

This meeting was held in person at Landscope School Hall but clerked online

**Present:**

**Members**

Exeter Diocesan Education Network - The Ven Douglas Dettmer (DD)  
Bearnas Educational Trust - Peter Bethel (PB)  
Isabel Cherrett (IC)

**Trustees**

Cheryl Mathieson (Chair)                      Christopher Norman (CN)  
Nicky Dunford (CEO)                              Dominic Course (DC)  
Fiona Walters (FW)                                Ben Thorne (BT)  
Kate Evans (KE)  
Graeme Scott (GS)

**In attendance:**

**Local Board Chairs**

Although invited none of the Local Board Chairs were able to attend on this occasion.

**Officers**

Matt Matthew (DCEO)  
Elaine Clarke (Clerk)

**Apologies:**

YMCA Exeter - Paul Reisbach, Member  
Sarah Cox, Trustee  
Paul Waterworth, Trustee  
Corinna Tigg, Local Board Chair – Raleigh  
Jo Carter, Local Board Chair – Woodleigh  
Lynda Cooper, Local Board Chair - Moorland

**Absent without apology:**

University of St Mark and St John - Gary Kinchin, Member  
Cat Radford, Local Board Chair - Totnes

No	Item	Action
1.	<b>Welcome</b> On behalf of the Board, the Chair welcomed all those present and in attendance. New members and trustees were welcomed. All members and trustees introduced themselves.	
2.	<b>Declarations of interest</b> Isabel Cherrett has a family member who is the Trust Inclusion and Improvement Hub Manager. Peter Bethel is a trustee of Totnes Elizabethan Museum, Member of Totnes Rotary Club, Treasurer Totnes Show and Totnes Town Council Sergeant. Douglas Dettmer is a director and trustee of Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd and Exeter Diocesan Trust and a trustee of Church College Hostel Trust and Tranquillity House Trust. The CEO is a Trustee for the Bearnas Education Foundation. Dominic Course is 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. Graeme Scott is an employee and Executive Chairperson for educational software company, The Mario Framework. Chris Norman is Director of CANE Properties Ltd. Kate Evans is Director for Education of The Good Shepherd MAT. Ben Thorne is Director and Trustee at Tor Bridge Academy Trust.	

3.	<p><b>Any other business</b> None notified.</p>	
4.	<p><b>Approval of meeting minutes</b> The minutes of the meeting T34 21 19 July 2021 were <b>approved</b> by those who were present at that meeting.</p>	
5.	<p><b>External Audit Service</b> The Chair asked the members to approve the appointment of Bishop Fleming LLP to carry out the External Audit for 2021 – 22. Prior to granting approval the members asked the following:</p> <p><b>Q – Has there been an increase in the fee for the audit?</b> <b>A – The CEO responded that there had been an increase in the fee. The recommended firm is also slightly more expensive than one of the tendered quotes received, however trustees had felt that the recommended firm provided a better, comprehensive offer and were familiar with the Trust having worked successfully with them over some years.</b></p> <p><b>Q – Will the lead individuals within the firm, who will be working with the Trust, have been reviewed?</b> <b>A – The CEO responded that the lead individuals have been changed over the years. In addition, different individuals do the groundwork.</b></p> <p>The members <b>approved</b> the appointment of Bishop Fleming LLP to carry out the External Audit for 2021 – 22.</p> <p>It was noted that the results of the External Audit for 2021 – 22 must be with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) by 31 December 2022 and subsequently with Companies House.</p> <p>It was noted that a tender exercise will be conducted by the Audit Committee during the Autumn term 2022 and a recommendation made for the appointment of external auditors FY's 22/23 to 24/25.</p>	
6.	<p><b>Report of the Chair of the Board of Trustees and Review of the Year's Activities for 2021-22 – for note and discussion</b> <b>The Chair highlighted the following from the report prior to taking questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Covid</b> – this has yet again had an impact of the Trust education provision this year. Although no lock down there have been some sustained periods of absence of staff and pupils across the Trust. Special thanks go to the CEO, DCEO, Sue Howard, HR Officer and members of the Executive Improvement Team (EIT) as despite the challenges, by working together, the Trust has not had to close any of the schools during the year. Pupils have been back in full time education for a year now and while across the Trust everyone is working hard to close the gap in pupil learning and development, the impact of Covid will be felt for some time yet, including effects on mental health.</li> <li>• <b>Staffing</b> – High numbers of staff have left the Trust this year - mainly teaching staff and teaching assistants (TAs). It is evident this is due to a number of factors; teachers are rethinking their work/life balance after the pressures of Covid over the last two years; the economy has had an impact on part time teachers and TAs no longer wishing to pay increasingly high costs of travel to work; TAs working 1:1 with pupils with special needs are finding this stressful. It is becoming a challenge to find staff, particularly senior teachers. This situation appears to be affecting many Trusts.</li> <li>• <b>Changes at Board level this year</b> – Notably we had the sad loss of trustee Roy Gillard, who passed away at the beginning of the year. Several other trustees have left. Four new trustees have been recruited who bring a range of</li> </ul>	

experience to the Board, complementing the skills of existing trustees, strengthening governance and the increasing ability to provide a constructive challenge.

- **Trust Growth** – Morchard Bishop, in a management partnership last year, converted in October taking the Trust to sixteen schools.

This year the Trust entered into a management partnership with Wolborough CE Primary School in Newton Abbot. The DCEO is working with Wolborough to improve their financial position. Wolborough have yet to submit an expression of interest to join the Trust, but this is expected soon. Some restructuring and land issues need to be resolved prior to this.

A federation of three schools in the Ivybridge area may enter into a management partnership with the Trust in September. One of the three schools is a church school. One school has had a recent Ofsted inspection and two prior Ofsteds have been 'Good'.

The Trust is also talking to another single academy which is a free school.

With the DfE pushing for every school to be in a strong Trust by 2030 it is felt there will be a lot of opportunity to acquire new schools – however any new schools would need to be a good fit to the Trust and do nothing to jeopardise existing Trust schools.

- **Finance** – This will be another strong year financially, thanks to the tight financial management of the DCEO and team. A healthy level of reserves has been built up to, in part, support growth and manage funding uncertainties such as staff pay awards. There is also increasing demand for capital funding to maintain and improve the Trust estate. Trustees have recognised the level of reserves is high and the Finance and General Purposes Committee have developed a plan for projects for use of the reserves, including capital, growth, technology and green projects. The plan retains a buffer in accordance with ESFA guidelines.

In conclusion the Chair extended thanks to the members, trustees and local board governors, the DCEO, Sue Howard, the EIT and all teaching and support staff for their hard work and dedication over a difficult year. She also thanked the CEO for her tireless work to achieve the best outcomes for the Trust. She added that she felt being part of such a robust Trust has enabled the Trust to face and come through the recent challenges.

The members thanked the Chair for her clear and helpful report then asked the following:

**Q – In terms of teaching staff recruitment and retention to what extent are salary levels part of that? What is the scope for using salaries as an incentive to persuade people to travel to work at our schools?**

**A – The Chair responded that there is probably some scope but the Trust is reluctant to move away from government recommended levels. There needs to be a balance between giving more and the knock on effect to everything else. It is a piece of work for the Workforce Strategy group to make the Trust the employer of choice. Having carried out exit interviews nobody so far has said leaving is purely to do with salary. Of our last leavers it was more the pressure of work mentioned. The Chair agreed that the Trust did need to be mindful of salary however, as the biggest risk to the Trust was not being able to get staff but advised that the Workforce Strategy group would be looking at other ways of attracting and retaining staff.**

**Q – Could the Trust pay travelling costs to staff?**

A – The CEO advised that travel costs were paid for journeys made by staff as part of their job, within work time. Travel to a place of work is not paid and would have tax complications. It is felt that the Trust offers extra incentives to staff through its programme of internal CPD and training, and opportunity for progression.

Q – Regarding the reserves and the environmental agenda, the Church of England General Synod has committed to net zero carbon targets for 2030 – how is the Trust addressing environmental issues, particularly the church schools?

A – The CEO, DCEO and trustees responded with a general overview of moving to a net zero target. They advised of ways in which the Trust will be continuing to address this issue:

- CIF bids and capital projects include suspended ceilings and LED lighting.
  - PV solar panels in situ at a number of schools and looking at funding and provision at other schools
  - Bids will be placed for the public sector decarbonisation programme in September for replacement of gas boilers with more energy efficient systems
  - Gradual replacement of school rooves to improve energy efficiency
  - Building up awareness in schools and school eco-councils. At present this is being led by individual academy heads (AHs), based on the capacity of the school to address the issues, rather than as a Trust-wide programme.
- Broadhempston has recently become an Eco-School

In terms of upgrading Trust school buildings, the DCEO advised that some buildings were in a conservation area however planning has not yet been an issue. The members and trustees also discussed the possibility of using of church buildings for school purposes and felt this worth looking into.

It was noted by members, from the CEO's summer newsletter, that many of the school clubs and activities had an eco- focus. The merits of local provision of school catering using locally produced ingredients, which the Trust is supporting were discussed. Members were advised that uptake of free school meals has increased.

Q – With reference to the Regional Schools Commission (RSC) broadening remit regarding safeguarding, has there been an improvement in the support and coordination of safeguarding within the Local Authority (LA)? Please note: the RSC is soon to become the Regional Delivery Directorate (RDD).

A – The CEO responded that following a second recent Ofsted, the LA remained in special measures. However following a recent referral to MASH from one of the Trust schools, a timely and appropriate response to the situation was made, which provided some hopes of improvement. New staff have also been appointed to the service which it is hoped will also help turn the situation around.

Q- When will the Trust be replacing the Devon Lady buildings at Diptford?

A – The CEO responded that the Trust is still awaiting the outcome of the Schools Rebuilding Programme bid for funding the project to replace the buildings. In the meantime an application has been for urgent capital funding – again a response is being awaited and recently the local MP has become involved in supporting the applications. Parents are becoming frustrated at the lack of progress and the CEO and Chair are continuing to communicate and provide updates on the situation to parents. The CEO explained temporary reorganisation of teaching arrangements at the school that would be required until such time as the funding issues are resolved and the building project complete.

BT explained that although financial reserves were available, the Trust wanted to exhaust every possibility of outside funding before using its own money towards the project as this would be the best outcome for the whole Trust. The CEO expressed her frustration with the current system of capital funding being based on pupil numbers –





	<p>It was noted that Otterton Church of England Primary School extended the age range from 3 to 11 with effect from 1 September 2021 and Drakes Church of England Primary School extended the age range from 3 to 11 with effect from 1 September 2022. It was also noted however that the opening of the extended provision for Drakes has been delayed owing to internal remodelling being required.</p>	
10.	<p><b>Election of Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees for 2022-23</b>  The Clerk advised there had been one nomination for each post as follows:</p> <p>Chair – Cheryl Mathieson  Vice Chair – Ben Thorne</p> <p>The opportunity for discussion of the candidates was offered, however none was required.</p> <p>Trustees unanimously <b>approved</b> the appointment of Cheryl Mathieson as Chair of the Board of Trustees for 2022-23.</p> <p>Trustees unanimously <b>approved</b> the appointment of Ben Thorne as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees for 2022-23.</p>	
11.	<p><b>Evaluation of governance impact – review of the performance and value of the meeting</b>  The following comments were received from members and trustees:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was felt that a rich discussion had been held over several of the issues and that the cycle and format of meetings going forward, had been moved on.</li> </ul>	
18.	<p><b>Date of the next AGM</b>  To be confirmed – see item 7.3.</p> <p>The Chair ended the meeting by wishing members and trustees a good summer break.</p> <p>On behalf of the members DD thanked the trustees for their sterling work this year.</p>	

The meeting closed at 19.25