-academy trust and included an approach to the ULT. A number of questions relating to this had been raised and the chair had responded appropriately.

It was resolved –

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

266. Trustees' Board Minutes:

Minutes of meetings of the Trustees' Board held on Wednesday, 13 May; Wednesday, 27 May; and Monday, 8 June 2020 had been previously circulated.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of those meetings be received and approved.

267. Matters Arising:

Minutes of meeting held on 13 May 2020

a) New School (Minute 253(a) refers)

The CEO reported that it would be necessary to communicate with all key stakeholders regarding the decision to defer opening of the new school until September 2022 and that support with this would be given by the local authority. The project board would next meet in September to determine a revised timeline for the build of the new school.

b) PR and Marketing Strategy (Minute 253(e) refers)

The CEO reported that SERO Creative had been successful in the tendering process to provide marketing / PR support from June – August 2020 inclusive. Work had already started and included an update to the ULT website and the ULT's Vision, Mission and Values statement. A copy of this had been previously circulated. Headteachers were also providing an input and the document would also be shared with the SRB and ULT members at meetings to be held the following week. Headteachers had also been asked to share the document with their staff and local governing boards.

It was resolved –

That the Vision, Mission and Values statement be received and that trustees asked to submit any views to the CEO before the statement was formally approved at a future meeting.

c) Staff Appraisal (Minute 255 refers)

The CEO reminded trustees that a decision was necessary regarding staff appraisal for the current year and that DfE guidance for completion of the process remained as previously reported. The CEO confirmed that most staff mid-year reviews had been completed as requested by trustees. Discussion followed and consideration also given to views of the unions regarding this process.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees approve completion of the staff appraisal process, as required by the DfE, and that the mid-year reviews be taken as the basis for this and for the subsequent award of any pay increases.
- ii) That trustees would expect headteachers, in the usual way, to write to any member of staff if progress against any agreed targets were not on target and appropriate support given.

d) Remote Learning (Minute 256 refers)

The CEO reported that there were opportunities for schools to secure DfE funding to help develop remote learning packages. Most schools were using Microsoft Teams for this purpose but an interest, particularly from the first schools, was also being shown in the use of Google Suite. The CEO further reported that schools continued to develop their remote learning policies and also sharing them with each other. All safeguarding requirements were being met and GDPR guidance being given by the local authority to ensure compliance.

Discussion followed and Mr Harper outlined a programme being used by JCB – “Turning Technology” – and felt that this could also be of value to schools. He offered to help and support the development of this with schools if considered appropriate.

It was resolved –

- i) That the update on remote learning be received and noted.
 - ii) That Mr Harper be thanked for his offer of help and support with this matter and that he be requested to discuss this matter further with the CEO.
- e) Trustee Training Programme (Minute 260 refers)
The chair reported that, with the exception of one, he had contacted all trustees to discuss with them their own individual training needs and what actions the trust board could take to further improve its role. He had written a report of those discussions and a copy had been previously circulated. The chair was pleased to confirm the positive views around the role of the trust board in support and development of the ULT, whilst various training opportunities were also identified. Succession planning, for both trustees and central staff roles, had been identified as a key factor requiring further consideration. The chair thanked trustees for their responses to the questions asked of them.

It was resolved –

That the chair’s report be received and noted, with thanks to him, and that this matter be included on the agenda for the next meeting for further discussion.

Minutes of Meeting held on 8 June 2020

Partial re-opening of schools on Monday, 15 June 2020

The chair reminded trustees of their decision to allow first schools to only admit Y4 pupils for one day only before the end of the school year, and not the five days had they had requested. Headteachers had been disappointed with this decision and at a meeting of the School Representation Board held on 9 June a formal request had been made for this decision to be reviewed.

The chair further reported that he had agreed to review the decision and headteachers asked to submit formal plans to show how the admittance of Y4 pupils for up to five days would be part of a formal transition programme. Copies of the school proposals had been received and forwarded to all trustees who had been asked to confirm their individual approval, or not, via email. The chair confirmed that there had been full individual support for first schools to admit Y4 pupils for up to five days before the end of the school year.

It was resolved –

That the updated admission arrangements for Y4 pupils be noted and that trustees give formal approval of individual trustee decisions regarding this matter.

268. Coronavirus and Safeguarding - ULT Schools:

a) Partial Re-opening of schools

The CEO was pleased to report that the partial re-opening of all ULT schools had been very positive and that the arrangements for Y4 and Y8 pupils, as outlined above, had been well received by parents.

b) Full Re-opening of schools in September

The CEO reported that headteachers were currently updating their risk assessments in line with Government guidance in readiness for the full re-opening of schools in September, and plans being shared with their governing board. Procedures put in place would differ between schools given the nature of the different school sites, but all would have to prioritise required social distancing and necessary cleaning programmes. School transport would also be a challenge and the local authority was preparing further guidance around this. There would also be the need for a staggered start for the different year groups when schools open in September.

c) Recovery of Education

Following the full re-opening of schools in September there would be full focus on the recovery of education for pupils and the CEO was pleased to report that she had been able to join a regional group to help support this. Trustees would be kept informed of how this might benefit ULT schools.

It was resolved –

- i) That the update on Covid-19/safeguarding issues be noted and trustees recognise that individual school risk assessments should be determined by local governing boards.
- ii) That a meeting of the trust board would be necessary before the start of the new school year for formal approval of the arrangements for the full re-opening of all ULT schools.

269. Trust priorities 2020/2022:

The chair reminded trustees of the need to continually monitor and review trust priorities. The CEO had included trust priorities for 2020/2022 in her July report, a copy of which had been previously circulated. Identified priorities were:

- recovery strategy in response to Covid-19
- develop excellent curriculum offer
- monitor, review and implement risk assessments
- support staff development, leadership and succession planning
- develop back office services and the central team
- embed financial stability

It was resolved –

That the trust priorities 2020/2022 as outlined in the CEO report be noted and approved.

270. 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. Other matters included:

- Data assessment – discussions continued between the CEO and headteachers regarding the accuracy of assessment and would remain a focus in the development plan.
- Ofsted inspections - although Ofsted and SIAM inspections were currently on hold, work continued with supporting schools in readiness for when inspections recommenced.
- Employer/Stakeholder engagement – although currently on hold, this remains a priority in the ULT development plan for September 2020. To support this the CEO had joined the Trust ASCL Professional Development Reference Group whose aim was to develop its support and CPD offer for trust leaders.
- Finance – the CEO and CFO were meeting with representatives from Staffordshire University Academy Trust (SUAT) to discuss the shared site of Ryecroft and Dove schools. The memorandum of understanding between the schools was being reviewed together with SLAs. Trustees would be kept updated regarding this.
- Governing Board vacancies – the recruitment of trustees and governors continued to remain under constant review.

It was resolved –

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

271. ULT Finance Report:

The CFO reported on the following financial matters:

a) Consolidated budget 2020/21

The CFO reported that the ESFA had confirmed that, due to the impact of Covid-19, budget returns should be submitted by 29 September rather than 31 July as in previous years. The need to provide 3-year budget forecasts had also been removed. The Finance and Audit committee had looked at both the consolidated budget 2020/21 and the 3-year budget modeller which reflected changes made to DfE funding grants

The CFO further reported that among the many implications of Covid-19, the increased financial costs to schools would be significant. Pro-forma had been made available for schools to record the extra expenditure being incurred and Government funding was to be made available to support schools. However, notification had been received that schools would not be able to access the additional funding if budgets were carrying a surplus. The CFO confirmed that this would apply to some of the ULT schools.

Discussion followed and consideration given to whether schools should submit separate bids for financial support in response to Covid-19 or for a bid to be submitted on behalf of the ULT.

It was resolved –

- i) That as financial decisions are delegated to local governing boards, individual school claims should be submitted for additional funding to support Covid-19 related additional expenditure.

- ii) That the trust board would meet before 29 September 2020 to formally approve the 2020/2021 consolidated budget.

b) CIF bids 2020/21 – outcomes

The CFO reported that the outcome for 2020/21 CIF bids had recently been received and the only successful bid had been the one submitted by Picknalls First School for safeguarding and security works. Schools would have the opportunity to appeal against their failed bids from September. The implications of the failed bids were that, as they were all to support identified building improvements, funds would have to be found from the school budget to undertake the necessary work. This would make use of any surplus funds that schools may have.

It was resolved –

That the outcome of the CIF bids be noted with disappointment that only one bid had been successful.

272. Growth of ULT / Trust Capacity Fund Application:

The chair reported that at recent meetings of both committees, consideration had been given to applying for financial support from the Trust Capacity Fund. Both committees had supported this given that the necessary criteria for growth of a multi-academy trust had been met due to Richard Clarke First School agreeing to join the ULT. It was hoped to finalise the arrangements for this during the autumn term which would enable the bid to be submitted by the deadline of the end of December 2020.

It was resolved –

That trustees fully support an application for financial support from the Trust Capacity Fund.

273. Review of Redundancy Policy:

The chair reminded trustees that approval had previously been given to revise the redundancy policy and that staff had been informed of this decision. They had been asked to confirm whether or not they supported the proposed changes. However, due to the closure of schools due to Covid-19 the matter had been put on hold and the implementation date deferred. The chair further reported that this matter had been discussed at the recent meeting of the Finance and Audit committee and decision taken to recommend that consideration be given by the trust board to reinstate the proposals for the revised policy.

The CEO further reported that in anticipation of this, views had been sought from ULT lawyers regarding the proposed changes to the redundancy payments and a letter had been received in response. This highlighted some of the risks that trustees should consider before implementing the changes, including the role of the unions in this process. The CEO undertook to circulate a copy of the letter to all trustees.

It was resolved –

- i) That the CEO be requested to make further checks regarding the legal implications of implementing the proposed changes and to discuss the matter further with unions.
- ii) That this matter be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the trust board for further discussion and subsequent decision.

274. Education Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of the Education committee held on 28 April 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Education committee had recently been held on 23 June 2020 and the committee chair outlined the issues that had been considered. This included a report from staff from the Teaching School on the continuing progress being made against agreed KPIs. Particular focus had also been given to the partial re-opening of schools.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Education committee held on 28 April 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 23 June 2020 be noted.

275. Finance and Audit Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee held on 6 May 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee had recently been held on 24 June 2020. The chair of that meeting outlined the issues that had been considered.

The chair of the trust board also reported that consideration had been given to the importance of curriculum led financial planning and benchmarking against other schools. Schools were being asked to provide the necessary information to support this. The CEO reported that she was working with ASCL to help put a bespoke model together that would better support benchmarking against schools in a 3-tier system.

It was resolved –

- i) That the minutes of the Finance and Audit committee meeting held on 6 May 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 24 June 2020 be received and noted.
- ii) That trustees fully support the development of a model for curriculum led financial planning of ULT schools.

276. Policy Approval:

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

- Communications Policy (changes recommended at the last meeting of the trust board)
- Whistle-blowing Policy (recommended for approval by Finance & Audit committee)
- Fixed Assets Policy (recommended for approval by Finance & Audit committee)
- Investment Policy (recommended for approval by Finance & Audit committee)
- SPS Discretionary Policies (this had previously been approved and the CEO confirmed that they remained fit for purpose)

It was resolved –

That all policies outlined above be received and approved.

277. Other Business:

(The CEO and CFO left the meeting at this point)

a) Appointment of CEO

The chair reminded trustees that Dr Clark, CEO, had been in post for 6 months since her appointment from the beginning of January and that the initial six-month probationary period was now at an end.

It was resolved –

That trustees fully support the continued employment of Dr Clark as CEO, with thanks to her for everything that she had done, and continued to do, in support of the ULT and its schools during a difficult period due to Covid-19.

b) Record of Thanks

The chair undertook to write, on behalf of the trust board, to the CFO to thank him for all the work he was doing to support the ULT. He would also write to headteachers to thank them and to also ask them to pass on trustees thanks to all members of staff.

278. 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, 14 October 2020 at 5.30pm.

Trustees were also reminded that extraordinary meetings of the trust board would be held before that date to formally approve risk assessments for the re-opening of ULT schools and to also approve the consolidated 2020/21 budget. Dates would be circulated once agreed.

Mr S Slater

Signed.....

14 October 2020

Date.....