# Totnes Local Advisory Committee (LAC)

**Meeting MINUTES**
**Thursday 25th June 2026**
**6pm**

**The meeting was held online via Microsoft 'Teams'**

**Present:**
**Parent Governors-** Jonathon Nicholls (Diptford) (Acting Chair)
Caroline Lucas (Sparkwell)
Lucy Gibson (Landscove)

**Academy Headteacher**- Thomas Cole

**In attendance:**
**CEO-** Rachael Sharpe **(For the first 10 minutes of the meeting)**

**Minutes**: **Governance Professional-** Charlotte Roe

| No | Item | ACTION |
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| 1. | **Welcome and apologies**<br><br>The following apologies were received from Governors and accepted by the meeting - Cat Radford, Nanya Coles (Broadhempston), Kate Wilson (Staff Governor, Kate Burch (Foundation Governor for Landscove) | |
| 2. | **Declarations of interest**<br>• NC is a business proprietor of Chocolate Batik, has a company directorship of Ashwick Consulting and Works at SafeLives Uk, a Domestic Abuse Charity.<br>• CR is Director of Blind Ditch Limited – Arts and Cultural organisation<br>• KB has a company directorship of Bob Burch ltd. | |
| 3. | The CEO was invited to address the meeting.<br><br>The CEO reported that, since the previous meeting, work had continued on the cluster approach to school improvement and high-quality inclusive education. A newly termed "education team" has replaced the executive improvement team to reflect a collective focus alongside headteachers. Recent sessions have centred on culture, particularly the vision of flourishing communities, with belonging, collaboration and curiosity increasingly embedded. Greater openness, mutual support and shared responsibility among headteachers were noted.<br><br>The CEO outlined significant operational pressure arising from the migration from SIMS to Bromcom. Administrative staff and teaching assistants have undertaken approximately 15–20 hours of training before the end of term. Flexible working arrangements and potential overtime payments are being considered, and the CEO acknowledged the strain on staff and confirmed that their efforts would be recognised. The transition is expected to deliver improved data accessibility, visibility and efficiency in the longer term. | |

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| | The CEO provided an update on the cessation of the government PE and sports grant from January, noting that this was unexpected and presents a significant financial challenge. The trust had previously pooled funding to deliver across five strands: high-quality teaching, enrichment, competition, increased activity and swimming. The approach focused on sustainability through curriculum development and staff upskilling. The CEO highlighted the potential loss of enrichment and competitive opportunities and confirmed that partnership models, cluster-based approaches and fundraising options are being explored, although no replacement funding has been identified.<br><br>The CEO informed the meeting that the Deputy CEO will leave in September for personal reasons. The departure was described as amicable but unexpected. Succession planning is underway with trustees to ensure continuity in finance, estates and operational leadership.<br><br>The CEO invited questions or comments from the meeting.<br>A governor noted that concerns regarding PE provision had largely been addressed and reaffirmed that PE remains a priority for schools and parents. It was acknowledged that, while staff have been upskilled, this does not fully replace specialist provision and adds pressure. Support was expressed for exploring partnership models and retaining the central PE team.<br>*How should PE and sports grant funding be used, particularly given it is not intended to fund staff salaries?*<br>The CEO clarified that funding must support the five key strands and emphasised compliance, noting that the PE team's role is to model and upskill rather than replace teachers.<br>*What balance should be struck between centrally retained funding and funding returned to smaller schools?*<br>The CEO acknowledged concerns and outlined wider financial pressures, including an inherited deficit, confirming that difficult decisions will be required.<br>*Will the current PE provision model be maintained until funding ends?*<br>The CEO confirmed that this remains the intention.<br>*What alternative approaches could sustain enrichment and PE provision going forward?*<br>Discussion included partnership working, shared provision across clusters, improved planning and parental support (e.g. transport for swimming).<br>*What was the rationale for moving from SIMS to Bromcom?*<br>The CEO explained that a formal tender process identified limitations in SIMS, particularly around trust-wide data access and efficiency, with Bromcom expected to deliver long-term improvements despite short-term pressures.<br>*Can updates on PE developments continue to be provided?*<br>The CEO agreed to provide further updates. | |
| 4. | **Approval of meeting minutes from Thursday 5th May 2026**<br>The Minutes from Thursday 5th May 2026 were circulated before the meeting. The LAC meeting accepted the Minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting. | |
| 5. | **Matters arising from Thursday 5th May 2026 (not on the agenda)**<br>4.1 Governors confirmed that there had not been any questions from the previous meeting that required a response. | |
| 6. | **Clerk Update**<br>**6.1 Appointments/nominations**-<br>The Goverance Professional gave an update on the following vacancies: -<br>The Governance Professional noted that the Clerk had received an email from Lucy Gibson asking for more information that could be shared on social media platforms advertising the vacancies. The GP confirmed that the Clerk would address this on her return to work.<br>• LAC Chair – The GP reported that she was hoping that Cat Radford would move into this position following her sabbatical. The plan was for the GP to make contact with CR at the beginning of September 2026.<br>• Sustainability Governor – The GP said that this vacancy was still open. | |

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| | • Foundation Governor for Harbertonford and Diptford – The GP reported that these positions were still unfilled. She confirmed that she had spoken directly with the Diocese and local vicars asking for their support in filling these positions.<br>• Parent Governors for Broadhempston and Stoke Gabriel – The GP was pleased to report that both schools had had interest and the recruitment process was underway for a parent governor for each school. It was hoped that these would be completed for the new academic year.<br><br>The Governance Professional reported that the Standards and Curriculum schedule for the forthcoming year is under review, with a proposal to reduce meetings to five annually alongside five focused visits, while allowing additional attendance where required. Visit forms are also being streamlined to reduce workload while maintaining impact, which is expected to be positively received by headteachers.<br>A governor reflected that, while focus areas are typically agreed at the start of the year, discussions during visits often adapt to address the most relevant and pressing issues at the time. The Governance Professional confirmed that this flexible approach is appropriate and supports an accurate and timely understanding of key issues across the trust.<br>It was emphasised that governors should continue to explore significant and emerging matters during visits, even where these differ from pre-set focus areas, while still providing some feedback against agreed priorities to ensure a complete trust-wide picture. The Governance Professional reassured governors that such flexibility, including discussion of matters such as staff wellbeing, is encouraged and supports effective oversight. | |
| 7. | Focus: Overview of Curriculum<br>• Enrichment curriculum and participation in wider opportunities including our SEND children<br><br>**Sparkwell**<br>The Academy Head reported that the core offer is well embedded, with the wider curriculum identified as the main area for further development. A high proportion of pupils have special educational needs, requiring adapted provision. Inclusive enrichment was highlighted, with all activities planned to ensure access for all pupils, including an example of a pupil with cerebral palsy participating in surfing.<br>The enrichment offer includes residential experiences for every class on a rolling programme, a planned London residential including HMS Belfast, and weekly forest school sessions. Outdoor learning across the wider curriculum was identified as an area for further development.<br>The Academy Head raised concerns about ensuring the educational value of trips, noting that activities should provide meaningful experiences beyond pupils' everyday lives. A funding model was discussed whereby parents contribute small monthly amounts to support enrichment over time.<br><br>**Diptford**<br>It was noted that hearing about enrichment practice across other schools is valuable, alongside updates from within the school. The school was recognised as already offering a strong enrichment programme supported by an active PTA, including canoe trips, a Tamar Bridge visit, aquarium visits and whole-school trips to River Dart Country Park.<br>It was acknowledged that sharing practice across schools is beneficial and that the cluster model could support this further.<br>*How can schools continue to deliver a broad range of enrichment opportunities in the future, particularly in light of reduced sports funding?*<br>Concern was raised about sustainability and the potential for collaborative solutions across schools.<br><br>**Landscove**<br>It was reported that enrichment includes beach visits, with a focus on strengthening | |

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| | educational value. An example was given of pre-visit input from a beach ranger to support learning about habitats and wildlife, enhancing the educational impact.<br>The importance of providing broader experiences, particularly given the rural context, was highlighted. Visits to cities and more diverse environments were seen as key to widening pupils' cultural awareness.<br>*How can such opportunities continue to be funded given associated costs?*<br>The school was described as offering a strong enrichment programme, including residential visits from Year 3 onwards, supported by an active PTA. It was noted that the school is receptive to externally funded opportunities and proactive in securing experiences, with administrative support playing a key role. Overall, enrichment was identified as a strength, with consideration given to sustaining and developing provision further.<br><br>**Harbertonford**<br>It was reported that enrichment provision has been significantly developed from a previously limited offer. Since the current Academy Head's appointment, clubs, visits and wider opportunities have been substantially expanded.<br>A school pledge has been introduced, setting out experiences pupils should access before leaving, reflecting cultural capital approaches tailored to a rural context. The importance of balancing local experiences with broader opportunities, including urban, arts and cultural visits, was highlighted.<br>Examples of enrichment include visits to aquariums, parks and farms, alongside residential trips and a London visit. While local trips are easier to organise, the need to broaden pupils' experiences was emphasised.<br>*How can schools continue to prioritise and fund more ambitious enrichment opportunities?*<br>Outdoor provision has been strengthened through structured forest school provision for all classes and the introduction of a gardening club, with produce shared locally. A wider range of extracurricular clubs, including music and arts, has also been established.<br>Overall, significant progress was recognised, alongside consideration of how to sustain and build on this momentum moving forward. | |
| 8. | **Focus: Review of attendance for the academic year**<br><br>**Sparkwell**<br>It was reported that attendance at the school was currently below the trust target of 96.8%, with levels sitting at approximately 94–95%. It was noted that in a small school context, individual pupils could have a significant impact on overall figures, with one pupil accounting for a substantial proportion of the gap. It was also highlighted that this pupil was not currently on site, further affecting attendance data.<br>A key issue identified was attendance within the Reception cohort, particularly where families were taking holidays during term time. It was acknowledged that some parents perceived there to be no financial penalty for taking holidays at this age, which had led to a notable impact on attendance percentages. An example was given of a Reception pupil being taken on holiday during term time.<br>It was questioned how schools could more effectively address this issue, particularly in relation to parental understanding of expectations around attendance in the early years, and what strategies might be put in place to mitigate the impact on overall attendance figures.<br><br>**Harbertonford**<br>It was reported that attendance was currently at 97.2%, with four fines having been issued during the year. It was noted that unauthorised holidays continued to be a key factor impacting attendance. It was observed that some parents appeared willing to accept fines as an additional cost of taking holidays during term time if it was financially beneficial overall. | |

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| | *It was questioned what further measures could be taken to discourage this behaviour and whether current sanctions were sufficient to influence parental decision-making.*<br><br>**Diptford**<br>It was reported that attendance at the school was 96.2%, with one pupil identified as having a prolonged absence, significantly impacting overall figures. It was noted that the school had taken a different approach to attendance management, with fines rarely, if ever, being issued.<br>It was observed that the school favoured a more supportive and relational approach when working with families, based on the view that issuing fines could have a counterproductive effect for certain pupils and parents. It was questioned whether this approach had contributed positively to attendance overall and how its impact compared to more punitive measures used elsewhere.<br><br>**Landscove**<br>It was reported that attendance was projected to be approximately 95% and therefore below target. It was noted that, within a small school context, a small number of pupils had a disproportionate impact on overall attendance figures. This included a number of part-time pupils throughout the year, which had significantly lowered overall percentages.<br>It was further reported that one pupil was currently not attending school at all and was unlikely to return, but remained on roll, continuing to affect attendance data. It was acknowledged that the overall picture was largely driven by a very small number of pupils rather than a wider issue across the school.<br>*It was questioned how schools might better manage the impact of part-time timetables and pupils not attending but remaining on roll, and whether there were any strategies to mitigate the effect of such cases on overall attendance figures.* | |
| 9. | **Focus: Behaviour and Relational Approach**<br><br>**Sparkwell**<br>It was reported that there had been some incidents involving the use of racist language, although it was felt that this often stemmed from a lack of understanding rather than intentional prejudice. It was noted that pupils were not overtly racist or xenophobic, but there were indications of unconscious bias influenced by external factors such as home environments and online content.<br>In response, the school had introduced a programme focused on inclusion and equality, alongside a wider emphasis on addressing unconscious bias. This was identified as a key area of development for the coming academic year. It was acknowledged that while incidents were not widespread, they required careful and consistent intervention.<br>It was questioned how best to support pupils in developing understanding and awareness in this area, and how the school could work with families to address the underlying influences contributing to such behaviours.<br><br>**Harbertonford**<br>The governor reported that the staff felt they would benefit from additional training to support the consistent embedding of inclusive practices. While existing provision was in place, it was felt that further professional development would support deeper understanding and ensure greater consistency across the school.<br>It was also reported that an isolated behaviour incident had occurred involving pupils vaping on the school site. This was acknowledged as unexpected at primary level but had been addressed. It was recommended that communication with parents be proactive in such cases, particularly where awareness may already exist among pupils, to ensure concerns were addressed promptly and transparently. | |
| 10. | **Feedback from Ethos Committees and Community Groups**<br><br>The Ethos Committee minutes from Harbertonford and Landscove were circulated before the meeting, however as there were no Foundation Governors or Academy Heads available, no questions were asked. | |

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| 11. | **Staff Feedback (to be reported to the Remuneration and People Committee)**<br>11.1 **Staff Governor Update:** There was no staff governor available however within the visit notes it was noted that there were updates which would be shared with the R&P Committee.<br>11.2 **Academy Head Feedback:** It was reported that the departure of the DCEO would present a challenge, given his role in maintaining stability across operational and financial functions. It was questioned whether a replacement should prioritise strong business expertise or greater educational understanding.<br>It was noted that leadership across schools remained positive overall, although recent changes had created some uncertainty. Concern was raised regarding reduced central capacity, particularly for school improvement and inspection readiness, and it was highlighted that future support would rely more heavily on cluster arrangements. It was questioned how the trust would rebuild expertise in this area and whether external support, such as subcontracted OfSTED experience, should be utilised to provide challenge and quality assurance.<br>It was reported that, despite these challenges, there was confidence in the trust's direction and optimism for greater stability moving forward. | |
| 12. | **School Updates**<br>The Governors were invited to feedback on any issues of the list below. The governor for Landscove reported that not all actions from the S175 audit had been completed, as some were dependent on training that had not yet been delivered. It was clarified that this was due to delays in local authority training provision rather than an issue at trust level, and that schools were therefore currently unable to complete those elements.<br>It was confirmed that this position was consistent across all schools and that arrangements were in place for the required training to be delivered in due course. It was also noted that schools remained compliant with national safeguarding requirements. *It was questioned when the outstanding training would be scheduled and how completion of the remaining actions would be monitored once available.*<br>The governor for Diptford reported that there were concerns relating to staff wellbeing due to ongoing uncertainty around the long term sickness of a key member of staff. It was felt that the lack of clarity was not sustainable and that a decision would need to be made in advance of the new academic year to ensure appropriate arrangements were in place for staff and pupils. The governor asked that when a final decision would be made and how the school and wider community would be informed to provide reassurance and stability moving forward.<br><br>• PAN (to include pupils joined/left)<br>• Pupil wellbeing<br>• Staff wellbeing and workload<br>• Feedback on any parent forum meetings/parents' evenings/PTFA/parental engagement<br>• ASIP update<br>• Sustainability Strategy<br>• Pre-school update<br>• Safeguarding ***(to be reported to Board of Trustees)***<br>• Buildings ***(to be reported to Finance and General Purpose Committee)*** | |
| 13. | **Successes and Sharing of Good Practice**<br>Any positive news to share or examples of good practice that could be shared within the LAC/across the Trust. | |
| 14. | **Standards and Curriculum Trustees Meeting**<br>The governors confirmed that they had received the previous Minutes and had no further questions. | |
| 15. | **Next S&C Focus:**<br>**Focus: TBC** | |
| 16. | **Key Accountability Questions**<br>Assurance v Reassurance | |

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| | The Governance Professional explained to the governors this concept and advised it was an effective way of ensuring that there was triangulation of information being received.<br><br>It was suggested that, as part of future planning, there could be value in introducing opportunities for governors and leaders to visit each school within the cluster to develop a greater understanding of individual settings. It was noted that similar approaches had been used effectively elsewhere, including the possibility of virtual visits where in-person attendance was not feasible.<br>It was recognised that such visits could support stronger relationships, enable leaders to share school improvement priorities, and provide greater context when discussing provision across the trust. It was acknowledged that time constraints, particularly for governors, could present challenges, and flexibility would be required in how this might be implemented.<br>It was further noted that increased collaboration across small schools would be essential to ensure long-term sustainability, both academically and financially, and to maintain a broad offer for pupils. It was agreed that developing a stronger understanding of each school's context would support more effective partnership working.<br>It was proposed that this idea be considered further and revisited in the next academic year. | **Clerk** |
| 17. | **Summary of Questions to be raised at LAC level –**<br>PE Update<br>Diptford long term sickness update | |
| 18. | **Summary of Questions to be raised at S&C** | |