

**Uttoxeter Learning Trust
Trustees' Board**

Minutes of a meeting of the Trustees' Board held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 9 December 2020 at 5.30pm.

Present:

Mr S Slater (chair), Mrs V Bennett, Mr S Harper, Mrs P Livesey, 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

298. 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 304).

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

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

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

- As previously agreed, he was working with the CEO to prepare a letter to be sent to all schools, on behalf of the Trust Board, to thank headteachers and all staff for the work they were doing to ensure that schools could remain open.
- Approval had been given for the headteacher of Thomas Alleyne's High School to send certain classes home due to staff absences.
- Discussion had taken place at the recent meeting of the School Representation Board (SRB) regarding the letter recently received from the DfE stating that DfE approval was required before any decision was taken to close a school. The chair had written to the DfE to seek clarification around the guidance, given headteacher responsibilities to ensure the safety and well-being of staff and students. With this in mind, approval had been given at SRB for headteachers to continue to take appropriate actions in line with health and safety responsibilities.
- As link trustee for Thomas Alleyne's High School he had attended the recent governing body meeting. At that meeting, governors had been asked by the chair to consider the appointment of Dr M Jary (recently retired governor of the school for many years) as associate governor but he had advised governors that Trust Board approval should be sought before making such an appointment.
- Contact had now been made with six of the eight chairs of governors to seek their views on the role of the Trust Board and their suggestions for developing the relationship between trustees and local school governors.
- As agreed by the Finance and Audit committee, approval had been given for headteachers to use school reserves, if necessary, to help fund decisions taken in response to Covid-19 implications. Much of the additional funding was required for staff cover.
- Together with the headteacher of Thomas Alleyne's High School, a request had been made to meet with the leader of Staffordshire County Council to seek his

support in the re-build of the school through national funding that was being made available.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees fully support all actions taken by the chair, with thanks to him.
- ii) That trustees agree in principle to the appointment of an associate governor at Thomas Alleyne's High School but that the chair of governors be requested to write to the Trust Board to seek formal approval.

300. Trust Board Minutes:

Minutes of a meeting of the Trust Board held on Wednesday, 21 October 2020 had been previously circulated.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of that meeting be received and approved.

301. Matters Arising:

a) Vision, Mission and Values Statement (Minute 286(a) refers)

The CEO reported that a suggestion had been previously made to perhaps switch the current ULT motto 'Inspired Teaching, Inspiring Children' to Inspiring Children, Inspired Teaching'

It was resolved –

That the ULT motto be retained as shown in the Vision, Mission and Values statement.

b) Richard Clarke First School (Minute 303 refers)

The CEO reported that the consultation for the school to join the ULT had been completed and the request was to be considered by the RSC's Headteacher Board on 17 December. A project steering group has been established to plan the timeline and support the school in joining the Trust. The Finance and Audit committee had recently given approval help the school fund the required legal services to commence work on searches, which would be paid back once academy grant funding was made available to the school.

The CEO further reported that discussions had been held with the local authority regarding the Tom Thumb nursery based at the school, and whether the land that it currently occupied should remain with the local authority or transfer with the school on becoming an academy. The CEO was pleased to confirm that there was some indication that the land will remain with the school but further clarification was being sourced.

c) Remote Learning

The CEO was pleased to report that schools had successfully implemented remote learning for pupils needing to self-isolate. Staff CPD was ongoing to develop, review and ensure consistency of delivery. Quality assurance was occurring through parent/pupil feedback, monitoring engagement levels and sampling live lessons.

d) Trust Capacity Fund Bid

The chair reported that the bid was currently being finalised and would be submitted before the deadline at the end of the week. Trustees were informed that if the bid was successful then the funding would have to be spent before April 2021. He outlined the key issues included in the bid which, if successful, would help fund the growth of the ULT.

The CFO further reported that information around school to school benchmarking was required to be included with the bid and that this information was collated through the financial dashboard tool kit. School data was being included but, due to problems with the website used for this purpose, the report he was putting together was not yet ready to share with local governing bodies or trustees.

It was resolved –

That trustees fully support the Trust Capacity Fund bid to be submitted and that the benchmarking information, as collated by the CFO, be submitted if requested.

302. External Audit:

The chair reported that the Finance and Audit committee had met with the Mazars, external auditor, at its recent meeting and had received and discussed the draft audit report. A number of suggested changes had been made and the auditor had agreed to include them in the final report. The committee chair also stated that there had been no significant issues in the draft report to concern trustees.

A copy of the final audit report had only been received earlier in the day and, although immediately circulated to trustees, the chair rightly stated that there had been insufficient time for trustees to read the report, and consider the detail, before the meeting. He therefore suggested that this item be deferred and that a special meeting of the Trust Board be held early in January to discuss the report in detail before giving formal approval. This would still enable the timeframe to be met for submitting the final audit report to the ESFA by 31 January 2021.

It was resolved –

That the Audit Report be received and that a special meeting of the Trust Board be held in early January 2021 for it to be properly considered before formal approval was given.

303. Safeguarding / Covid-19 and ULT Schools:

The CEO informed trustees that details on how schools were continuing to cope with Covid-19 had been included in her report. All schools were currently completing an audit that had been requested by Staffordshire County Council, to be returned by the end of the week. No concerns had been expressed regarding this.

The CEO further reported that there had been an increase in the number of staff and students having to self-isolate since half-term but this was due to positive Covid-19 cases stemming from the community rather than within school. Headteachers continued to do everything necessary to ensure that their schools could remain open but it was a challenge.

The chair further reported that he continued to acknowledge, on behalf of the Trust Board, all of the work that headteachers were doing which was over and above what was normally expected of them.

The CEO referred to a recent letter to schools from the DfE to suggest that schools use one of their INSET days and to close for the Christmas holiday on Friday, 18 December. This suggestion had been made to ensure that school staff would not be contacted by Test and Trace, if it had been necessary, on Christmas eve. Trustees noted that the first schools had mixed views regarding this, the middle schools did not support closure on that day, and that the high school was looking to close.

Discussion followed and trustees were also informed that this was not an extra INSET day and that any school agreeing to this would have to use one of its existing days. Rev Sherwin reported that St Mary's School in Uttoxeter, where she was chair of governors, had already agreed not to close on that day. Trustees also recognised that many parents would likely express concerns around the late notice of a school closure for childcare reasons and also that INSET days for the school year had already been set and with plans in place. Changes would result in further disruptions for schools.

It was resolved –

- i) That schools be advised not to close for an INSET day on Friday, 18 December 2020.
- ii) That should any member of staff have to respond to any Test and Trace calls on Christmas eve, they would be given time-off in lieu.

304. Review of Redundancy Scheme:

(Mr Storer declared an interest prior to discussion of this item).

A report had previously been circulated giving a summary of the review process to-date and the CEO went through the detail of it. The report had also been considered at recent meetings of the Education and Finance and Audit committee meetings. Trustees noted that the unions had confirmed that, in their view, collective bargaining had been undertaken on behalf of their members and the CEO further reported that the lawyers had also recently responded positively to the situation regarding new appointees to the Trust and for decisions to dismiss and re-engage to be communicated through headteachers. The CEO reminded trustees that a letter to inform staff of the decision to change the redundancy scheme had been previously issued and that a summary of staff responses to the letter had been considered at a previous meeting of the Trust Board. The summary had confirmed that a significant number of staff had not responded at all to the letter.

Discussion followed and, having previously paused the process, trustees considered the next steps to be taken. The CEO advised that if a decision was taken to go ahead with the revised redundancy scheme then a formal process around dismissal and re-engagement would have to be followed for staff not supporting the change. The Trust's HR adviser had advised that this should include personal consultation meetings with all staff not accepting the change although the lawyers had indicated that this was not necessary. Trustees questioned the process to be followed for those staff who had not responded to their letter.

Before reaching a decision, trustees again considered the implications of not revising the redundancy scheme and remained of the view that if changes were not made then this could impact on the future financial viability of the Trust.

It was resolved –

- i) That trustees agree to proceed with the revised redundancy scheme, as previously conveyed to staff, and the CEO be requested to seek clarification around legal obligations in dismissing and re-engaging staff and whether there was a requirement to consult personally with members of staff not supporting the changes.
- ii) That this matter be included on the agenda for the special meeting of the Trust Board to be held in January to consider the further advice received and to also consider whether the 2-year lead-in to the revised scheme was still necessary given the delay in implementing the change.

305. 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.

It was resolved –

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

306. ULT Finance Report:

The CFO reported that detailed consideration of financial matters continued to be given by the Finance and Audit committee, with actions taken as necessary. He further reported, however, that in line with trustee approval the pay award for all staff, in accordance with national guidance, had now been actioned with effect from September 2020.

It was resolved –

That the CFO financial update be noted.

307. Trust Improvement Plan:

The CEO reported that the Trust Improvement Plan continued to be developed, with support given from Mrs Rudge, headteacher at Thomas Alleyne's High School. The CEO further reported that she hoped to share the draft report with trustees at a meeting early in the new year.

It was resolved –

That the update on the Trust Improvement Plan be noted.

308. Education Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of the Education committee held on 22 September 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Education committee had recently been held on 24 November 2020 and Rev Sherwin, committee chair, outlined the issues that had been considered. In particular, Mrs Rudge, headteacher at Thomas Alleyne's High School, had been welcomed to the meeting to give an update on the Teaching School.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Education committee held on 22 September 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 24 November 2020 be noted.

309. Finance and Audit Committee:

Trustees had been previously circulated with minutes of a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee held on 30 September 2020. Trustees also noted that a meeting of the Finance and Audit committee had recently been held on 2 December 2020 and Mr Trigg, committee chair, outlined the issues that had been considered. In particular he reported that Mazars Ltd had attended the meeting to present the draft external audit, as previously discussed. He was also pleased to report that a number of school internal audit reports had been received which were all positive and contained nothing to cause Trust concern.

It was resolved –

That the minutes of the Finance and Audit committee meeting held on 30 September 2020 be received and accepted and that the report of the meeting held on 2 December 2020 be received and noted.

310. IT Review:

The CEO reported that meetings continued to be held with various trustees to consider the scope of the IT review and to develop business cases in readiness for going out to tender early in the new year. A more detailed report would be available for the next meeting.

It was resolved –

That the update on the IT review be noted and that trustees await further details.

311. Trustee/Governor Training Programme:

The chair reported that, together with other trustees, he had attended the level 1 Safeguarding course held the previous evening. A Safer Recruitment training session was also being arranged and trustees would be advised of this shortly.

The chair further reported that he had now spoken with most chairs of governors and there had been support for joint training sessions, as appropriate, for trustees and governors. The chairs would also be inviting link trustees to attend governing body meetings and had also asked for information, if available, to show how the effectiveness of the ULT compared with other MATs.

It was resolved –

That the chair be thanked for his update and that trustees would continue to explore ways of strengthening their relationship with local governing bodies.

312. 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.

313. Policy Approval:

A number of policies had been previously circulated and the CEO outlined the tracked changes that had been made to each of them, to reflect previous discussions.

It was resolved –

That the following policies be received and approved as presented, taking account of the suggested changes:

- Staff Code of Conduct
- Staff Discipline policy
- Pay policy

314. Other Business:

Uttoxeter Rugby Club

Mr Harper, as chair of the junior section of Uttoxeter Rugby Club, reported that he was seeking for the club to develop a relationship with the ULT and to secure the long-term use of suitable school grounds for training and match purposes.

It was resolved –

That the chair be requested to discuss this matter with Mr Harper and advise how best to proceed with this request.

315. Date of Next Meeting:

- i) Trustees were reminded that the next termly meeting of the trust board would again be held remotely (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday, 10 February 2021 at 5.30pm.
- ii) That trustees would be informed of the suggested date for the special meeting to be held in January 2021 as soon as possible.

Signed.....
S. Slater

Date.....
10 February 2021