

## MINUTES of the BOARD MEETING

10 December 2024, 1p.m. at Tolvaddon

### Part A Public

Item	Subject	Action
	<p><b>Trustees present:</b>            Karen Brokenshire (KB)            Amy Claridge (AC)            Robin Cowen (RC)            Rob Gasson (RG)            Karen Harris (KH)            Mike Hosking (MH) – Chair            Nick Lake (NL)            Deborah Richards (DR)            Ross Schreiber (RS)            Peter Sheppard (PS)</p> <p><b>Also present:</b>            Jem Alder (JA) – Trust Governance Lead            Cathryn Andrews (CA) – Director of Development            Simon Hague (SE) – CEO <i>items 1-9 only</i>            Jess Hutchings (JH) – Governance Professional            Tamsin Lamb (TL) – Director of Education <i>items 1-9 only</i>            Sean Pinhay (SP) – Chief Finance and Operations Officer [CFOO] <i>items 1-9 only</i>            Vanessa Schreiber (VS) – Executive PA <i>items 1-9 only</i></p>	
<b>1</b>	<b>Apologies:</b> Matt Brierley (MB)	
<b>2</b>	<b>Conflicts of Interest</b>	
2.1	Meeting reviewed the current Register of Interests and no additional interests were declared.	
2.2	Meeting discussed the requirements within current Academy Trust Handbook for including senior staff within the published register. It was agreed to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Publish the minimum details – Trustees / Members / Accounting Officer.</li> <li>2. Maintain a wider register including all staff who have involvement with financial decisions / procurement. SP to identify who should be included.</li> </ol>	SP
<b>3</b>	<b>Minutes of the meetings</b> of 15 October and 21 November	
3.1	Minutes of the meeting of 15 October were accepted subject to the following amendment: Item10.1 – remove KH from Action column / Tracker.	
3.2	Minutes of the meeting of 21 November were accepted as an accurate record.	

<b>Item</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Action</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Action Tracker / Matters arising</b>	
4.1	Tracker. 171. Policy approval schedule. Agreed latest list to be discussed at February Board.	
4.2	173. Lead Trustee Safeguarding report. Deferred to February meeting.	
4.3	178. Attending LGC meetings. It was agreed Trustees would prefer to attend by invitation and purpose was to primarily observe. JA to make LGC Chairs and GPs aware.	JA
<b>5</b>	<b>STRATEGIC / OPERATIONS</b>	
<b>5.1</b>	<b>CEO's update</b>	
5.1.1	Marazion's request to join the Trust is on the Advisory Board's agenda for their December meeting – we should hear the outcome before end of term. Penpol's governors are taking more time to make a final decision. SH confirmed several of their staff have visited our schools and he expects to meet with their governors again.	
5.1.2	Promoting the Trust. This has been a priority for some time and two opportunities arose since our last meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CA presented to the DfE's South West Leaders meeting on our approach to sustainability and Net Zero.</li> <li>• SH and SP presented to the Optimus MAT summit on the Trust's Community Funding initiative.</li> </ul> Both were well received and the Trust is already receiving requests to visit / learn more from other trusts. SH suggested this supports the view that in both areas the trust is further ahead in implementing these two approaches than many others.	
5.1.3	Grant funding. Trust has been successful in obtaining two grants from the local authority – each for £100K: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Re-locate two Elliott Huts from Treloweth to Godolphin.</li> <li>2. Redevelop the kitchen at Rosemellin into a hub kitchen – our catering provider Chartwells is also investing £60K into this project.</li> </ol>	
5.1.4	SH briefly summarised latest announcements from the DfE including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra funding for High Needs</li> <li>• 1.4 billion to rebuild schools</li> <li>• Reassessing free school projects</li> <li>• Curriculum review timetable</li> <li>• Introducing Report card for future Ofsted inspections</li> <li>• Funding for breakfast clubs and mental health support teams</li> </ul>	
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Policy update / approvals</b>	
5.2.1	Update. JH is undertaking a significant piece of work on all aspects of how the trust manages policies and the role of governance to approve and review as required. Proposal to circulate policies for review via email where appropriate was agreed.	

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	Updated schedule to be presented to future Board meeting for review and comment.	
5.2.2	Support Staff Pay - amendment. TL explained the policy previously approved needed more detail about pay protection, and this amended version takes into account legal advice received. Trustees approved the amended policy.	
5.3	<b>Admission Arrangements 2026.27.</b> SH explained there have been minor changes to the regulations since last year including parents must now request a place on a waiting list, and the trust must publish a map of the designated area for each school (rather than link to council website). Trustees approved the arrangements.	
<b>6</b>	<b>SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>	
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Director of Education's update</b>	
6.1.1	TL highlighted the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roskear Ofsted report now published – very positive</li> <li>• Involved with new leadership recruitment at Marazion. Very worthwhile as has helped us get to know the school well and build relationships.</li> <li>• Writing plan following our first thematic review is almost completed and should be in place next term</li> <li>• Received requests from LGCs about Headteacher's wellbeing - made links with a specialist support company and will start this next term</li> <li>• LA has asked for expressions of interest from trusts to help them increase capacity to meet inclusion needs. Trust is submitting two proposals: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Open an ARB at Roskear.</li> <li>2. Provide a Forest School / therapeutic support at Halwin.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	
6.1.2	Home education – request from Cornwall Council. TL reported frequent requests from the local authority for schools to keep children on roll after their parent has taken them out of school – because they do not have the capacity to complete their paperwork quick enough. Trust has tried to be flexible and retain on roll for upto two weeks, but some children have been in this position since the start of last term and she has instructed Heads not to continue. The number of children being home educated across the county has increased from c.300 to 2500 since the pandemic. Trustees considered the LA's request and the views of officers and agreed that the Trust should refuse to keep any children on roll once removed from school by the parent.	
6.1.3	Trustees noted the reports on risk indicators, school summaries and latest Attendance and Exclusions data. <i>Q: Is there any link between concerns about behaviour and the budget reductions required for the current year?</i> Behaviour has not worsened due to reductions – but some schools have found it harder to adapt their new staffing structure to manage some behaviour – especially those who relied heavily on learning mentors.	

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<b>6.2</b>	<b>SIG Committee</b> 25 November	
6.2.1	<p>RC fed back from the recent meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanked CA on her People’s Strategy presentation and the approach the trust is making to meet the challenge of recruiting and retaining staff</li> <li>• Confidential update on the challenges of supporting children with complex needs within our schools due to external provision not being available.</li> </ul> <p><i>Q: Given the improved budget provision RC proposed the trust consider creating a contingency fund for TL and colleagues to use as they see fit?</i></p> <p>SH confirmed he would agree with this approach. Tamsin acknowledged that although further investment in giving more staff the skills and confidence to manage these situations is needed – it can be very difficult to predict the urgent need for a temporary solution and support so would support this approach.</p>	
6.2.2	KB has been appointed committee chair as RC is stepping down as a trustee.	
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Trust Nursery provision.</b>	
6.3.1	<p>TL explained that as the government had announced additional funding to allow trusts to set up new provision it made sense to give the board an overview of current provision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 14/16 schools have provision in place or an external provider on school site</li> <li>• Some operate flexibly – so can be harder to state what capacity is</li> <li>• Nurseries have termly admissions – so figures more volatile than our schools</li> </ul> <p>Officers do not recommend pursuing the option to expand / add provision at Portreath or Weeth.</p>	
6.3.2	<p><i>Q: Are our relationships with onsite / local providers positive?</i></p> <p>Yes generally very positive. Our EY teachers work closely with the private sector providers as this increases our number on roll, and the children are better prepared when they join us. TL also confirmed that the Trust’s Speech and Language lead will go out and support them on request.</p> <p>Trustees thanked TL for this update.</p>	
<b>7</b>	<b>FINANCE</b>	
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Approve Audited Accounts</b>	
7.1.1	<p>Draft accounts have been externally audited and the FAR Committee recommend their approval following their review and presentation from the new auditors.</p> <p>Accompanying Trustees report was also noted – including wider introduction of new trust name and standardisation of abbreviations.</p> <p>Trust reserves are c.11% of income – so within the DfE’s acceptable range.</p>	
7.1.2	<p>Management Letter and Letter of Representation.</p> <p>Trustees noted the auditors only found four low level queries to include in their report. SP summarised these and reported progress has already been made to address two of them.</p> <p>He confirmed the audit had still been a rigorous process and the new auditors had been a pleasure to work with.</p>	
7.1.3	Trustees approved the Accounts for 2023.24 and the accompanying management letter.	

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7.2	<p><b>Budget Monitoring.</b></p> <p>SP emphasised this is early in the financial year and so far is 'going as planned'.  He highlighted there is a small overspend on staffing – but is yet to check if any budgeted vacancies can be removed now new academic year has started.  He confirmed that the announced additional pay award funding is not yet included – but all known costs and commitments are.</p>	
7.3	<p><b>FAR Committee</b> 26 November.</p> <p>NL briefly summarised the items from the recent meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft accounts and presentation from our new external auditors</li> <li>• Good discussion about capital programme and how to fund it with input from the Estates Manager</li> <li>• Internal audit report</li> <li>• Draft Whistleblowing policy update</li> </ul> <p>He confirmed that KH has taken on the role of Whistleblowing Trustee.</p>	
7.4	<p><b>Reserves – policy and strategy</b></p>	
7.4.1	<p>MH summarised the reasons for having this discussion on the agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trustees are aware that the financial position is better than expected</li> <li>• Both committees have identified areas where additional funds could be used – notably premises and staffing levels</li> <li>• Reserves are reducing over time and were needed to set a balanced budget for this year</li> <li>• Previous budget planning has not needed to agree a minimum amount of reserves to retain</li> <li>• The ever present tension between holding reserves 'for the future' versus meeting the needs of the children in our schools now ...</li> <li>• ... and of course using reserves for revenue expenditure is always a once only solution</li> </ul>	
7.4.2	<p>SH provided the leadership perspective on the current situation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Setting a budget for this year – even by using £500K from reserves – saw significant reductions in support staff</li> <li>• Living Wage historically not funded – and unclear if latest funding streams are actually going to cover this in the future</li> <li>• The unexpected bonus of a fully funded pay rise for teachers has meant current projection for this year is close to break even</li> <li>• This in turn means a debate on how to use our reserves to address underfunding of staffing and estates is warranted</li> <li>• Ongoing work in improving budget controls and monitoring gives us greater confidence in whole year projections ...</li> <li>• ... but this is still early days so we would prefer for arrangements to run for a few months before making any major expenditure decisions</li> <li>• Recognise the benefit of committing reserves if it saves money in the future ...</li> <li>• ... and conscious of need to think creatively to support some of our schools</li> <li>• Consensus decision needed on <i>what</i> level of reserves we should retain before any discussion on the <i>how</i> to spend</li> </ul>	

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7.4.3	<p>Trustees asked a range of questions:</p> <p><i>PS: Do we need to consider the implications of national projections for a decline in pupil numbers?</i></p> <p>Yes but that is a bigger problem than just this trust.</p> <p><i>RC: Do we know what the biggest pressure points are – have we attempted to rank them?</i></p> <p>Not yet.</p> <p><i>KB: What interest do we earn from our bank accounts?</i></p> <p>Last year it was £105K due to high interest rates and level of reserves but we are expecting significantly less this year.</p> <p><i>DR: Might we achieve a similar level of in year savings as last year?</i></p> <p>SP did not expect this to be repeated after the tightening of controls.</p> <p>Trustees also made the following observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently little benefit to being 'too good' at generating reserves</li> <li>• Need to strike a balance between managing the longer term and year on year decisions</li> <li>• Do need a joined up conversation with the LA and Diocese – needs a collaborative rather than a competitive approach by all involved in education</li> <li>• Even very tiny adjustments can make a big difference to a class or whole school ...</li> <li>• ... and it also demonstrates to our staff 'we have your back'</li> </ul>	
7.4.4	<p>Setting a minimum level for reserves.</p> <p>SP confirmed that the DfE see below 5% as a concern – Crofty is currently well above this. Individual Trustee suggestions included 7 or 8% - whilst SP suggested setting a range of between 5-12% as an alternative approach.</p> <p>KH considered that this early in the year any major commitment was more risky as we are very reliant on projections – so would prefer a stepped approach based on constant review and updating.</p> <p>RG pointed out that the longer the delay in making a decision then less of the school year remains for expenditure to have an impact.</p>	
7.4.5	<p>MH brought the discussion to a close by proposing that officers can spend upto £200K of current reserves – their decision on how to use the funds.</p> <p>Update report to February Board meeting and opportunity for further discussion.</p> <p>Proposal was agreed.</p>	SH
<b>8</b>	<b>GOVERNANCE</b>	
<b>8.1</b>	<b>Revised LGC Terms of Reference</b>	
8.1.1	<p>RC summarised the aims and approach taken by the task group setup to review and update the terms of reference for local governance.</p> <p>Key aims were to make local governance simpler to deliver and manage – whilst retaining all the strengths they bring to governance of the trust as a whole.</p> <p>Feedback shared at the recent governor conference was taken into account and the resulting draft is out for consultation.</p>	
8.1.2	<p>JA gave a brief summary of the feedback received to date:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree with SDP focus</li> <li>• <i>'Really helpful'</i> - clarifies and streamlines responsibilities</li> </ul>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website responsibility now ambiguous?</li> <li>• How to monitor SEND / PP via SDP?</li> <li>• How to approve policies in a knowledgeable way?</li> <li>• Why was staff welfare removed?</li> <li>• New template for monitoring reports would be helpful</li> <li>• One page version of roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	
8.1.3	<p>JA explained the task group had also discussed and approved some procedural changes to the ToR which were not consulted on – notably allowing employees to be a chair / vice chair at another trust school.</p> <p>These are identified in the accompanying report.</p>	
8.1.4	<p>Meeting discussed suggestions as to alternative solutions to chairing LGCs given the high rate of turnover the trust has experienced. Discussion covered the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making local chairs a paid member of staff – already implemented by another trust although they define their local tier as ‘monitoring hubs’</li> <li>• Could Governance Professionals take on an enhanced role?</li> <li>• Governance loses independence and any transition to a new model could be difficult</li> <li>• Should we put more focus on identifying how effective our chairs are?</li> <li>• Governance has undergone a culture shift over the last 8 years – we can expect this to continue</li> </ul> <p>Trustees did acknowledge that if the trust continues to have issues recruiting local chairs it made sense to keep other options open. It was agreed to amend 2.6F of the current draft ToR to read “<i>will provide a Chair</i>”.</p>	
8.1.5	<p>Trustees agreed the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Approve new ToR subject to any final consultation feedback and amendment to 2.6F discussed earlier.</li> <li>2. Delegate final responsibility to approve new ToR to the Trustees attending Governance Planning meeting in January.</li> <li>3. Approved procedural changes with immediate effect.</li> </ol>	JA
<b>8.2</b>	<b>Governor Conference</b>	
8.2.1	<p>Trustees noted the report and positive feedback from October’s conference.</p> <p>MH passed on his thanks to all the contributors and organisers.</p>	
8.2.2	<p>Date for 2025 was agreed: morning of 11 October.</p>	
<b>8.3</b>	<p><b>Members meeting</b> 15 November.</p> <p>MH reported this had been a positive meeting with Cathryn Andrews deputising for SH. He highlighted that two new Members had been appointed bringing current membership above the recommended five.</p>	
<b>9</b>	<b>AOB</b>	
9.1	<p>Arrangements and membership for a forthcoming Permanent Exclusion Panel were discussed.</p>	

<b>Item</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Action</b>
9.2	MH reported he would be unavailable for a period commencing 6 January for medical reasons. Cover arrangements were agreed.	
9.3	Trustees and officers thanked RC for his contributions as a Trustee. RC commented it had been a pleasure being part of the trust and confirmed he would be continuing his involvement by becoming a Member from January.	
10	Confidential item	

<b>Dates of next meetings</b>	
14 Jan	LGC Chairs
20 Jan	SIG
29 Jan	FAR
<b>11 Feb</b>	<b>BOARD</b>
4 Mar	LGC Chairs
7 Mar	Members AGM
10 Mar	SIG
18 Mar	FAR
<b>1 Apr</b>	<b>BOARD</b>