

The Link Academy Trust  
**Audit Committee**  
**Minutes: 20 January 2021**  
5pm  
A/1/21

*The meeting was conducted online using MS Teams due to the Covid-19 pandemic*

**Present:** Mr Dominic Course (Chair)  
Miss Sarah Cox

**In attendance:** Mrs Nicky Dunford – Chief Executive Officer  
Mrs Rachel Hill – Clerk  
Mr Matt Matthew – Trust Business Manager  
Cheryl Mathieson – Chair of Trustees

**Welcome:** The Chair welcomed Sarah Cox, newly appointed Trustee, to the meeting.

**Apologies:** Mr Jason Hayward-Jones

**Declaration of Business Interests:** The CEO and Dominic Course are Trustees of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (SDMAT). The CEO is a Trustee of the Bearnas Education Foundation.

1. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of 11 November 2020 were approved as a true and accurate record.

2. **Matters Arising**

2.1 **Item 2.3. Health & Safety.** The TBM advised that the Link had recently signed up to a new software package called Every for H&S compliance. Training will start next week for Health & Safety staff, followed by Administrators.

2.2 **Item 9 Minibus Policy.** The CEO reported that each school has their own method for managing their minibus. *DC asked whether this should form part of the School Transport Policy?* The CEO replied that there isn't such a Policy but procedures are in place that are strictly adhered to. The CEO agreed to research how other schools manage their minibuses.

**Action CEO**

2.3 **Transfer of funds from the SDMAT schools with the Westcountry Schools Partnership**  
The Chair advised that he has not as yet followed up the outstanding sum of approximately £16,000 that should have been transferred from SDMAT to WEST. The TBM advised that the SDMAT deadline to sign off their accounts with the ESFA is 31 January 2021. The Chair agreed to action the matter by following it up with WEST and copying in Francis Clark.

**Action Chair**

2.4 **DC to speak to IJC regarding responsibility of the Risk Register.** The Chair advised that he had spoken to IJC about this matter and responsibility for the Risk Register had now been handed to him.

2.5 **CEO to review the Audit section of the Risk Register.** This matter is dealt with under agenda item 7 below.

2.6 **Building Projects.** The TBM reported that the three CIF projects for Tedburn (Mechanical & Electrical (M&E)), Broadhempston (M&E) and Yeoford (roof) have been completed and returns submitted to the ESFA. All projects came in at cost or under cost. The next CIF applications have been submitted before the deadline. A pre-start meeting with the contractors was held on 19.01.2021 in relation to the Ilington project for the pre-school and Early Years classrooms. Digging works will commence 25.01.2021 with a programme which will go through to July 2021. Classes are being held in the Village Hall and are working well. *The Chair asked if there had been any issues or delays due to Covid-19?* The TBM advised that this had not been the case. A minor risk could be that one of the pre-commencement conditions from the Building Control planning was that an archaeologist has to be on site for part of

the building work. Total project price was estimated at approximately £368,000 however the tender came in less than the option appraisal. £248,000 is funded by the ESFA. The school is contributing £31,000 approximately. Approximately £19,000 has been spent for the project to reach this point.

- 2.7 Annual Report & Financial Statements. The Annual Report and Financial Statements were approved by the Board of Trustees at their meeting of 07.12.2020. The TBM advised that final signatures were applied on 19.01.2021. The Auditors require some final minutes of post year-end meetings of Trustees prior to submission the week commencing 25.01.2021.

**Action TBM/Clerk**

- 2.8 Griffin Accountancy. Their appointment as the internal auditors for 2020/2021 was confirmed by Trustees at their meeting of 07.12.2020. The Internal Audit will also be dealt with under agenda item 4 below.
- 2.9 Constitution & Terms of Reference. The Constitution and Terms of Reference for the Audit Committee was approved by the Board of Trustees at their meeting of 07.12.2020 and are now filed in SharePoint.

### 3. Academies Financial Handbook – review of compliance as a Trust

Compliance with the 2020 Academies Financial Handbook was discussed. It was agreed that the Academy was compliant with the areas of change.

*The Chair noted that under **General controls and transparency** within the Handbook item 2.12 states a termly review of pupil number projections should take place. The Chair asked how this took place?* The CEO replied that pupil number projections were drawn up by her at the beginning of each academic year and numbers for 2021/2022 would be ready for distribution to Trustees following a check with Executive/Academy Heads against these numbers. *The Chair queried whether pupil number projections were a fixed and rolling item in the Executive/Academy Head reports?* The CEO confirmed this, adding that she also writes a summary report on each school including the number in school against their capacity, the PAN and the projected numbers against their PAN. The TBM added that all schools now regularly check their admission numbers as part of budget planning reports and these are presented to the Finance & General Purposes committee. *The Chair added that in terms of long term risk, pupil numbers is a risk which the Academy continually faces as it impacts on income. CM added that pupil numbers were challenged at F&GP meetings and that the Board of Trustees also received the CEO's report mentioned above.* The CEO continued that there are currently three schools that are being closely monitored to ensure class numbers are relevant to pupil numbers.

*The Chair noted that the other change to the Financial Handbook was the financial reporting and that Trustees were now receiving regular reporting through the Directors Dashboard (DDD). The Chair asked how Trustees could raise questions about information within the DDD outside of meetings?* The TBM advised that any questions could be emailed directly to him. *The Chair added that he wished to ask a question relating to the varying percentages of budget spent by schools on Teaching Assistants.* The TBM advised that the Kreston Benchmarking report was used. Benchmarking also takes place with Bishop Fleming from the last set of accounts. A further self-assessment tool is then used. Each school is also assessed individually.

The matter of catering was discussed. *The Chair noted that catering contractors have been contracted and due to Covid-19 there are fewer children in school buying meals and he asked how the TBM was dealing with this?* The TBM advised that an analysis of the situation would be taken at half term.

### 4. Internal Audit

The TBM advised that there was nothing further to add following the last report received by Griffin in November 2020. The next area for internal audit would be Risk Management which would include budgeting and monitoring with particular emphasis on the work completed during and post Covid-19. Payroll systems and income systems would also be scrutinised. *The Chair asked when this would be undertaken?* The TBM advised towards the latter half of term but that he would ring Griffin to confirm.

**Action TBM**

5. **Policies:**

- Data Management and ICT Security Policy. The CEO pointed out various amendments that needed to be made to this policy. It was agreed that the Clerk would make these changes and send to the CEO for approval

**Action Clerk/CEO**

- Data Protection Policy. Clerk to make minor amendments and then forward to Trustees for approval.

**Action Clerk**

- Individual Rights Policy. It was agreed that this policy could be forwarded to Trustees for approval.

**Action Clerk**

- Subject Access Requests Policy and Subject Access Request form. It was agreed that the Chair would review this policy and send his comments to the CEO and Clerk.

**Action Chair**

- Records Retention and Disposal Policy. It was agreed that the CEO would ensure the disposal bag was covered in the policy.

**Action CEO**

6. **Health & Safety**

The CEO advised that there were no incidents to report. An online learning protocol has taken place with E/AHs to ensure parents have the protocol in place for their children and home learning. One complaint has been received from a parent relating to online PE and posting comments on Facebook. Parents have been made aware that they should log their children into Facebook and supervise and check sessions. Any comments on Facebook should be written by the parent/s. In addition, Teams Meetings have been smooth and feedback has been positive. Three letters have been sent to Ofsted complimenting the Link's work with schools and pupils during this lockdown.

7. **Risk Register**

It was confirmed by the Chair that the responsibility for the Risk Register sits with the Audit committee.

The CEO read through the eleven control lines of the Regulation & Statutory Compliance section of the Risk Register and suggested changes to both the narrative and scoring for each line. Each proposed change was discussed by the committee in depth. The committee agreed to the recommended changes and the CEO agreed to update this section of the Risk Register accordingly.

**Action CEO**

8. **Data Protection**

There were no issues to report.

9. **Safeguarding**

Engagement is being closely monitored as part of general process as well as reporting on vulnerable children.

*SC asked if online attendance was recorded?* The CEO replied that attendance is recorded on an attendance sheet. An Engagement Report is also drawn up each week using Teams.

Vulnerable children have been identified and encouraged to attend school. AHs will contact the CEO with any major concerns.

*The Chair asked if the Trust was receiving any more referrals or flag ups for domestic violence due to the pandemic?* The CEO replied that this was the case, and sometimes when a family member's mental health had been affected due to the pandemic. E/AHs are being extra vigilant. TA's are wonderful at spotting where there could be any concerns and report to the AHs who react immediately. Cases are also supported through the Inclusion Hub. *CM added that it must be quite hard to identify domestic violence online.* The CEO agreed and

added that this was why it was best for the vulnerable children attend school. The extended key worker group was discussed and noted by the committee.

10. **Date of future meetings**  
Wednesday 12 May 2021