

STAR MAT Board of Trustees'

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 2nd March 2021 at 5.30pm via Google Meet

Present: Clare Thornton-Eckford (Chair), Nick Sheppard, Peter Wilson, Richard Coy, Alison Smith, Simon Peacock, Deborah Hastie, Frances Dodd

In attendance:

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

1.0 Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

1.1 Apologies were received and accepted from Tom Fielden. There were no declarations of interest.

2.0 Minutes of the Last Meetings – 19th January 2021 and EGM 24th February 2021

2.1 Resolved:

Trustees agreed that the minutes of the meetings, held 19th January 2021 and 24th February 2021, were true and accurate records of those meeting and the Chair was duly authorised to sign them.

3.0 Action Points and Matters Arising

3.1	Deliver proposal on digitising parent governor elections	The COO indicated that preparations were ongoing. A pilot had been launched for testing. The DPO, Veritau, had provided advice. The COO thanked Tim at SHS for his support on the project. The process, if successful, could replace paper election processes completely, including post Covid.	ACTION TF
	Speak to Mr Westland re: application to join TGS LGB	Carried forward. It was noted that Mr Westland had applied prior to Christmas and therefore this matter should be taken forward as swiftly as possible now.	
	Prepare flow chart outlining process for considering and approving Trust Appointed governors	On agenda.	
	Curriculum planning reporting to LGBs	The CEO noted that this would be discussed with headteachers via the 'continuing conversation' mechanism. Curriculum intent, implementation and impact would be reported to governors in the summer term.	
	Record Trustees recognition of Phonics outcomes at Kellington (via their LGB)	Completed.	
	Deliver School Improvement Strategy for approval. Speak to Alison Smith about the specifics to do with Church School	On agenda.	
	Progress with implementation of RSE policy and position re: DfE deadlines	The CEO confirmed that local policies and frameworks must be consulted, approved	

	and rolled out for September. The CEO was checking with schools as to progress. Update after Easter.	IY
Review cleaning contract costs in Brayton budget	This matter had been addressed.	
Reports to Trustees on the outcome of the procurement process for Payroll services	On agenda.	
Convey the approval of SCA spend in letter to LGBs, via communication with heads and chairs	Completed.	

4.0 Governance Matters

4.1 Flowchart for Trust Appointed governor process (proposal circulated prior to the meeting)
 It was proposed to add, at the end of phase 2 and prior to a formal recommendation being put to a Board meeting, that the nominated one-to-one Trustee would have a conversation with the chair of governors of the preferred LGB about the candidate to be nominated. The Governance Advisor, referring to the note that he had authored, reminded Trustees of the initial rationale for the currently agreed process. A Trustee spoke about the importance of recognising that LGBs were sub-committees of the MAT – the MAT had accountability for local governance and therefore any conversation with a chair should be after any decisions had been made, as per the draft flowchart. Another Trustee agreed, saying that this could not end up being about a negotiation; the feelings of individuals must not be allowed to impune the integrity of an appointment process. Views were shared on either side of the debate. A Trustee said that communication was the key factor and perhaps the Board had not done enough in terms of outlining why the process needed to be the way that it was and that Trustees had to look at local governance as a whole and ensure skills and capacity were spread across the piece – the MAT was one organisation. Trustees agreed with this sentiment – the duty to deliver equity and fairness had to be communicated. The CEO proposed adding the guiding principles that had shaped the process (and therefore the flowchart) and discussing this at next Chairs’ forum. Trustees agreed this would be a good idea. The flowchart would then be finalised in due course. The CEO and Chair to discuss ahead of the forum.

IY / CTE

4.2 Training Matrices (made available via the Google governance drive)
 The matrices had been discussed at all recent LGB meetings. The CEO noted that many of the LGB strategic plans highlighted the importance of training. The CEO suggested that Trustees pay closer attention to the level of population on matrices at the May meeting and be prepared to take action with those local boards whose governors were clearly not attending training. The CEO highlighted particular issues in certain boards and frank discussion followed. The Clerk reminded Trustees to complete safeguarding training if they had not done so in the last 12 months.

Agenda

ALL

4.3 RAG criteria for LGBs (parameters shared prior to the meeting)
 The CEO noted that he had worked with the Governance Advisor to arrive at the criteria and parameters set out in the pro forma circulated. This had also been shared with the headteacher group and would be introduced at the chairs’ forum. This RAG rating would form part of the wider risk register of schools. The criteria contained measurable objectives but with some elements of subjective opinion – such as the evaluation of heads, chairs and clerks. The new process introduced a transparent methodology to assessing the quality of local governance. Trustees welcomed the criteria. A Trustee felt that effective church school governance needed to be added in as a criteria. The CEO agreed.

IY

4.4 Link Trustee Protocol (amended protocol shared prior to the meeting)
 The revised protocol referenced that Trustees would be in regular receipt of LGB minutes ahead of Trust Board meetings and made clear to everyone that Trustees would also have access, post meetings, to LGB agendas and papers on Decision Time for reference purposes. Trustees approved the amendments.

4.5 LGB finance working parties (draft ToRs to be presented)
 The CEO had received an enquiry from the Chair at Sherburn High about establishing a finance working group. The CEO felt it appropriate to offer this facility to all LGBs (as per the agenda planner - LGBs were encouraged to look at the use of working parties), on the basis that any such

group needed to operate via defined terms and would not be given any delegated authorities. Final decisions on finance/resource related matters would still reside with the LGB or Trust Board, in accordance with the SoD. Trustees were happy for the ToRs to be taken to the Chairs' forum.

4.6 It was agreed that all governance meetings should remain online until May half term.

4.7 Governor applications

It was unclear what progress had been made with Stephen Westland's application to join TGS LGB. The Chair agreed to speak to Mr Fielden about this.

With regards Anna Williamson's application, Mr Coy noted that Mrs Williamson was a former chair of governors, who would bring a lot of relevant and necessary skills and experience to the CAT at Appleton Roebuck. It helped that Mrs Williamson was completely independent of the school, i.e. had no current ties to the school community. Mr Coy felt this would be an excellent appointment and in the longer-term interests of the LGB; indeed Mrs Williamson had the capacity to be a future chair of governors' post CAT.

Resolved:

Trustees agreed that Anna Williamson should be appointed as a Trust Appointed governor for Appleton Roebuck LGB.

5.0 Committee Reports

Minutes from the recent round of LGB meetings had been circulated prior to the meeting.

5.1 Trustees confirmed they had reviewed the minutes. It was confirmed that Mr Holah had responded to the confidential issue highlighted by Brayton LGB.

6.0 School Improvement

6.1 CEO Report

Prior to the meeting, Trustees had received the main report, monthly planning summary and 'continuing the conversation' summary. The CEO highlighted that the information included on Decision Time was also uploaded to the Google governance drive for Trustees to review easily post meeting (in the school links folders).

Remote Learning Reports

Reports from the individual schools circulated prior to the meeting.

6.2 Schools had largely followed the DfE template which had been adapted slightly to better serve MAT needs. The secondaries had been given permission to tweak the template further to allow for reporting on assessments in a remote learning environment. The summary of Q&A on this matter at LGBs was included in the meeting papers.

6.2.1 A Trustee was concerned by the small group of parents who had made negative comments on the remote learning offer at one of the schools within 24 hours. What were these parents expecting after schools started this with only one days' notice? Some of the comments were quite unpleasant by all account; how prevalent were personal attacks on schools and teachers via social media? A Trustee commented on wider aspects of parental behaviour in that community. The CEO noted that it had been quite cutting for those headteachers who had suffered instant complaints about remote learning. Unfortunately, this 'feedback' stemmed from the Secretary of State's rhetoric. The vast majority of parents were very supportive of schools and teachers and negative sentiments definitely lessened once schools were fully up and running with their remote learning offers. The CEO put on record his support for the Trust's headteachers in terms of the work they had done, along with their staff, in this area.

6.3 The need for remote learning would reduce after 8th March but not disappear. Development in this area would move within the remit of the digital strategy working group and be included in the new school improvement strategy framework.

- 6.3.1 A Trustee had been surprised by the numbers of children on sites. Full credit to staff for running schools in light of this but were the numbers a bit of an issue. The CEO explained why numbers on site were higher this time around. The CEO added that the necessary contingency planning post 8th March would be discussed at the upcoming Covid Task Force meeting.

School by School Data (Primary)

Data evaluations circulated prior to the meeting.

- 6.4 The CEO noted that the data trends were somewhat erratic but there were a few common threads that could be drawn from the data set. Headteachers had agreed a reassessment timeline. The wellbeing survey tool would also be used. The intention was for PUMA and PIRA tests to again be used to benchmark teacher assessments. Governors would receive a further update in early summer term, with an overview coming to Trustees on 18th May. A further round of formal assessments would take place in early July and this would be reported to LGBs and Trustees at the final meetings of the year. There had been a clear emphasis on Reading and Phonics catch-up in the Autumn term. This fresh data indicated a need to focus on Writing.

- 6.4.1 A Trustee picked up on issues with Writing and resilience of children therein. Was there anything the Trust could do to assist schools with addressing the reported problems? The CEO replied that the schools had been encouraging pupils to write but it was the case that whilst at home some children may have not kept up with their Writing skills. The schools had to maintain broad and balanced curriculums but the CEO assured Trustees that if there were key issues then they would be tackled. With reference to possible avenues to address drop off in Writing skills etc, the CEO was conscious of not disengaging pupils; the matter was quite complex to solve.

- 6.4.2 What was the Trust's approach to summer learning? The CEO said that there had been headlines in the media but schools had not been given details of eligibility for the recovery premium and the roll out of any support in the summer. There was indication that transition to year 7 would be prioritised, particularly for those children defined as vulnerable. What had been implied in press releases was not realistic given the amount of money being talked about. In any event, a year's learning could not be made up over 6 weeks. Also, the Trust could not allow both teachers and children to be burned out before the new year even started. Some children had been through quite a horrendous experience in lockdown and everyone had to be mindful of this.

- 6.4.3 What was the situation re: secondary assessment? The CEO replied that the secondaries would be challenged on how rigorous their assessment schemes were and how they were improving student's resilience towards assessments. Assessments would be subject to benchmarking /moderation exercises. Assessment frameworks for the end of year grades would be drawn up and shared with governors, so as to ensure that all elements of leadership were in agreement on the way forward. Would there be commonality of approach across the secondaries? The CEO replied that a consensus position had been arrived at.

- 6.4.4 Several Trustees were interested in the topic of Quality Assurance (QA), as this seemed to be the area where schools and ultimately Trusts might be challenged? The CEO could understand their interest and likely challenge in this area. He assured the Board that plans were being drawn up and these would be shared with governors and Trustees. The consultation on year end assessment had only just closed and a lack of clarity at this stage on mini exams and wider expectations wasn't helping. Moderation would be the key tool in getting it right.

Catch Up Premium

Individual school reports circulated prior to the meeting.

- 6.5 Schools had been given flexibility on their use of CUP. Plans were being evolved in light of the changing circumstances.

Attendance (term one)

Attendance data for each school had been circulated prior to the meeting.

- 6.6 The data showed that many schools had seen higher attendance rates than in previous years. From summer term, full statutory requirements would be back in play with regard demands on parents for pupils to attend. Responding to a query, the CEO did not think that schools would be held responsible for attendance rates for the whole year.

SIC Reports and Planned Work for the Term

Available reports and pertinent information shared with Trustees prior to the meeting.

- 6.7 The CEO gave a brief summary of intentions. The SIC had been meticulous in their planning for the next period. The CEO noted that items in red indicated where planned visits had not taken place for a variety of reasons.
- 6.8 Had the Trust made plans for replacing the SIC, who had announced their retirement? The CEO felt that he could take this issue forward now that he had been confirmed as permanent in post. How to gain external objectivity and challenge did need to be considered but it was not a simple operation. The CEO was reviewing CST documentation and talking to colleagues in EBOR about their arrangements. Possibly, the MAT might look to buy into other Trusts' models. It might also be the case that the Trust contracted a new external advisor. The Trust needed to avoid spending large amounts of money on external assurance and thus not leaving enough money to develop school improvement functions internally. A Trustee wondered whether having a full-time resource could provide the Trust with an income stream, by selling that person's services to other Trusts. The CEO replied that if they gained an in-house specialist it would allow the Trust to look at doing things in different ways but indicated that this was not his favoured approach. MAT to MAT sharing of internal specialists and mutual reciprocation of support was seen as a more sustainable model but with an external element retained to some extent. There was a further general discussion on QA processes. The CEO concluded that the Trust had enough talent and skills within the Trust to manage in house short term but that he would like to examine external validation options.

School Improvement Strategy 2021/21

Finalised strategy document circulated prior to the meeting.

- 6.9 The finalised strategy had been presented to headteachers. The strategy fully reflected conversations at and post last meeting.

Safeguarding and DSL Supervision Project

Link governor and DSL discussion reports circulated prior to the meeting.

- 6.10 The CEO highlighted conversations with all schools about how they were supporting vulnerable young people in their settings. Mr Sheppard, safeguarding Trustee, note that the oversight work from Cayte Mulhern was excellent. The Board could have every confidence regarding the progress with internal processes in this area.
- 6.11 The CEO talked about piloting the DSL supervision project. This was about coaching and promoting a culture of excellence around safeguarding. The new Ed Psych would provide the model for DSLs. The Ed Psych was very thorough and this would be a welcome resource. Mr Sheppard advocated the pilot. Amongst its benefits, was the promotion of staff welfare. Staff needed support as they were often having to deal with quite difficult cases. The CEO was fundamentally committed to the pilot and to rolling out the project permanently thereafter. Trustees welcomed the roll-out of the project. Everyone recognised that schools were working with families in challenging environments. It appeared good value for money. The Chair noted that, given what was in KCSIE, all Trusts should be doing similarly.

7.0 Reporting Decision on Payroll Contract

Summary tender paper circulated prior to the meeting.

- 7.1 The COO thanked Mr Peacock and Mr Fielden for their work on the panel. The panel had shortlisted three providers. The risks and concerns were outlined in the summary. Mr Peacock

and Mr Fielden, acting with the duly given delegated authority, had upheld the recommendation of the panel. The move to the new provider, NeoPeople, would commence in April. There were considerable cost savings from the new contract, circa £30k year on year. Training for schools was in the diary and data would be transferred securely. The risks associated with the quick turnaround would be mitigated. In any case, the risk of remaining with EPM was far greater than any potential issue with the swift move to NeoPeople. Exit clauses for material breaches were in place in the contract. The contract had been through legal. Mr Peacock noted that the panel had been through a very thorough process.

- 7.1.1 Did the new provider have a track record? Had they come with positive testimonials? Five references had been sought and these referees had replied within a day. All were very positive in their feedback and NeoPeople had very low error rates. The CEO had been keen to secure a company with the resilience to deal with the issues that had been raised with EPM and to deliver a better service. The Trustee welcomed the reassurances. Mr Peacock added that NeoPeople had a workable mobilisation plan that followed a proper methodology.

8.0 Policy Review

A Child Protection policy addendum and updated privacy notice required approval.

8.1 Resolved:

Trustees approved the documents as circulated. It was noted that the addendum would be redundant upon return to schools on 8th March.

9.0 Items to be Delegated or Communicated to LGBs

- 9.1 Certain matters to be taken to chairs' forum, as outlined above.

10.0 Any Other Urgent Business

- 10.1 ASCL's advice on the use of face coverings had been shared with Trustees. The Trust's policy was strongly recommending the use of face coverings in classrooms but not issuing a mandate, which was the strongest possible response whilst following DfE guidance (face coverings were not going to be a legal requirement). If students/parents refused to engage and children did not wear face coverings then the schools would have to deal with that. It was a complex matter.

- 10.1.1 What was the staff view? Some staff would be keen to wear face masks and have them used but no straw poll had been conducted. The executive decision was to follow the guidance. A Trustee said that they had been consistent in following formal guidance and by doing so reduced the risk of any formal legal challenges. The CEO felt that the Trust would be challenged either way, by parents with conflicting views. Further general discussion followed.

- 10.1.2 What was the risk of classroom transmission? Was there any firm data on this? The CEO said that time would tell in terms of how the community data might translate into impact in the classroom. There was no evidence to date of in-class transmission. All cases were driven by community transmission. Testing would pick up percentages of cases but would not be a complete safeguard. Schools would track things as best they could. The important thing was that schools knew what to do in the event of cases being identified.

10.2 Resolved:

Approved face coverings policy, as per version four circulated.

- 10.3 The Chair, on behalf of Trustees, congratulated Mr Yapp on his appointment as permanent CEO.

Date and Time of the Next Meeting

Tuesday 18th May 2021 at 5.30pm

The meeting closed at 8.05pm

Action Points from the Meeting	Agenda Item	Person(s) Responsible	Date for Delivery
1. Speak to Mr Westland re: appointment to TGS LGB	3.1	TF	ASAP
2. Update on progress with RSE consultations and policies in schools	3.1	IY	May meeting
3. Discuss Trust appointed governor process and rationale ahead of Chairs' Forum	4.1	IY / CTE	Before CofG forum
4. Attend to training, specifically safeguarding training, review matrices at summer 1 Trust Board meeting	4.2	ALL	May meeting
5. Church school effectiveness to be added to RAG criteria for assessing LGBs	4.3	IY	May meeting
6. Deliver FWG ToRs to Chairs' forum and offer LGBs opportunity to establish working parties	4.5	IY	CofG forum