

Board of Trustees/Directors

Minutes: 7 February 2022

T/36/22, 4.00 pm

The meeting was held online using MS Teams

Trustees/Directors Present:

Cheryl Mathieson Chair	Paul Waterworth (PW)	Graeme Scott (GS)
Nicola Dunford CEO	Sarah Cox (SC)	Christopher Norman (CN)
Dominic Course (DC)	Fiona Walters (FW) – joined 4.30pm	

In attendance: Matt Matthew Deputy CEO (DCEO)

Sue Howard as Clerk

Katherine Evans (KE) – Soon to be appointed Trustee. Declared she is an employee of
The Good Shepherd Trust

1. **Welcome and apologies**

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Trustees to the meeting

Apologies – N/A

All Trustees were present

2. **Declaration of Business Interests**

The CEO is a Trustee of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (SDMAT) and also a Trustee for the Bearnas Education Foundation. Dominic Course is a Trustee of SDMAT, Chair of Governors at South Dartmoor Community College and a Director of DACORS Ltd. Fiona Walters is a director of Devon Opera Ltd and of LCP Harlesden Ltd, and a Trustee of Devon Opera. Sarah Cox is Shareholder of S Cox & Co Ltd, Shareholder of Naked Sprout, Trustee of The Fryer Welfare Trust and The Fryer Recreational Trust, Trustee of Drake's School PTFA. Graeme Scott is an employee and Executive Chairperson for educational software company, The Mario Framework.

3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting T35/21 held on 6 December 2021 **were approved:** Part I only

4. **Matters arising**

4.1 **Item 5.5 Trust Logo**

To note that the agreed strapline was added to the new logo design. The Company Registered number needs to be added to the footer of all headed paper **Action SH**

4.2 **Item 5.6 Any Other Business**

The Chair advised Trustees that an online trustee training course has been identified, 'Essential Trustee Programme', which is being run by the Confederation of School Trusts. It is felt that the content is comprehensive and builds the knowledge that trustees need of governance, education and finance and identifies the behaviours that make effective board members. It is designed to benefit both newly appointed trustees and established trustees. The programme will be delivered over six months, with 16 hours of learning split into 8 seminars. All seminars will be held online. It is intended that all members of the Board participate to gain maximum benefit as this will provide a shared development experience and develop a collective understanding of the role and purpose of the trust board. The cost will be covered by TCAF. Trustees were provided with a link to the details and asked to take a look

and feedback to the Chair, via email, with any comments.

Action All

4.3 **Item 6.2 Annual Report and Financial Statements**

To note that Chair and CEO have signed the Letter of Representation. Also to note that the DCEO has submitted the approved Annual Report and Financial Statements to the ESFA and Companies House, and posted these documents on the Trust website.

4.4 **Item 7. CEO's Report - Safeguarding**

Refer to Item 12.

4.5 **Item 8. Strategic Plan**

Refer to Item 6.

4.6 **Item 9.2 Audit Committee**

Cyber security – To note DCEO sent out a link to online cyber security training

4.7 **Item 10.2 F&GP Committee –2021-22 Financial Performance**

To note that Clerk is now notifying trustees by email when a meeting document is uploaded to SharePoint

4.8 **Item 11.2 Remuneration Committee – Terms of Reference**

The Chair advised the Board that the Committee could not find any evidence that states the Trust should have a Remuneration Committee separate to the F&GP Committee; it was the Trust's choice in order to keep consideration of remuneration issues separate. Therefore, it was felt it was not of interest to the ESFA. Instead further advice will be sought from elsewhere, either the Trust's auditors or legal advisers. Item to be carried forward.

Action Chair/Clerk

4.9 **Item 12.2 S&C Committee – Governance**

CEO to report on progress regarding enabling Hub Chairs to cover more than one school – it was clarified at the last S&C Committee meeting held 26 January 2022 that the Local Boards wanted the Hub Chairs to be an additional member of the Local Board Hub rather than having to be linked to a specific school. This would likely require a change to the Scheme of Delegation and/or Terms of Reference and it was agreed that the Local Boards would work with Sarah Clarke (ATSIL) regarding this matter. The Board would be updated in due course.

4.10 **Item 13.1 Appointment of new members/trustees**

Refer to Item 10.1

4.11 **Item 14. Risk Register**

Refer to Item 11

4.12 **Item 17.1 Health and Safety Policy**

To note that minor queries were addressed by DCEO

4.13 **Item 17.4 Anti-Bullying Policy**

To note that CEO has addressed the definition of bullying. Policy is presented for approval under Item 14.3.1 of this meeting.

5. **Chief Executive Officer's Report**

The CEO report had been provided via SharePoint prior to the meeting. The CEO summarised a few key points in her report including:

- Meeting with Stephen Lees, Senior Regional Lead & HMI earlier this month. The meeting was in relation to Ofsted Inspections and the position of small schools managing the new framework of mixed age teaching. Ofsted are accepting that small schools cannot necessarily do the best in delivering every single subject and may need to use somebody from another school or a leader across the Trust to help with this. It is also acceptable for an NQT, ECT or someone needing support to do team teaching with a more experienced teacher as long as there is a support plan in place. However, schools must ensure that the children still receive the expected standard of education

- Attendance data for all staff for January 2022 had been provided which reflected the picture in relation to the pandemic. Any long, non-Covid related, absences were being dealt with as usual under the Attendance Policy.
- Attainment data is not yet available, the CEO will provide the Clerk with this once ready and it will be forwarded to all Trustees
- Growth - Wolborough C of E Primary School have now signed a Management Partnership agreement with the Trust. The board of a small federation are meeting shortly to discuss the possibility of joining the Link and the CEO and DCEO are presenting to another school this evening, although it is very early stages still for this one
- Finance Manager – Variations to the TCAF application have been agreed to enable us to appoint Academica to assist with the recruitment process. The Job description and salary scale have been revised to hopefully attract some quality applicants. Four CV's have already been received. Closing date is 14 February 2022

Q&A's from the CEO's report

Q – We have 192 pupils leaving this year across the Trust, how are we going to 'buck the demographic trend' to ensure similar numbers join?

A – The data is looking fairly stable at early indicators for places in Sept 22 with the Trust position with numbers in our preschools sitting at 191. This would hopefully result in a good percentage as the feed in for the next academic year. The Trust are being active to keep the numbers consistent.

Q – The Regional Schools Commission plan to see all Trusts every 2 years. Are these inspectorial or advisory?

A – These are seen as MAT reviews and generally involve a trip to Bristol for a question and review session. The Link's reputation is being seen as a growing and successful Trust

Q – Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) Grant, whilst great to be in demand, how does this affect you and the team in relation to capacity? The £5k estimate to be paid for that work, where is that being directed?

A – Since Sept 2021, the DCEO role has been created, giving the CEO more capacity to engage in this type of project. It is seen as advantageous to form relationships with other MATs and build reciprocal relationships. There is also a Peer to Peer review with The Bridge MAT in Cornwall, a similar trust to the Link, but not seen as competitive as in different geographical regions. Working very well together.

The £5k is not yet earmarked, but the Board will be updated as to how this is spent. As it relates to School Improvement, this is likely to be the area to benefit

Q – Following an extensive review of our Trust website over the past few weeks trying to gain an external perspective, whilst felt that the website is excellent, there are certain statements open to interpretation. How do we as Trustees define Academic Excellence? What does the phrase 'The Very Best Education' mean to all of us? What is our Trustee view on the Ethos expected of our schools? It is proposed that some time is spent having discussions around these areas to ensure we are in agreement. There is much on the website about how well we have adjusted to the new technical area of digital learning. What work are we doing to teach Oracy?

A – There will be a follow up to the recent Trustee Togetherness Day which could focus on the Ethos and any other areas it was felt needed some collaborative thinking. Whilst it must be noted that our individual schools may have slight differences within our overall Trust Ethos, this would appear to be an effective piece of work to move forward with.

There is lots of work being done around Oracy, the CEO will ask the ATSIL to provide the Trustees with a paper on the progress.

Action CEO

6. **Strategic Plan**

The DCEO shared his screen to show the Strategic Planning Diagram and summarised the purpose within the Board of Trustees. He added that within the SharePoint site, there is a section called Strategic Planning which holds all the different sections and targets set. The DCEO asked all Trustees to have a look and then arrange a 15-20min catch-up with him to discuss their area of responsibility and their actions. **Action DCEO/ALL**

The CEO added that the plan is a real opportunity to drive one area forward and together this creates a Trust that is always moving forward together.

7. **Audit Committee**

Minutes of A/1/22 – 19 January 2022. The Chair had nothing specific to highlight to the Board that wasn't evident in the minutes. He said that the Committee had met with Griffin, the internal auditors and queries had been raised around the Internal Audit programme, in particular to try and link the internal audits to matters that are being highlighted on the risk register. It was also evident that an audit on Cyber Security is necessary. The Trust's current Internal Auditors are not able to facilitate in this area, so the Trust have sourced another company to do this, Secure Schools.

8. **Finance & General Purposes Committee**

There has been no meeting held since T35/21, the next meeting scheduled for 18 February 2022 where a Chair is hopefully to be appointed following the loss of Roy Gillard. The DCEO has no financial concerns at this stage to report to the Board.

9. **Standards & Curriculum Committee**

9.1 **Minutes of S&C/1/22** – 26 January 2022. The Trustees were advised that the draft minutes are not yet available, but will be uploaded to SharePoint when ready. The Chair summarised the main discussions of the meeting, which included the Local Board discussions and reports and SEND/SENDCo requirements across the Trust

9.2 **Main issues from Local Hubs drawn from S&C meeting.** Reports from the LBs were made available via SharePoint prior to this meeting. They vary between all the boards and some standardisation maybe required to ensure consistency and similar formats. This is an area of focus for Sarah Clarke who works closely with them. The views of our LBs are very important and it is evident they are all committed to our schools.

9.3 **Terms of Reference** – The revised ToR were uploaded to SharePoint prior to the meeting and reflect a small change to the Local Board being noted as in Attendance rather than members. **Approved**

10. **Governance**

10.1 **Members and Trustees**

The Chair advised Trustees of the following:

Members – Isabel Cherrett was approved and appointed as a member effective 1 January 2022.

Trustees – To note that Roy Gillard was removed as a Trustee with effect from 5 January 2022 following his sudden passing in the New Year.

To note that Jason Hayward-Jones has resigned from the Board with effect from 7 February 2022. The Board gave thanks for his work and contribution over the last three years.

New Trustees - Foundation Trustees, Graeme Scott is appointed effective 25 January 2022, Christopher Norman effective 2 February 2022 and Kate Evans is just awaiting EDEN approval.

Non-Foundation Trustee, Benjamin Thorne, is recommended for appointment. The Expression of Interest, previous experience and interview process of the candidate were provided in a paper written by the Chair prior to the meeting.

The Trustees **agreed** the appointment of Benjamin Thorne and the Trust HR Officer will finalise the recruitment paperwork and resolution to be signed by the Non-Foundation Members.

Action HR Officer

10.2 **Local Board**

The Chair advised there is one new local board governor recommended for appointment: Amber Reed – Staff Governor for Morchard Bishop for Woodleigh.

Approved

- 10.3 Follow up from Trustees' Togetherness Day. Overall, it was felt that the day had not covered all the areas we had hoped to focus on but it was agreed it had been good to get everyone together. A questionnaire will be going out to the Trustees to get their feedback shortly and follow-up sessions will be planned, in particular to explore further the themes from Sir David Carter's presentation.

11. **Risk Register**

11.1 & 11.2

The Chair of Audit reported that the Trust Risk Register was seen as an unwieldy document via the current format of an excel spreadsheet and did not provide good links to the individual academy risk registers. Every, who currently provides the software package for the Trust's H&S requirements, has an extension of its software which covers wider risk registers. A demo of the software had been provided and it was considered to be very good and far more suitable, but the initial cost was very high. The DCEO has since negotiated a more competitive price which is now deemed as reasonable for the Trust. The software will be rolled out across the Trust and training provided. The DCEO had set up one school initially to be able to show the Trustees and shared his screen to illustrate. The software will highlight more clearly the risks that are current and pressing and will automatically remind when risks are due for review, ensuring actions are done in a timely manner. There will be a set template giving better standardisation across the Trust. Reports can also be more easily produced for individual schools and the Board as a whole making it easier to review risks going forward. There is lots of work still to do, including adding all the Trustees and then assigning them to certain risks that they or a committee are responsible for. In addition, work will be needed to review all the risk probability and impact scores.

Q – Who decides the categories of potential risk?

A – The categories have been standardised initially, taken from our original Risk Register, but we can customise as we move along where it is deemed to be necessary.

12. **Safeguarding**

No further issues to report. The CEO reminded all Trustees about the monthly Safeguarding focus which is distributed via email to all staff, Local Boards and Trustees to ensure that everyone has a deep understanding of all areas of safeguarding and their role within it. These then feed into inset training days at all our academies. The CEO had written to our local MP when she complained about the lack of response and actions from external agencies on a particular safeguarding issue and was grateful for the response. Some external action had now been taken.

Q – The Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE) changes recently shared with Trustees in February, when do staff get this information?

A – All staff read KCSiE part one every September and sign to confirm this which is held on file at each school. The changes highlighted within the CEO report are proposed changes for September 2022 and will be confirmed on publication later this year

Q – It is not evident that Single Central Record (SCR) checks are being done, how can Trustees be assured this is happening?

A - The Trust HR Officer has recently reviewed all SCR's and advised the individual Administrators of each school of any anomalies that need to be addressed. On the whole there were no major serious issues, but it is the responsibility of those administrators to address any issues. Personnel file reviews also aim to take place annually, but with the Pandemic over the last two years, there has been a time and capacity issue regarding this. It was added that the recruitment process over the last 2-3 years has been tightened up immensely and statutory paperwork is always in place prior to the file being handed over to the school and most issues are in relation to historical staff who have been in place for a numbers of years.

It was agreed that further discussion around SCR and personnel file checking was needed.

Q – The Executive Improvement Team (EIT) dashboard reflected a concerning RAG rating for one of the Trust schools, why is this?

A – There have been lots of incidents of challenging behaviour from a specific pupil and whilst the staff did lack confidence without specific training in past years, this is being addressed and focussed on. It is an isolated situation and the school are now beginning to get substance and consistency.

Q – It is becoming apparent in the press that there has been a doubling up of home schooling since the pandemic. How as a Trust do we keep a track on the Missing Children in Education?

A - Our schools are very vigilant in following up on these children and work closely with the Local Authority in this area. It is an ongoing situation and always challenging, but the CEO, together with the Academy Heads will continue to monitor and improve the processes and evidence clearly any actions.

13. **Health and Safety**

No issues to report. The Trust Data Protection Officer and Health & Safety Coordinator work extremely hard with all our schools and visit regularly to check on compliance. A contractor has been appointed to visit one of our schools to survey an issue with an external boundary wall, but not a serious issue and of no danger to the actual school building.

14. **Policies for approval**

The following Policies have been reviewed and updated and are presented for approval:

14.1 **Recommended by the Audit Committee**

- Risk Management
- Business Continuity Plans

Approved
Approved

14.2 **Recommended by the Standards & Curriculum Committee**

- Attendance

Q – What are the thresholds that the Local Authority use to intervene with families? Is the Trust going to respond to the consultation out currently and would we need to change our policy in response to that?

A – There has been extensive work done on this policy. Attendance generally is very good across the Trust, except where the Pandemic is concerned. The CEO does not feel the need to amend further the policy as we are efficient and pro-active at addressing issues as they come about. The Board asked the CEO to amend the policy so it reflects the thresholds. The policy will then be circulated via email for approval.

Action CEO

- Pre-School/Nursery Admissions

Approved

14.3 **Recommended by Trustees**

- Anti-Bullying
- Exclusion

Approved

Q – Within the policy, there is no statement around the effect to the pupil being excluded and a simple sentence should be added. If a child is permanently excluded what is the next stage for that child, who will take on that responsibility going forward? There needs to be a clear link between the behaviour outside of school and maintaining the pupil body as a whole.

A – GS to email proposed amendments via tracked changes to the CEO and she will amend the policy to reflect the points raised. The policy will then be circulated via email for approval. **Action GS & CEO**

- Admissions – Final determined

Approved

Q - Trustees spoke about the need to have all policies available via a folder in SharePoint

A – To be looked into how this can be achieved. Simple enough to initially set up, but it is maintaining it going forward and ensuring updated as and when policies are reviewed and approved

15. **Meeting Dates 2021-2022**

The following dates have been agreed for 2021-2022; meetings will commence at 4.00 pm, except for the AGM which will start at 6.00 pm.

T37 Monday 23 May 2022- to be held in person, subject to current circumstances, with the option of online participation

T38 Monday 11 July 2022 - to be held in person, subject to current circumstances, with the option of online participation

AGM Monday 18 July 2022, 6pm - to be held in person, subject to current circumstances, with the option of online participation

Meeting finished at 6.30pm