



Mid Devon Local Advisory Committee (LAC)
Minutes of the meeting held via Microsoft Teams
Monday, 19 January 2026 at 5 pm

Name	Role/Type of Governor	School	
Joanna (Bidly) Hooper (JH)	Chair – Foundation Governor	Morchard Bishop/across the LAC	P
Bruce Abbott (BA)	Parent Governor – Vice Chair	Yeoford	P
Hannah Bancroft (AH)	Staff (Academy Head) Governor	Across the LAC	P
Mat Boulton (MB)	Parent Governor	Cheriton Bishop	Ap
Todd Chenore (TC)	Trustee Appointed Governor	Across the LAC	P
Catherine Cozens (CC)	Parent Governor	Morchard Bishop	P
Tom Woodley (TW)	Parent Governor	Tedburn St Mary	Ap
Vacancy	Staff Governor	Across the LAC	
Pam Down (Clerk)	Clerk	Mid Devon LAC	P
Charlotte Roe (GP)	Governance Professional	Link Academy Trust	P
Rachael Sharpe (CEO)	CEO	Link Academy Trust	P

Present/Apologies/Absent

		ACTION
1	WELCOME AND APOLOGIES JH, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting, including Rachael Sharpe, CEO, present for items 1-4 only. Apologies received from MB and TW – approved .	
2	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: Nothing pertaining to the Agenda of this meeting.	
3	APPROVAL OF THE P1 MINUTES FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2025 The Minutes were approved and will be signed electronically by the Chair. They will be forwarded to HR to be uploaded onto the Trust website.	Chair/Clerk
4	MATTERS ARISING from 24.11.2025 (not covered elsewhere in the Agenda) Governors to review the responses to the questions raised at the previous LAC and confirm if any supplementary questions:	
4.1	MBS – new server request , escalated on the Risk Register and known at Board level – still nothing further heard by the School. The server is not working and the Internet connection is being lost every few minutes.	MBS new server request on RR – update required
4.2	Minibus – The AH had spoken to the other LAC AHs. As all schools/classes are of varying sizes, the use of a minibus would have limited effectiveness so would not be viable. In addition, there are no funds available. Agreed to remove this item from the agenda. The AH was thanked for moving this matter forward.	
4.3	The GP advised the CEO intends, where possible, to be present for the first ten minutes of each LAC meeting. This would enable the regular flow of communication between governors and feedback with the S&C. The CEO suggested holding a Chairs’ meeting a week prior to the round of LAC meetings to update and keep Chairs informed of Trust business in order to feed into their LAC meetings. The Chair was asked to consider this suggestion. The CEO confirmed this would be in addition to attendance at the S&C Committee.	
		Chair to consider meeting other Chairs/CEO prior to LAC meetings

<p>4.3i</p>	<p>Launch of Strategic Plan 2025-2028: This had been launched with parents based on the feedback received from Schools, Governance/Trustees. There are five key strategic priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ High quality inclusive education ▪ People ▪ Culture ▪ Finance and Operations ▪ Governance <p>There is a robust action plan to support the priorities into the next three years; as a MAT and with individual action plans for each school.</p>	
<p>4.3ii</p>	<p>Review of the Central Team had taken place during the Autumn Term with a proposal to reduce the number on the Central Team; some roles will no longer exist from September 2026. Individual meetings will be held on Friday to be followed by a consultation with the rest of the Trust. The consultation period will finish on 4 February when the CEO and SLT, with the Board, will finalise which roles will no longer be in existence and how the Central Team will look like from September 2026.</p> <p>Some staff changes are already known; the DoE has secured a job as HM Inspector and will be leaving the Trust at April. The DoI will retire in April 2026. This presents a number of opportunities and the AHs are very much involved, with anyone within the Trust being able to contribute from next week. The CEO acknowledged this is an unsettled period for staff; the SLT is aware there is a lot of change happening at once yet soon there will be further clarity. The CEO asked if there were any questions.</p> <p><i>A governor had two questions:</i></p> <p><i>i) Regarding the proposed streamlining, is it planned to replace the role of DoE or would that be shared amongst current staff?</i> The CEO advised there would not initially be an appointment made for the role of DoE. Recruitment often takes a term and there would be time taken to think about what the role brings to the Trust, what is good about it and what is not so good or could be done elsewhere. The CEO's vision would be a replacement, but what that would look like is still uncertain. There were two points connected with this:</p> <p>a) Having a DoE sometimes may mean AHs become reliant on that person and often wait for that person to come into the school to find out what actions are needed within individual schools. The AHs should be the school improvers, holding the responsibility and empowerment.</p> <p>b) As a Trust, clusters had worked well in governance yet in other areas, such as school improvement, this had not worked so effectively. This area needs to be developed so, in turn, there would then be a review of what the DoE role would look like. All these factors will be reviewed as part of the consultation process so there are no definitive answers as yet.</p> <p><i>ii) Wraparound care at Morchard Bishop: The meeting moved into Part 2</i></p> <p>The Chair invited questions regarding the Strategic Plan (4.3i). The Chair commented it was an aspirational Plan but until the Action Plans are seen, it would be difficult to see how it will actually happen and what the success criteria would be.</p> <p><i>A governor referred to the Measuring Success Metrics section querying the statement about 'financial reserves remaining strong'. The governor was not aware the Trust currently had any reserves. The CEO confirmed the Trust had to keep 5% in reserves but the projected deficit is substantial and would eat into this if changes were not made.</i></p> <p>Other questions raised with the CEO (Part 2) <i>Governors raised concerns about the transparency and allocation of Pupil Premium (PP) funding, noting disparities between calculated entitlement and funding received directly by schools, and questioned whether allocations had been made more proportionate or clearly evidenced in terms of impact.</i> The CEO explained that PP funding was currently held centrally to fund roles supporting vulnerable pupils across the Trust. She confirmed that feedback had</p>	

	<p>been taken on board and that changes to centrally funded roles from September 2026 were intended to return more funding directly to schools..</p> <p>Questions were also raised regarding the allocation of Sports Premium funding and value for money of an external provider. The CEO advised that this had not yet been reviewed as part of the current structural work but could be considered in future.</p> <p>The CEO confirmed that detailed financial information was held at Trust level, with oversight through the Finance & General Purposes Committee, and that changes identified through a financial review were subject to consultation, with improvements expected for schools following implementation.</p> <p>As there were no further questions, the CEO left the meeting.</p>	
<p>5</p> <p>5.1</p> <p>5.2</p> <p>5.3</p> <p>5.4</p> <p>5.5</p>	<p>CLERK UPDATE</p> <p>Staff Governor Vacancy (since September 2025): No nominations received. It was the Clerk's understanding the CEO did speak to AHs but the clerk was unaware of any result and neither was the GP. The Chair felt the LAC was now in a position where someone needed to be asked to serve on a rota basis.</p> <p>Training - Safeguarding L2: The two remaining governors who had not completed the annual L2 Safeguarding have now done in their educational settings and will forward the Certificates to the Clerk to hold on file.</p> <p>Update on any local or national issues: Sustainability Strategy (written within the Trust's key objectives): TC had agreed to take on the role of Mid Devon LAC Sustainability Governor. TC had received the job description and will look at it in detail. Meanwhile, TC had sent emails to each of the AHs and had already received a response from three. He is planning to meet with one AH tomorrow and will book appointments with the others shortly. TC will check individual school websites to look at each school's sustainability plan before meeting with the AHs. TC was thanked for making a good start in this role.</p> <p>Publications/paperwork: a) Governance Alerts and the Spring Checklist: The Clerk advised both publications, issued by DES, are useful and informative. Training opportunities were highlighted. b) Declaration of Interests forms The Clerk thanked everyone for completing and returning the additional form sent in October.</p> <p>Significant changes within the Trust, including key personnel had been covered in the update provided by the CEO, 4.3ii. <i>A governor stated he would support the point raised earlier regarding unrest within schools about money being used closer to where it is needed rather than being used for SLT salaries. Another governor added that action plans outlining the level of support from SLT were not comparable across the Trust and support not proportionate to the cost. One school had questioned their involvement with the Trust.</i> There was hope the outcome of the review of the Central Team would result in positive change.</p>	<p>Staff gov vacancy Clerk to ask the CEO what the next steps should be</p> <p>L2 S/G Certs to be forwarded to the Clerk asap</p>
<p>6</p> <p>6.1</p> <p>6.2</p>	<p>FOCUS: In line with the Governors' Visit Note Spring 1 2026</p> <p>Governors were thanked for the three governor/AH visit reports received. Feedback from governors re their focus visits invited.</p> <p>Mid-year overview of Attendance No concerns had been raised, attendance is good with just the usual illnesses.</p> <p>Parent and Community Engagement Some issues already discussed. Schools continue to work hard to engage positively with parents and the community. Morcharad Bishop: Well attended Christmas carol service and singing in the local residential home. Tedburn St Mary: A lovely long list of community engagement – quite aspirational - including the Moldova Shoebox Appeal, Christingle, Nativity, School and Community adult choir sang at the residential home, Christmas Fair and Children in Need. Yeoford: Good, open communication with the AH routinely on the school gate in the mornings / parents able to speak with teachers or TAs in the mornings and visible at the end of the day. Regular meetings, email, social media and newsletter updates.</p>	

<p>6.3</p>	<p>The challenge in all schools around reaching some parents was acknowledged.</p> <p>Curriculum Subject Focus – EYFS</p> <p>Yeoford: A very encouraging report with EYFS being provided with a fantastic setting.</p> <p>Tedburn St Mary: A positive report whilst also recognising what improvements are needed and focusing on the actions to achieve this.</p> <p>Morcharad Bishop: Lots of positives whilst also looking at ways to develop, including new strategies to trial. The AH had made expectations for an early years’ setting very clear, supported by purposeful resources and planning. <i>A governor had noted the relational approach is possibly a little behind at the moment: the governor asked when it was felt the school would feel it had caught up.</i> It had been believed previously the relational approach had been fully embedded but it had since appeared more work had been needed. Early Years is a Trust priority yet the only CPD had been one afternoon for teachers in the Autumn term. In a school where the practice does need to develop, more direction, roll-outs and strategies to support had been expected from the Leaders. The DoE had been spearheading Early Years but now that person is leaving, the school is aware they will not receive the support originally promised. The AH had been strong in front-loading; writing plans and strategies, training staff and putting in curriculum progression to embed, so much development had been made. The AH was applauded for the work done in the short time in the role, particularly as much of the AH directed time had been spent teaching due to covering staff. <i>A governor believed this should be highlighted with Trustees, AHs are doing an admirable job in making so many things happen with limited resource and time.</i></p> <p>Other point highlighted:</p> <p>Staff absence and cover</p> <p>Governors raised concerns about long-term staff absence in two schools, with Academy Heads providing cover, impacting leadership capacity and delivery of the ASIP. Questions were raised about the lack of Trust-wide cover, absence insurance, and the financial strain of supply costs on school budgets. Current absence policies and staff wellbeing were also discussed, alongside suggestions for alternative models, including a central Trust fund.</p> <p>Trust leaders acknowledged the pressures on staff and confirmed that absence insurance had been considered but was currently deemed too costly. The GP confirmed the matter would be raised with the Finance, Remuneration and People Committees for review by Trustees.</p>	<p>Trustees to be made aware that AHs are doing an admirable job in spite of spending much of their time covering supply (not actually having time in their specific role to push things forward as they would wish)</p> <p>GP to raise long term absence/insurance cover and the five day self-certification with F&RP C’tee and the Trustees.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>FEEDBACK FROM ETHOS COMMITTEES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS</p> <p><u>Ethos Group at Morcharad Bishop CoE School 15.01.26</u> – minutes previously circulated.</p> <p><i>A governor asked how the School evidences living the vision and values.</i></p> <p>The children are very strong in talking about values particularly following the enhancement of the vision and values now being more deeply rooted in Christian theology. They are able to talk about the Christian values relating to the Bible in terms of what it means for the Christian faith and a role model from the Bible, an advocate for young people, Jeremiah. It was now the case of embedding, so the children feel it all day every day. The adults definitely say they feel it and talk about the values a lot of the time.</p> <p><i>Another governor asked about the teaching of Spirituality and how is it explained?</i></p> <p>The AH advised Spirituality is being explored right now, together with how it is lived in schools. The first worship on spirituality had taken place that afternoon; it is hard to explain and use the best language to be meaningful to children. Staff had discussed and grappled with the best ways to introduce spirituality as it can be hard to define. They had believed ‘awe and wonder’ was a tangible hook and a good definition and how it relates to children and their world, what it feels in their heart, what it feels to be at peace and curious. Spirituality is fairly new teaching at the School and being developed and not yet embedded. The first step is for children to be able to understand what spirituality is for them personally.</p>	

	<p><i>A governor referred to the helpful point of exploring what spirituality is for those without a faith or not religious and to give them a meaningful definition for themselves, others, the world and beyond. Sharon Lord (RE & SIAMS Lead) had used the useful phrase 'spirituality is not a preserve of faith'. Older children discuss and explore creation and the Big Bang theory; they are curious.</i></p> <p><i>The Foundation Governor acknowledged the great support given to the School and children by Chris Boyles, the Youth Worker from the Methodist Church, who goes into the School every week. He is also very involved in the Ethos Group and runs some mentoring groups for the children. Staff had been able to talk with him and share language so the message is the same for whoever is leading worship – he is a great asset to the team.</i></p>	
8	<p>SUCCESSSES AND SHARING OF GOOD PRACTICE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tedburn St Mary: Reference to the long list of wider community links – supporting the community and also the wider world (Shoebox Appeal). ▪ Morchard Bishop: A governor stated the school is a very positive environment to be in thanks to the AH. The governor referred to engagement when watching and discussing an episode of 'In the Factory'. Another governor agreed, referring to a specific art session at school which a child had re-tried at home. There is an obvious passion for teaching and inspirational learning. 	
9	<p>SCHOOL UPDATES</p> <p>Governors to consider and discuss feedback on any issues/successes from their school visits or visit notes completed by the AH.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PAN (to include pupils joined/left) • Pupil wellbeing • Staff wellbeing and workload • Attendance (Trust target is 96.5% with an aspirational target of 98%) • Suspensions and permanent exclusions • Feedback on any parent forum meetings/parents' evenings/PTFA • ASIP update • Sustainability Strategy • Pre-school update <p>The visit reports had covered quite a bit of the above. In addition, the following points were raised:</p> <p><u>Pupil wellbeing</u> It was noted there was little to report on this as pupils are happy.</p> <p><u>Staff wellbeing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Long term sickness is affecting AHs ability to push forward when they are spending a lot of their time teaching. ▪ <i>A governor raised a strong concern about two teachers with temporary contracts. They are both 'absolute gems' but understandably need security. It is vital the School does not lose them: what can be done to secure the staff longer term? The GP will raise this with the Remuneration and People Committee.</i> <p><u>Parent forum/parents' evening/PTFA</u> All the reports referred to open communication and good engagement.</p> <p><u>ASIP</u> In hand with some schools more than others due to two AHs having to teach so having a lack of time to progress. The Chair noted it is admirable much is happening but in spite of the time barrier due to staff absence cover.</p> <p><u>Pre-Schools</u> covered within EYFS focus and reports. Training in place and progress being made.</p> <p><u>Risk Register</u> <i>A governor noted there was still some confusion about who completes, where it feeds and how it fits with finance and budgets. Another governor believed that when high risks are identified, flagged, and acknowledged, when nothing is actioned, there seemed a desensitisation. Governors agreed that when urgent risks were identified yet there was little update or communication regarding resolution, the meaning and effectiveness of the Risk Register was reduced and questioned.</i></p>	<p>GP to raise the insecurity/potential loss of good staff on temporary contracts with the R&P C'tee</p> <p>Risk Register confusion: Governors questioned effectiveness of Risk Register when high risk resolutions were not addressed.</p>

10	<p>STANDARDS AND CURRICULUM TRUSTEES' MEETING</p> <p>The draft minutes of the meeting held on 09.12.2025 (confidential until approved) had been circulated. The Chair highlighted some areas of discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A lot of discussion on data as detailed in the report (DoSI) and proposed targets. ▪ Vision and Values and Christian Distinctiveness: A large number of schools are Church Schools so this is an important area for the Trust. Sharon Lord gave a good presentation showing where our schools were RAG rated against six areas. Simple quick fixes were possible which enable schools to move from red, orange to green. ▪ Wellbeing of pupils: The DoE had given an overview of the report and confirmed the RSHE policy is an interim one as the full RSE and PSHE policy is under review. 	
11	<p>NEXT S&C FOCUS:</p> <p>Detail of the focus areas was discussed. The GP will revisit the some of the foci and amend where necessary.</p> <p>Confirmed in retrospect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision and impact for SEND ▪ Provision for PPG & LAC ▪ Safeguarding Audit with a <u>LEARNING WALK</u> <p>The DoSI requires submission of termly phonics data to monitor expected levels. The AH stated that subtle preparation with the relevant children is ongoing. The AH would appreciate clear guidelines about what 'expected' should look like which would make projected data across the Trust more comparable.</p> <p>Visit note Spring 2 had been previously circulated, along with supportive paperwork.</p>	
12	<p>EVALUATION OF GOVERNANCE IMPACT:</p> <p>The Governors discussed staff wellbeing, particularly in terms of the level of support SLT had provided in relation to the amount of top slice taken – governors believed the proportion not to be comparable. This will be raised with the leaders.</p> <p>The Governors discussed staff wellbeing in relation to covering long term absence (or face big budget deficits employing supply cover) particularly as a big part of that was covered by AHs who then have limited time to fulfil their own key role. This will be raised with the F&GP & Remuneration Committee.</p> <p>The governors requested Finance, Remuneration and People Committee revisit the decision not to pay for absence insurance believing it is detrimental to school budgets and also creates a time (and stress) barrier to AHs being able to fully reach targets within their ASIP.</p>	
13	<p>QUESTIONS TO BE RAISED AT LAC LEVEL (Governance Professional)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staffing at Yeoford: Request for urgent review of temporary contracts to secure valuable staff before they seek permanent employment elsewhere. ▪ Budget – need for robust, transparent finance information. Reducing the top slice – examples outlined regarding the Sports Premium Grant with a very low percentage of the Grant going directly to schools: how would this be explained to Ofsted? ▪ Staff absence insurance – plea for this to be reviewed to relieve pressure on staff during times of long-term absence. What HR policies and procedures are in place to support AHs trying to reduce absence, particularly in view of the 5 day self-certification? The main cover is undertaken by the AHs which takes focus off their prime role. The alternative is losing thousands of pounds/creating a deficit in their budget to pay for supply cover. ▪ Risk Register: still confusion about who completes, where it feeds and how it fits with finance and budgets. More communication requested regarding high risk flags otherwise the effectiveness of the Risk Register is reduced and questioned. 	<p>GP – to raise these items at F&GP and Remuneration</p>

14	<p>QUESTIONS TO BE ESCALATED TO S&C</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Morchard Bishop – repeating the new server request – this is a desperate situation and has been escalated on the Risk Register. ▪ The Chair to raise at S&C there were a number of concerns detailed by governors which the GP ensured would be raised at Finance/Remuneration & People Committees and cross referenced with S&C as appropriate. Governors asked that Trustees are made aware the AHs are doing an admirable job developing their ASIPs in spite of spending much of their AH directed time covering long term teacher absence. 	<p>Chair to mention at S&C</p>
15	<p>ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE MEETING</p> <p><i>A governor commented that from a personal point of view it was good to have the CEO present from time to time; it is very positive. The Chair agreed it was very useful and good to have immediate answers and communication. The GP advised the aim is for LACs to be empowered and discuss matters amongst themselves freely without members of SLT. This has led to the idea that LAC Chairs meet with SLT before the meeting and any Trust developments could then be brought to the meeting. The GP confirmed she will still attend LAC meetings. LACs have become a stronger voice, critical and supportive friends. The LACs should remain an independent voice, directed by the Clerk and Chair not the CEO/SLT.</i></p> <p><i>A governor stated that if Chairs are to meet with the CEO a week before LAC meetings, consideration will need to be given as to how it will in work in a timely way with regard to visits and reports. The GP stated that visits should not be affected. The aim is to give Chairs more in-depth knowledge of what is happening within the Trust which they can then take to their LACs. The Chair asked how timing would work should questions need to be raised. There was a brief discussion as to whether the meeting with the CEO should come before or after the LAC meeting. The Chair felt the purpose of LAC Chairs being at S&C is to report on what has been said, she questioned whether she would be duplicating her role meeting with the CEO and also attending S&C. The GP will discuss and review with the CEO and other Chairs.</i></p>	<p>GP to discuss timing of Chairs/CEO meeting – before or after LAC? Duplication of S&C attendance?</p>

The meeting closed at 6.19 pm

During the meeting, the AH expressed frustration that the Internet at Morchard Bishop had been dipping in and out – the AH had needed to repeat some conversation when her screen had frozen.

Signed as approved by the Chair, Joanna Hooper Date: 9 March 2026