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 Waterton Academy Trust
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Waterton Academy Trust

Minutes of a Trust Board Meeting

DATE: 5 July 2022	TIME: 6pm	LOCATION: Centre for Excellence, Waterton Academy Trust
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Attendees

Chair:	S Johnson	
Trustees	S Bates	J Henson
	A Goudie	J Shaw
Attending:	D Dickinson (CEO)	
	P Knox (CFO)	
Clerk:	L Clark (Head of Governance)	
Apologies:	K Davies, N Shaw	

ITEM		ACTION
1.	Welcome The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.	
2.	Apologies for Absence Apologies of absence were received and accepted from K Davies and N Shaw. The Clerk explained that L Rowlinson-Brown had resigned down from her role as Trustee with effect from 14 June 2022 and all relevant records have been updated. Thanks, were recorded for L Rowlinson-Brown's contribution to the Board.	
3.	Declarations of Interest The standing register of declarations of interest was noted and no further declarations were made.	
4.	Appointment of Vice Chair of Trustees The Head of Governance updated Trustees that a formal expression of interest had been received from A Goudie, which had been circulated to Trustees. Trustees unanimously agreed to appoint A Goudie as Vice Chair.	
5.	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 1st March 2022	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>The minutes were available for review in advance of the meeting. Trustees confirmed they had read the minutes and there were no further questions or points raised. It was confirmed that all actions had been undertaken.</p> <p>The minutes of the meeting held on 1st March 2022 and all the meetings held virtually during the covid pandemic were signed by the Chair.</p> <p>Trustees were updated that the appropriate technology had been installed at the Centre for Excellence should Trustees wish to hold hybrid meetings in the future.</p>	
<p>6. Safeguarding, Risk Register and Conditions of Care</p>	
<p>Trustees were updated that there are no qualifying safeguarding issues to report to Trustees. All safeguarding matters are being dealt with by the Trust DSLs and Headteachers. The CEO drew attention to the Conditions of Care set out in the report and confirmed that these continue to be met. The Audit and Risk committee will review the risk-register at their next meeting; in the meantime, covid remains on the risk register but this will be reviewed in line with government guidance.</p>	
<p>7. COVID Update</p>	
<p>The CEO explained that the arrangements for COVID have been relaxed in line with government advice. The academies continue to operate safely and risk assessments will continue to be reviewed until September 2022. It is likely that in September a Trust statement will be written on covid to replace the risk assessments. There is no longer reporting around numbers of cases within the Trust.</p> <p>In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Trust follows current national HR guidance with regards to staff absences and covid.</p>	
<p>8. CEO Headline Update</p>	
<p>The CEO provided a brief summary of the report highlighting the key updates.</p> <p><i>Conversations and Conversations</i> – There are no conversions in process. Conversations are continuing with two Barnsley schools and the CEO is meeting with their governing boards in the Autumn term. The CEO emphasised how the Trust’s strategic planning is in line with the conditions of care. In light of the DfE White Paper there is increased interest in the Trust and further approaches from another nine schools in Barnsley have been made.</p> <p>Trustees asked a range of robust questions in relation to the capacity of the Trust; the ability to grow to that size; realistic and achievable timeframes; due diligence of schools interested in terms of educational and financial performance; and the growth of the Hubs.</p> <p>The CEO answered all questions and explained in detail that strategic growth will be agreed with Trustees in line with the conditions of care and detailed due diligence reports provided to the Trust Board along with recommendations as part of all key decision making. The Trust would not look to take on as many schools as have expressed an interest as this would not be realistic or achieve the outcomes that the Trust is looking for.</p> <p>A strong central team is in place, but all growth would be incremental (historically one or two schools in a term). A key focus will be on standards as the Trust would not be looking to take on a significant number of schools with lower outcomes due to the current level of work</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>required in the East Hub with three of the schools requiring substantial input from the school improvement team. In response to a question, it was reiterated that the Trust do not have to take on schools who have expressed an interest, and equally, some of the schools currently interested may not feel as though Waterton is the right fit for them and will therefore withdraw interest.</p> <p>The CEO also explained that the Trust are conducting a piece of work to actively approach schools which are believed to be a good fit for Waterton. There are not many MATs in Barnsley, hence the significant interest received.</p> <p>The CEO and Trustees commented on how it was an exciting time for the Trust, and emphasised the need for rigorous and robust due diligence to inform strategic planning and the growth of the Trust.</p> <p>In order to be able to focus more time on Trust business, the CEO has recently resigned from the Wakefield School’s Forum and the AP strategic group. The CEO has recently been appointed to the DfE national panel for education for the de-carbonisation programme, which is a high-profile panel. In response to a question, the CEO confirmed this will not be a significant time commitment and meetings will be held virtually. Trustees spoke very positively of the Trusts involvement on the panel and as part of this key national programme.</p> <p>An update was provided that the Head of HR position was appointed to today – the individual will bring a wealth of high-level HR expertise and will be an asset to the Trust.</p> <p>The CEO provided a summary of the reshaping of leadership across the Trust. Following the retirement of the Headteacher at Wrenthorpe (J Coyle), L Cavell (current Chief Education Standards Officer) will be taking this substantive post. The Trust will now, instead, operate with a Senior School Improvement Officer role - J Simpkins being successful in her application. A Head of Estates has also been appointed. A change of duties for the COO role has also been put in place to focus on organisation change, onboarding of schools, significant developmental projects, comms, marketing, and GDPR. A detailed overview of roles and responsibilities will be brought to the Autumn TB meeting.</p> <p><i>A discussion was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</i></p> <p>Trustees also posed questions to the CEO regarding his capacity and whether he has the capacity to concentrate on school improvement (SI), in addition to the strategic role in leading the growth of the Trust. The CEO provided assurances that the SI team are a strong team, and with J Simpkins in the Senior SIO role, this allows him to have oversight but it does not detract from his strategic role. In addition, it is good value for money for the Trust in terms of the reshaping of leadership, and it also allows for money to be spent on engaging with a highly experienced consultant to conduct the annual reviews at school level, with the added positive element that this provides an independent view of the school but within the Trust framework. The CEO explained that work has been undertaken on reshaping the risk banding; and that a range of networks of leaders within the Trust have been set up (e.g., the science network met today at the CfE); both of which are positive steps forwards.</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>The CEO summarised that he feels strongly that this reshaping of leadership, along with the focus on SI, will provide him with a greater understanding of the schools and how to continue to drive improvements whilst also focussing on strategic growth. As growth occurs it is likely that a Deputy CEO will be recruited for to ensure continued, scalable capacity, and for succession planning.</p> <p>Trustees commented positively on the extensive work to date and were in agreement on the reshaping of leadership, plans for strategic growth within the conditions of care, and in the knowledge that robust due diligence be undertaken to inform all key decisions.</p>	
<p>9. Head of Governance Headline Report</p>	
<p>The Head of Governance provided a brief summary of the key points within the report. Trustees were updated that CST had been due to conduct the external review of governance in the summer term, however, due to capacity of their consultants the review had been postponed. The Head of Governance, Chair and CEO explained that their disappointment had been communicated, and discussions had taken place with CST and as a result, a reduction in fees had been negotiated for a spring term (22/23) review. Trustees were in agreement that CST remained the most appropriate organisation to conduct the review and were assured that the review would be undertaken in the agreed timeframes. The Head of Governance will liaise with CST to confirm and arrange specific meeting dates.</p> <p>Trustees unanimously agreed to appoint A Goudie to the Audit and Risk Committee and agreed the committee will meet ahead of the Trust Board meeting in October.</p> <p>Recruitment of Trustees was discussed in detail following the recent resignation, the completion of the skills audit, and in light of Academy Ambassadors ceasing to operate having lost their funding. The potential skills gaps in legal expertise were noted, and S Bates advised he would contact solicitors within his professional network. It was discussed and agreed that recruitment material will be produced by the Head of Governance and two Trustee roles will be advertised on social media and through the Trust website. Robust procedures for appointment will be followed, with the Members being the appointing board.</p> <p>Trustee capacity, training and engagement was discussed, with the Chair emphasising that the role is wider than attendance at board meetings and now that covid restrictions have lifted there are a wide range of opportunities for Trustees to visit school, meet school leaders and attend events. Some of the showcase events were discussed including the Waterton talent show, MatLympics, Children’s Parliament, and charity events, which Trustees have all been invited to. Trustees were strongly encouraged to attend at least one or two events per year. Visits to schools were also discussed and it was agreed these should be planned in advance with the Head, with a clear purpose and should not create any additional workload for staff.</p>	<p>LC</p>
<p>The governance calendar for 2022/23 was reviewed and approved. Meeting invites will be sent out.</p>	<p>LC</p>

ITEM	ACTION
<p>Trustees commented positively on the comprehensive report and there were no further questions at present.</p>	
<p>10. CESO Headline Report</p> <p>The CEO provided a brief summary of the CESO (Chief Education Standards Officer) headline report. It was noted that National attendance and Persistent Absence (PA) figures have been released with PA being 20.1%, around double the pre-pandemic figure. The challenges are predominantly in the East Hub. The attendance policy has been reviewed in consultation with Headteachers and Attendance Officers in line with the new DfE Guidance. Each policy will be specific to each school, but with some standardised procedures for managing and escalating cases, and standard communications. Ensuring procedures are standardised will ensure that there can be no parental challenge due to discrepancies in how schools handle cases.</p> <p>The CEO provided a summary of a recent request for flexi-schooling. Requests for flexi-schooling are very unusual; parents can request to have a school place but home educate for some days of the week. Trustees were in agreement that the Trust will not approve requests for flexi-schooling, as this does not align with the Trust ethos or the aims of other policies. Representatives were reminded that flexi-schooling is different to requests for reasonable adjustments relating to children with SEND or medical needs.</p> <p>Phonics outcomes were provided in the report, with positive results indicative of the hard work and excellent practice in schools. It was noted that at King's Meadow, 10% of pupils were 1 mark from passing. These additional children would have taken the overall outcomes to 81%. The picture at King's Meadow represents a much-improved position and huge success for the school.</p> <p>An overview of recent Ofsted inspections was discussed, and commented very positively on. There had been strong outcomes achieved for NJA and NCPA, which allows some freedom and capacity to be directed at other schools in need. It was noted that J Grayston has worked hard to improve the picture at CTA, as there are some significant challenges at the school. Overall, there is a good picture on outcomes across the Trust.</p> <p>The CEO explained that in the autumn term there will be feedback about improving outcomes at KS2 and the actions in place to achieve this. The CEO commented that the Trust has really strong Headteachers in place and he is looking forward to working closely with them. Thanks, were recorded for L Cavell's (CESO) work across the Trust on improving outcomes and wished her well for her Headteacher role at Wrenthorpe Academy.</p> <p>A query was raised by a Trustee regarding specific applications for Early Years specialist Hubs. The CEO will look into this. Work with the teaching hubs on qualifications is also progressing.</p> <p>Trustees commented positively on the comprehensive report and there were no further questions at present.</p>	<p>DD</p>
<p>11. COO Report</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>Attention was drawn to the detailed report from the COO (Chief Operating Officer) which had been shared in advance of the meeting and included a comprehensive HR, Estates and IT update. The CEO also provided a brief summary of key points.</p> <p>It was highlighted that a significant piece of work on the MIS (management information system) is ongoing; being led by the COO and Head of IT.</p> <p>A question was asked regarding the number of support staff recruited and the higher number of leavers shown within the report. The CEO confirmed that exit interviews are offered but few take up this offer, and although leavers were slightly higher than usual it was not unusual for there to be this level of movement of support staff. Trustees discussed that it continues to be a candidate driven market. The CEO confirmed that the Trust must be strategic around ensuring colleagues can access opportunities within the Trust in order to retain staff.</p> <p>In response to a question, the CEO explained that there is a trigger point within HR policies regarding sickness leave, but this is something the Head of HR will be reporting on in more detail once in post, and procedures will be reviewed as required. Trustees discussed and emphasised the importance of robust HR procedures, as well as opportunities for staff training and development, in terms of staff wellbeing and therefore potential reduction in staff absence. There is also considerable monetary savings to be made in ensuring robust HR policies and procedures are in place, and that there is a strong HR function within the central team.</p> <p>Trustees commented positively on the comprehensive report and there were no further questions at present.</p>	
<p>12. CFO Report</p>	
<p>The report was shared with all in advance of the meeting. An opportunity was provided for Trustees to ask questions or submit comments in relation to the report.</p> <p>Budgets remain challenging for the Trust. Although reserves have increased for the last two years this is in part due to Covid-19 related grants and cost savings. Some of these grants are quite high value, and without additional grants all schools would be in deficit. Staff costs are increasing, with ongoing union discussions and a threat of strike action should a national pay award agreement not be reached with unions.</p> <p>From 2023-24 there will be a minimum £30,000 salary for Teachers, likely resulting in increases for all teachers. From 2023-24 the Schools Supplementary Grant will be included within GAG funding, but it is not yet known whether this will be funded at the same rate.</p> <p>Trustees were made aware of a fall in numbers on roll, which will result in an increased funding challenge from 2023-24 (allocation is based on census data from the previous October). Pupil numbers are closely monitored, this low intake has been identified as being as a result of a low birth-rate.</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>There are other uncertainties around Sports Premium, Recovery Premium and free school meals. It was also noted that staffing challenges and supply costs also remain a significant issue for the Trust.</p> <p>Trustees were reminded that the East Hub Board and West Hub Board receive comprehensive reports and review each school in detail, and a summary of the budget setting process was provided. Trustees commented positively on the work undertaken. It was further noted the hard work undertaken at Walton to achieve a budget which is not in deficit.</p> <p>The CFO offered to provide any further detail now, or via email / meetings, should Trustees have any queries. Following budget approval from Trustees, the CFO must submit the budget forecast return and 3-year projection to the ESFA by the deadline of 26th July. Copies will be available for inspection.</p> <p>A question was raised regarding the possible national pay award for teachers and how this would impact the Trust. The CFO explained the difficulties of this if there was no additional funding provided from the government.</p> <p>A question was also raised about the use of reserves and the impact on reserves should they be needed to fund items such as the teacher pay rises. The CFO and CEO reiterated that the reserves have already been allocated to key large-scale projects (e.g. at Charlston).</p> <p>The CFO also provided a brief update on the work around establishing a well-being charter. The Trust INSET day in September will have a well-being focus (children and adults). The CFO reported that 6 schools are currently buying into staff absence insurance via Schools Advisory Service. There is a disparity in staff benefits as those schools which are insured can access a well-being offer, meaning that some staff have increased access to well-being related services. A £19 per employee rate for well-being services has been negotiated and agreed, to include physiotherapy, personal training, weight-loss services, menopause support and a range of other services. As well as supporting staff to be healthier and happier it was hoped that this would reduce absence in some cases.</p> <p>It was confirmed after query that all staff can access an offer of counselling services; this is arranged separately.</p>	PK
<p>13. Policy Update</p>	
<p>It was noted that these had been approved by the Hub Boards. Trustees had reviewed and there were no further questions, and all policies were approved.</p>	
<p>14. White Paper and Green Paper</p>	
<p>Attention was drawn to the White Paper and Green Paper which had been previously circulated to Trustees.</p> <p>The CEO advised he will provide a Trust specific presentation on the implications of the papers and the impact on the Trust.</p>	DD
<p>15. Union request – covid protocols</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>The CEO informed Trustees there had been two union requests arising from the recent JCC meeting. The first was regarding specific protocol around long covid and a request for indefinite absence. The SLT reviewed and recommended that long covid absence should not be treated differently to any other illness/condition. Trustees were unanimous with the resolution to decline this request, stating that current arrangements are appropriate and equitable for all.</p> <p>The second request relates to the fact that due to recent pay freezes and lack of incremental rises, whereby if the Trust make a payment of £1 to employees, it will allow staff to accrue pensions. The DfE have not provided a definitive steer on this, but it was felt that this was not cost prohibitive to the Trust and would be a boost for staff morale. Trustees unanimously approved this request.</p>	PK
<p>16. Any Other Business</p>	
<p>The Chair provided a brief update on a project within his workplace (prison service) to plant heritage hedgerows to access an annual grant from national heritage, and queried whether this is something the Trust can access. The CEO confirmed that as part of the 'let's go zero' campaign a range of initiatives are being looked at, with L Welsh (Headteacher at NJA) leading on this project.</p>	
<p>17. Feedback to/from Hub Board and ASCs – Questions, Comments and Concerns</p>	
<p>The Chairs commented there were no specific points raised by the Hub Boards for the Trust Board to comment on.</p>	
<p>18. Identification of Confidential items</p>	
<p>A discussion within item 8 was deemed as confidential.</p>	
<p>19. Confirmation of date and time of next meeting –</p>	
<p>The Head of Governance indicated that based on the approved governance schedule of meetings the summer term Trust Board meeting will be held on 11th October</p> <p>It was confirmed that the meetings will be held in person at the Centre for Excellence, Walton; however, there was a discussion that the October meeting may be held at Wrenthorpe Academy.</p>	LC

MEETING CLOSED 19:55

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

Actions from the Trust Board meeting held on 5th July 2022

Agenda Item N°	Summary of Action	Who?	When?
9	Send out meeting invites for 2022/23	LC	asap
10	Query - specific applications for Early Years specialist Hubs	DD	asap
12	BFR to be submitted to ESFA and circulated	PK	26/07/22
14	Trust specific presentation on White and Green Paper	DD	Next mtg
15	Action union request	PK	asap
19	Confirm venue for 11 th Oct	LC	asap