

STAR MAT Board of Trustees'

Minutes of the meeting held Wednesday 2nd December 2020 at 6pm via Google Meet

Present: Clare Thornton-Eckford (Chair), Nick Sheppard (until item 5.2), Tom Fielden, Peter Wilson, Richard Coy, Frances Dodd (until item 5.2), Alison Smith, Simon Peacock

In attendance:

Ian Yapp (Chief Education Officer, STAR MAT)
Melissa Boyes (Chief Finance Officer, STAR MAT)
Iain Tessier (Clerk, Governance Advisor – STAR MAT)

	ACTION
<p>1.0 Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.</p>	
<p>1.1 Apologies were received and accepted from Deborah Hastie. Nick Sheppard and Frances Dodd had indicated that they would need to leave the meeting early.</p>	
<p>1.2 There were no declarations of interest.</p>	
<p>2.0 Minutes of the Last Meetings – 20th October 2020</p>	
<p>2.1 Resolved: Trustees agreed that the minutes of the meeting, held on 20th October 2020, were a true and accurate record of that meeting and the Chair was duly authorised to sign them.</p>	
<p>3.0 Approval of the Final Accounts The finalised accounts and audit report were circulated prior to the meeting. The following items were noted by the auditors with regards the finalised audit report and accounts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit findings report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Section 5 minor update to bring on the prior year unadjusted errors • Updated financial statements, please note we still need to update the following formatting issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Page 15 and 16 the carbon emission heading is not formatting correctly to be bold on page 14 and then this should be the heading on page 15 and 16 not fundraising. ○ Page 43 heading note 6 at the top of the page to remove ○ Page 49 column headings at the end of the page to remove ○ Page 52 total cost analysis by academy to move onto page 53 to tidy the formatting up ○ Page 60 the actual return on scheme assets sentence has an extra £000 we will remove 	
<p>3.1 The COO noted that the final draft Balance Sheet and SOFA had not changed but there had been minor alterations elsewhere. All the school accounts were tied. The management responses to the items raised in the audit findings had been included. The valuation exercises had been circulated – if Trustees wanted to reassess valuations that was fine but this task should be looked at post year-end. The numbers were supported by a professional report and therefore Trustees were content to leave them as they were.</p>	

3.2 **Resolved:**
Trustees approved the final accounts as circulated. It was noted that the auditors would accept digital signatures from the relevant parties.

4.0 **Risk Register**
Circulated prior to the meeting.

4.1 The COO said that the Trust had been harsh on itself in terms of its initial assessment of its preparedness and exposure to risk on the finance and resources side of things. Happily, actions taken to date had mitigated, to a large extent, many of the identified risks have been mitigated to a great extent. Commenting on the remaining risks, the following matters were highlighted:

Strategic and reputational risk

Other organisations were competing for biddable funds. Nothing could be done about their existence but the Trust could put itself in the best position possible to secure those funds.

Partnerships

Rated as amber due to issues with suppliers previously noted.

Digital technology

The change in the education and work landscape and the need to have a quality online learning platform and wider infrastructure meant that the Trust viewed this as a risk.

Operational risks

All five of the 'reds' were linked to risks with suppliers.

Pandemic outbreak

The Trust had identified this as a risk Pre-Covid. The fact that it was now a reality meant that risks in this area had to be taken seriously and there would be ongoing work to do to mitigate risks as a result of Covid.

Financial risks

These were primarily linked to the audit findings. There were detailed analyses of these in response to comments made by Members last year.

The COO believed that the register was in a good state and workable.

4.2 A Trustee said that they would like to see a comparator tool on the dashboard so Trustees could see the progress with mitigating risks. The COO agreed and would add this in.

5.0 **Ratify Pay Committee Recommendations**
Copies of the LGB Pay Committee minutes had been circulated prior to the meeting.

5.1 The CEO noted that suitable challenge had been present at Headteacher PM meetings.

5.1.1 Did any of the processes stand out as highlighting any issues? The CEO could endorse the recommendations around Headteacher progressions. All of the LGBs were given suitable guidance on how to execute their Pay Committee duties. There was some variability in how processes were delivered and the evidence bases referred to, however, this had been a complicated and challenging year. HR advice was that Headteachers should only be withholding staff for progression where performance issues were already known about in February (prior to Covid). Pay Committee meetings had to proceed but with an eye on taking the advice and the ongoing situation into account. Trustees were referred to the minutes of the Pay Committee meetings. The Governance Advisor said that Trustees needed to be satisfied that local processes had been carried out according to robust procedures, in line with appraisal expectations, the Pay and Appraisal policies and the Pay Committee Terms of Reference provided to them by the Trust Board

5.1.2 Confidential minute.

5.2 **Resolved:**
Trustees approved the pay progression recommendations as put forward by the LGB Pay Committees.

MB

Nick Sheppard and Frances Dodd left the meeting

5.3 Confidential minutes.

6.0 Update on Cleaning Contract

Trustees had received the most recent communications between the Trust and RCCN.

6.1 Trustees' comments at the recent FAR committee had been taken very seriously. Communications had since been sent to RCCN, on the back of the challenge from Trustees and the ongoing concerns of the executive. Mr Sheppard had supported the Trust with those communications. A response had been received from RCCN. Everyone had to be clear about the safeguarding position and the outstanding issues. The Trust's position had been made very clear to RCCN – all staff needed to have an enhanced DBS to work on a school site. The Trust could now see exactly where the 'holes' were. Requests had been made with respect five members of RCCN staff. The CEO noted that RCCN's processes had been clearly stated to be inadequate. There was plenty of evidence of poor management at all levels.

6.2 Procurement options were being considered. Taking the service in-house could happen in the event of emergency. However, in terms of procurement, RCCN, for example, were still on the accredited list. Therefore, the procurement process had to be very diligent to avoid a similar situation happening with another new supplier moving forward. Mr Peacock and Mr Sheppard were supporting the procurement exercise to provide Trustee oversight. The Chair asked that an in-house option be considered. The COO replied that this would require more capacity at management level to manage staff and an in-built capacity to cover staff absence etc. This option might be possible as a long-term solution but work would be needed to make that a reality. Following a frank discussion, Trustees were happy at this point for the procurement exercise to continue.

7.0 School Improvement

Prior to the meeting, Trustees had received the following documentation:

- Copies of the reports generated from the school improvement 'single conversations' with all of the headteachers and the school improvement advisor.
- The planned allocation of Donna Kettle's time as SIA
- The Church School overview reports outlining distinctiveness and effectiveness
- The end of year outcomes/assessment data for the two secondary schools
- The updated education risk register
- The annual Education Performance categories for each setting
- A Covid19 device allocation update
- The CEOs letter to Members

7.1 The CEO drew Trustees' attention to the themes in the conversations. The documents were used as part of headteacher appraisal conversations. Another round of meetings titled 'continuing the conversation' were already in the diary. The notes from these meetings would be circulated ahead of the January Board meeting. It would be good to look at commonalities across schools. For example, what remained the areas of concern – were there patterns etc. The HR partner was supporting the Trust to look at options for those schools which currently have in place interim leadership structures, in order to make them sustainable and successful.

7.2 Trustees made positive comments about the material circulated. The level of documentation and detail had been very useful. The format of the summary was also very helpful. It helped to pull together key trends and observations. This allowed Trustees to consider the position across the board. It was good to see the school improvement topic in such detail on the agenda. A Trustee encouraged the CEO to continue with the format in any updates. The CEO welcomed the feedback, noting that Covid might have been a catalyst for the single conversations but actually this was about ongoing school improvement conversations and leaders were aware that reports would be shared with governors, Trustees (link Trustees) and school improvement advisors. Responding to a query about challenge for leaders in key areas,

the CEO said that searching questions about safeguarding and the quality of online learning, for example, would be levelled at school leaders. The Chair felt that the new reporting format was potentially more insightful than the RAGged education risk register.

7.3 Some of the information circulated was going to Members but the CEO had wanted Trustees to have sight of documentation first. A Trustee asked about the Church Effectiveness reports; these were effectively populated but what oversight process has gone into that population prior to Trustees seeing them. The CEO replied that the church school advisor from the Diocese had provided both oversight and moderation of the information listed.

8.0 Headteacher Report Format and Revised LGB Agenda Planner for 2020/21

The revised headteacher's report format and revised agenda planner had been circulated prior to the meeting.

8.1 The CEO wanted to streamline reporting from heads to governors. With the development of specific reporting templates, remaining elements of duplication had been removed. Certain sections were not adding anything from meeting to meeting and had therefore been removed or revised. The Headteachers had been consulted on the process. Trustees welcomed the revisions to the format.

8.2 The agenda planner had been adjusted to reflect the environment leaders continued to operate in and provide some more flexibility on reporting points. This was about a temporary adjustment for the remainder of this year only. The CEO further outlined the rationale for the adjustments. A reporting format for catch-up premium would be developed. Expectations for LGB meetings would be laid out for headteachers ahead of each meeting, as this had been well received ahead of the December LGBs. There would be standardised reporting and clear indication given when an agenda item had to be covered. Curriculum presentations would be encouraged in due course but otherwise conversations about curriculum development could be done via link visits and reported thereafter to main LGB, with an option for a Q&A. The Governance Advisor said supported the adjustments that had been made and local boards would still be covering the requirements of the Scheme of Delegation and the Academies Financial Handbook and Governance Handbook.

Resolved:

Trustees approved the revised agenda planner.

9.0 Policy Review

The finalised Pay and Appraisal policies were circulated for information. Trustees also received the ASCL response submitted to AVEC. The finalised Disclosure and Barring (DBS) policy had been circulated for Trustees' scrutiny.

9.1 A Trustee noted that in reviewing the structures for progression on the leadership scale, the pay policy (and its predecessor) was largely silent on the review of the Deputy Head. Surely the same rationale for assessing headteachers should apply to deputies? The CEO acknowledged the point and would raise this with AVEC HR, adding that sometimes a policy did not go into the detail that was then actually delivered in the process. The Governance Advisor said that he was aware that the Trustee had raised this matter with regards the corresponding 'silence' on the matter in the Pay Committee Terms of Reference. The Terms could only reflect duties outlined in the policy. The new Pay policy would lead to a review of the Pay Committee Terms of Reference ahead of next year and this would include additional statements on considering the progression of deputy heads in line with the wording in the policy.

9.2 DBS policy

The Trust had consulted with headteachers on the policy. It had not changed in nature since issued as a draft at last meeting. Page 27, the self-declaration section was highlighted. It was fine to be included according to HR and the LA. Guidance would be given to headteachers via Cayte Mulhern on how to raise and deal with concerns. The current DBSs across the Trust would be audited to assess how old some of them were. There would be a benchmarking exercise on entering into a renewal program. The key question was what value any renewal

IY

Clerk

process would add when compared to its total cost to the Trust. The Headteachers were keen on a 10% random sample. HR did not believe that this would add any value, preferring instead an 'age limit' on a DBS or paying for the auto-renewal service. It was clarified that the self-declaration would be an annual requirement. Given that intention, wouldn't that obviate the need for a 10% sample? Yes, that was the argument AVEC put forward. The CEO wanted to embed a positive safeguarding culture. Who would check on the headteachers that they were monitoring returns? The headteachers would be required to confirm that all self-declarations had been returned every year and the CEO would, in turn, check this with headteachers.

Resolved:

Trustees approved the DBS policy as circulated.

10.0 Outcome of the Whistleblowing Investigation

10.1 Trustees noted that they had received the report and recommendations therein.

11.0 Governance Matters

Prior to the meeting Trustees had received three governor applications for initial consideration.

11.1 The Clerk outlined the context for each of the applications.

11.2 A Trustee believed that Peter Ball needed to be retained at Sherburn Hungate Primary. He provided challenge to leadership and had a good range of skills and knowledge.

Resolved:

Based on the endorsement, Trustees were content to appoint Peter Ball as a Trust Appointed governor on Sherburn Hungate LGB without undertaking a one-to-one.

11.3 It was agreed that Deborah Hastie would meet with Nigel Bellamy and Tom Fielden would meet with Steven Westland, ahead of a recommendation at next Board meeting.

DH, TF

12.0 Any Other Urgent Business

None.

Date and Time of the Next Meeting

Tuesday 15th December 2020 at 5pm (precedes Members' AGM).

The meeting closed at 8.05pm

Action Points from the Meeting	Agenda Item	Person(s) Responsible	Date for Delivery
Comparator tool on the risk register dashboard	4.2	MB	By January meeting
Enquire with AVEC about need for Pay policy to be more explicit about reviewing deputy head performance/progression	9.1	IY	Report back January meeting
Review and revise the Pay Committee Terms of Reference	9.1	IT (IY)	For January meeting
Meet with prospective governors	11.3	DH TF	By 15 th December meeting