

STAR MAT Members' AGM

Minutes of the meeting held Tuesday 15th December 2020 at 7pm via Google Meet

Present: John Hattam (Chair), Robert Hall, Dawn Younge, Ian Butler, Alison Lee

In attendance:

Clare Thornton-Eckford (Chair of Trustees)
Nick Sheppard (Trustee)
Tom Fielden (Trustee)
Alison Smith (Trustee)
Simon Peacock (Trustee)
Richard Coy (Trustee)
Peter Wilson (Trustee)
Ian Yapp (CEO, STAR MAT)
Melissa Boyes (COO, STAR MAT)
Iain Tessier (Clerk, Governance Advisor – STAR MAT)
Lucy Jenkins (Sagars)
Susan Seaman (Sagars)

1.0 Welcome, Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

ACTION

1.1 The Clerk welcomed all to the meeting. There were no apologies. There were no declarations of interest.

2.0 Appoint a Member to Chair the Meeting

2.1 John Hattam offered to Chair the meeting. Members indicated that they were happy for Mr Hattam to do so.

3.0 Approve the Minutes of the Last Meeting – 16th December 2019

Minutes circulated prior to the meeting.

3.1 Resolved:

Members approved the minutes of the last meeting as circulated.

4.0 CEO's Report on Progress and Performance of STAR MAT

Prior to the meeting Members and Trustees had received the following documents:

- Annual Report to Members
- CEO covering note with regard Covid-19 adjustments
- Annual STAR MAT Church Schools Oversight Report
- Annual CoE Distinctiveness Reports by school
- Education Risk Register (for information) - 3 pages
- Resources Risk Register (for information)
- Revised Strategic Plan (for information)
- TGS and SHS centre-assessed grades 2020 (for information)

4.1 The Chair welcomed the comprehensive suite of documents provided. Members confirmed that they had read the material.

4.2 The CEO noted that it had been an interesting and challenging reporting period; one in which he had not formally taken on the CEO role until September 2020. Despite the unusual nature of the year, the Trust had aimed for as much continuity in reporting to Members as possible. However, in

the material circulated there was some historic data, such as in the Church reports. Those reports had been compiled and aligned in accordance with the expectations of their Diocesan advisor. The CEO felt that he needed to describe in narrative form the year the Trust had been through, with closure of schools etc. The outcomes from secondary schools were centre assessed and standalone and not nationally benchmarked, thus there was no analysis or evaluation. With regards the education risk register, certain threads were more up-to-date than others. A further update of this would take place in January. The CEO had wished for this register to also be more evaluative but given the year at hand this was difficult to achieve. The Chair of the Trust Board wished to highlight the outstanding contribution of the CEO and COO in what had proved to be an extremely challenging year.

Questions and comments were invited.

- 4.3 The strategic plan was very thorough. Everyone acknowledged the barriers to delivering certain elements but clearly efforts to mitigate these barriers had been made. The CEO was invited to comment on how he viewed its delivery moving into next year. The plan had been written with a caveat that Covid could be a limiting factor. Whilst this had been the case, it had also been an accelerating factor for other parts of the plan. An example of this would be the ICT strategy; The Trust had taken this forward at speed to facilitate a quality online learning offer. Remote learning was now in place for all schools. Delivery of the strategic plan was on course and the CEO was confident that large parts of it would be delivered as planned. The Trust was also evaluating that progress using the established KPIs. Members would be given an evaluation update in January as promised. Some alterations to the plan had been required, such as the ICT infrastructure. IY
- 4.4 With reference to the Church school reports, a Member had noticed that none had identified training needs. Had this been looked at? The CEO replied that training considerations for those schools would be looked at alongside the other, non-Church schools. The CEO would pick up the Member's specific point with the CE school headteachers – he acknowledged that the reports outlined CPD but not further training needs. The Diocese had offered schools a deadline in the Spring Term to deliver these reports but the Trust had wanted to ensure they were ready for this Members' AGM. The Headteachers might have training needs in mind but not articulated these in the reports at this time. The Chair welcomed the CEO picking this up with headteachers in due course, although Members were not wanting to unnecessarily burden headteachers at this time. IY
- 4.5 Looking at the risk register, risks linked to pupil absence had been identified. With absence having been higher for some schools in this recent period, were certain schools now at more risk? The CEO had spoken with the NYCC team and headteachers were working through the revised statutory guidance on recording attendance. Currently, those pupils self-isolating were discounted from absence figures but those testing positive for Covid and therefore absent due to illness were marked as absent. Attendance in MAT schools was actually quite high and, for some of the schools, higher than it was pre-Covid.
- 4.6 Comments around 6th form recruitment and collaboration had been noted. Were the 6th forms at risk of not being viable? The COO said that an SRMA had conducted a viability study. The Trust had not yet digested the recently received report on their findings. A management response would be compiled. Viability largely depended upon student numbers increasing. There would need to be an honest discussion on the way forward as the 6th form provisions were a risk from a financial perspective. However, the finances were only one aspect to consider. The CEO said that the Trust also needed to consider if the 6th forms provided suitable and aspirational environments to service the needs of students. From that perspective, the 6th forms needed to be assessed and the Trust needed to look at what other settings were doing to be successful. The Chair of the Trust Board said that continuation of 6th form provision could not be based purely on the finances. Online learning could be the key to operating 6th forms with an improved offer and a lower cost base. This matter was on Trustees' radar.
- 4.7 The Chair asked the CEO what kept him awake at night. The CEO replied that at present, in fact since March, there had been a necessary preoccupation with Covid and Health and Safety and now it was about managing the transition back to some form of normality. Re-establishing levels of accountability across the piece was necessary. Of immediate concern was the promise to provide

testing in schools, with no clear idea on how this would be delivered in practice. The level of guidance issued in the last year had been challenging in itself to navigate simply due to the sheer amount of it and that fact that it constantly changed. Interpreting guidance and then forging a path came with difficulties associated with resourcing. Factor in things like 27 staff absences across two schools at one-point this term, Members could understand the logistical and operational challenges the leadership faced. Having to move beyond that and return to looking at impact and strategy was not always easy.

4.8 The Chair asked the Chair of the Trustees what they were most proud of over the past year. The CofT was proud of the way the Trust's governance systems had evolved, particularly the way the MAT Board had developed a formal mechanism to step-in and support and improve governance where issues had been identified. Modelling good governance, bringing people together and building capacity through recruitment were very important in the current climate. The Chair agreed about the importance of strong governance and its contribution in driving better performance.

4.9 Was the current size of the Trust something that everyone was comfortable with? The CEO said that there were no plans for further expansion at this time. There had been some exploration pre-March but there was no capacity to take on a struggling school. The MAT might consider taking on another school if it was approached by a stronger school that would add value and capacity to what was already there. Ideally, the Trust would like to take on another secondary setting but again that would depend upon the strength of the prospective partner setting. The Chair welcomed the clarification.

5.0 Presentation of the End of Year Accounts

Prior to the meeting Members and Trustees had received the following documents:

- Audit report and findings
- Final accounts (approved by Trustees on 2nd December)

5.1 The Trust Board had approved the accounts at their meeting on 2nd December, and this was an opportunity for Members to receive these for information and scrutiny. The COO noted that the auditors were present to take questions and make a presentation if requested. This had been a challenging year due to Covid, although school closures had resulted in some financial benefits and the Trust closed the year with good reserves to carry forward. The Chair welcomed a clean set of accounts, with only minor recommendations and clear indication that previous items had been dealt with. The COO had delivered on her promise of last year to balance the books. This was not easy in the current climate. The COO and her team were congratulated on their efforts.

5.2 Prior to the inception of the Trust, schools had been told of the efficiency savings that came with academisation. Where were the financial gains moving forward? For example, were further renegotiations on contracts possible? The Chair of the Trust Board assured Members that contracts was one area being closely looked at and that capacity at Trust level had been introduced to allow that to happen. The CEO noted the existence of a contracts risk register (RAG rated). Contracts were prioritised for a variety of reasons, not just on the basis of cost and/or financial benefit. Those in the current renewal cycle might yield savings, such as the cleaning contract. There were several other likely opportunities. The SRMA had not identified any potential savings in this financial year but such savings were possible the following year. The CEO was frank in his assessment that any gains at this stage might well be eaten up by in-year costs linked to Covid and no-one could say with certainty how long those additional costs would affect schools.

5.3 How did the Trust ensure compliance in what was a complex environment? The COO replied that on the finance side her team was working closely with schools to improve budget monitoring and with LGBs to improve financial governance. The central team was now adept at running financial reports. Procedures were robust but improvements could still be made. Such improvements were easier to implement no that the back office had more capacity. The Chair noted spirited conversations at recent Trustee meetings about large variances in the secondary school budgets and invited further comment. Members were assured that measures had been put in place to support adequate monitoring pending recruitment. Adverse monthly variances could be adequately captured and questioned.

Robert Hall left the meeting

- 5.4 To arrive at a small in-year surplus for 2020 was a good result. What were the in-year costs around Covid looking like? The COO did express some concerns. Supply cover would be monitored, as this had the potential to spiral. Given the requirement for additional ventilation of classrooms, heating and energy costs were likely to increase too. The Trust had deployed day cleaners to schools and cleaning provision had increased generally and this came with higher costs. The cleaning contract was being looked at but it was not possible at this stage to say whether that would yield meaningful savings.

6.0 Update on Recruitment of a Permanent CEO

Mr Yapp was invited to leave the meeting

- 6.1 The Chair invited the Chair of the Trust Board to update Members on this matter. The Trust would be advertising in the new year for a permanent, full-time CEO. There was a firm expectation that the interim CEO would apply and would be viewed as a strong candidate. The recruitment process and panel had now been agreed. The Chair said that the Trustees had been right to advertise externally. Interviews were planned for February.

Nick Sheppard left the meeting. Ian Yapp re-joined the meeting.

7.0 Any Other Urgent Business

- 7.1 Given the challenges faced by schools, how was the Trust supporting the mental wellbeing of staff and students? The CEO said that this was quite a complex matter to distil in a brief answer. To a large extent such oversight was devolved to school level. Every school had a staff wellbeing strategy in place, with methods for supervision of staff therein. Conversations with headteachers had focussed on school improvement strategy but discussion about staff wellbeing had been included. Examples were provided. The Trust had outlined some non-negotiables on this subject. The wellbeing thread of the people strategy was very pertinent this year. Schools were addressing student wellbeing in a variety of ways. There were pastoral teams, well-being surveys, learning mentors and nurture programmes, as well as utilising catch-up funding. The various approaches had been discussed across Trust leadership. Leadership had also listened to parents and families about how their children had managed during lockdown and were handling the transition back to school. The vast majority of children had returned very positively. The work ethic, behaviour and passion for learning of Y11s was noted.
- 7.2 The Chair wished to address the recent difference of opinion between Trustees and Members about the Trust Board's composition. The passion of the Chair and Trustees was acknowledged but Members still felt that the right decision had been made. The Chair hoped that all concerned would still work together for the benefit of the 4000+ children in the Trust. The Chair also encouraged everyone to examine ways in which Trustees and Members could work together more closely going forward, whilst respecting the formal roles that Members and Trustees held. The Chair of the Trust Board responded saying that the disagreement had been put behind them and they looked forward to working with Members in the future.
- 7.3 The Chair concluded that there was a lot to be proud of in the last year. The Chair wanted Trustees to continue to focus on and prioritise the children who needed most support to close gaps to their peers; those children least able, through their circumstances, to weather the storm. On behalf of the Members, the Chair thanked Trustees for their contributions over the past year.

The meeting closed at 8.15pm

Agreed Actions

Action	Minute	What	Who	When
1	4.3	Provide evaluation update to Members	CEO	End Jan 2021
2	4.4	Discuss training needs with HTs as minuted	CEO	Easter 2021

These minutes were approved at the STAR MAT Members AGM meeting on 16th December 2021.

Approved