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Waterton Academy Trust

Minutes of a Trust Board Meeting

DATE: 16 th July 2024	TIME: 6pm	LOCATION: Centre for Excellence, Waterton Academy Trust
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Attendees

Chair:	S Johnson	
Trustees	S Bates	L Harrison
	K Davies	J Henson
	A Goudie	J Wathen
Attending:	D Dickinson (CEO)	M-C Bretherton (DCEO)
	P Knox (COFO)	
Clerk:	L Clark (Head of Governance)	
Apologies:	J Shaw	

ITEM	ACTION
1. Welcome The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.	
2. Apologies for Absence Apologies of absence were received and accepted from J Shaw.	
3. Declarations of Interest The standing register of declarations of interest was noted and no further declarations were made.	
4. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising The minutes and confidential minutes of the meetings held on 19 th March 2024 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. The Head of Governance provided an update on the actions, and it was confirmed that all actions had been undertaken or would be picked up during this meeting. The minutes and confidential minutes listed above were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate reflection of the meetings.	
4a. Minutes and feedback from committees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People Committee - Audit and Risk Committee J Wathen, Chair of the People Committee provided a brief summary of the first meeting of the committee held on 11 June 2024 which had included agreeing the Terms of Reference; reviewing the people strategy and updates to the work towards this; Ofsted preparations and the review of actions from the monitoring visit; quality of the provision; different delivery models; sustainable growth of the provision and how the new role of Head of People and Partnerships will drive this forwards. It	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>was noted that it is a complex area which the trust had worked very hard on, and fantastic progress made, as evidence by the Ofsted visit which had taken place the week after where all areas of the provision were judged outstanding. The board commented extremely positively on this.</p> <p>The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, A Goudie, provided a brief summary of the committee meeting which had taken place prior to this trust board meeting. The risk appetite statement and scope of risk had been confirmed (HoG to add to Teams). The risk register and internal scrutiny updates had been reviewed. There had been a robust discussion and questions on the financial controls and mitigations in place and how assured are trustees on the clarity of the financial picture and actual costs. It had been agreed that the CEO would look at this to ensure the committee had those assurances and that this was evidenced on the risk register.</p>	<p>HoG</p> <p>CEO</p>
<p>5. Safeguarding, Risk Register and Conditions of Care</p>	
<p>It was noted that the risk register has been covered under item 4 and as such moving forwards the agenda will be amended to reflect this.</p> <p>Trustees were updated that there was a qualifying safeguarding issues to report to trustees. <i>A discussion was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</i></p> <p>The CEO summarised that the conditions of care continue to be met, as referenced within the report.</p>	<p>HoG</p>
<p>6. CEO Headline Report</p>	
<p>The Chair confirmed with the board that all had read the report in advance of the meeting. The CEO provided a brief top-line summary of the report with opportunity for questions.</p> <p>The previously discussed conversion of King's Oak Primary Learning Centre continues to be underway, with a likely date of October/November 2024.</p> <p>The trust has been approached by a school in Barnsley and a school in Wakefield regarding holding a conversation about a possible academy conversion and joining Waterton.</p> <p>Initial and informal conversations had begun with two trusts, who have approached Waterton around potential mergers/acquisitions. The Chair highlighted that there was an agenda item (6a) to discuss mergers and the trust appetite for such.</p> <p>Other updates included the carbon neutral project at WEA (West End Academy); system leadership duties including the CEO's invite to sit on the Barnsley 2030 Board; the work at SCS (Sharlston Community School) progressing well; leadership movements within the trust including the retirement of long-standing COFO, P Knox, at Easter 2025; the new Director of Standards joining in September 2024; and that the role of Head of IT Services has been removed from the structure, with a return to a fully brokered solution being the preferred way forward as previously discussed by trustees. The CEO is currently working his way through IT emails and projects, and in response to a question confirmed he has capacity to do this initial sift with work being passed on to colleagues or to TIO (Turn It On) the technical support.</p> <p>Trustees continue to be invited to CEO/DCEO walk-arounds at school, and specific mention was given to the Chair visiting KMA in September as a follow on from his previous visit to see the enhanced space and provision. An invite was extended to all trustees.</p>	<p>HoG</p>
<p>6a. MAT Mergers</p>	
<p>Trustees were referred to the paper from the NGA which had been uploaded to Teams and provides a helpful and unbiased information / guide to MAT mergers.</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>The CEO explained there are two trusts interested in exploring this with Waterton, but it is for the trust board to discuss and approve a more formal conversation.</p> <p>In response to questions the CEO confirmed that the trusts are primary and special schools, with one also being a secondary trust. It was clarified that in terms of pupils numbers one trust is smaller than Waterton, and the other is larger.</p> <p>A question was posed about workload of ELT and CLT in terms of a merger, and how it compares to a single school joining the trust. The CEO indicated that there was a process which the DfE supports on, and that he was speaking to a trust in the midlands who had gone through the process to gain an understanding. There was a discussion on what would constitute a merger and what would be an acquisition, and whether this was based on number of schools, number of pupils, budgets etc. There would also be a need to consider whether the trust would be 'Waterton' or a new entity and the benefits or negative implications of this.</p> <p>Resolution: In summary, trustees approved, in principle, the discussions to explore the opportunities further, with a report to be brought to the next trust board meeting.</p>	CEO
<p>7. Governance Headline Report</p>	
<p>The Head of Governance (HoG) drew attention to the report and the key points, including an update on the newly appointed member, S Edwards. This brings the members board to five which is the DfE recommendation. The members had met today and had interviewed two prospective trustees who had submitted expressions of interest following advertising / networking to add additional capacity and specific skills to the board. In particular, a gap in HR expertise had been identified. Members had unanimously agreed to appoint C Nicholson (education expertise) and L Hutton (HR expertise) and had commented positively on the skills they will bring to the trust board and how their values and ethos aligns well with Waterton.</p> <p>The HG will update all records, undertake an induction with the new trustees, and invite to the next meeting.</p> <p>Trustee monitoring visits interim report</p> <p>L Harrison, Link Trustee for quality of education highlighted to trustees she had conducted monitoring visits to seven schools to date, focussing on access to arts for pupils, and how the school has adopted strategies to promote a positive reading culture and reading for pleasure. Reports from all visits had been shared with trustees on Teams, and an interim report of the seven schools had been produced to highlight themes, patterns and recommendations. L Harrison commented that it was clear that all schools are aware of the importance of reading for pleasure, and overall provide a positive reading culture, however schools were at different stages of implementation of their strategies.</p> <p>L Harrison picked out key elements of her report in relation to the arts which was a much more variable picture, with very few schools providing the opportunity for children to see live music, theatre or dance. Whilst dance was part of PE in schools, there was no evidence of any schools using dance as part of teaching strategies. There were limited opportunities for children to engage with drama or play scripts, and schools are not using drama to support the development of oracy across the curriculum. L Harrison presented a range of groups/networks/opportunities which the trust may consider in order to be at the forefront of redressing the balance of the arts to ensure access to a broad, rich learning experience for the children. It was noted that the statement from the new Education Secretary highlighted the gap in the arts, and this may therefore become a focus for Ofsted.</p> <p>There was a discussion and questions about the opportunities such as the theatre at NJA which could be used, creative partnerships, and after-school clubs. There was also discussion around the curriculum being crammed and how to ensure there is scope to teach these areas.</p>	HG

ITEM	ACTION
<p>In discussion and through further questions thanks were given to L Harrison for this powerful piece of work, providing trustees with a real insight into the arts and reading, and allowing the trust board to triangulate information.</p>	
<p>8. Finance Main Report</p>	
<p>The report had been shared in advance of the meeting. The COFO summarised top level information. and an opportunity was provided for questions and further discussion on key points. Questions had also been invited in advance of the meeting and were responded to in the course of discussion.</p> <p>It was highlighted that during 2023/24 stricter controls and processes were introduced and a more forensic approach adopted by ELT to challenge individual Headteachers on supply costs, sickness absence and staff vacancies and deliver cost efficiencies, and a 40% saving on supply has been realised.</p> <p>A question was asked about the marketing strategies of the trust and the approach to addressing the fact that several of the trust's schools are experiencing low cohorts which ultimately impact funding. The COFO explained that national pupil projections indicate a continued decline in the primary sector over the next three years as pupil rolls fall even further, but schools continue to actively market to the community, and in particular to new housing developments etc.</p> <p>A specific question was asked if the trust had modelled differing scenarios for the teacher pay award – the COFO explained that the trust has modelled at 5% as there is no certainty if there will be additional funding to cover this, and therefore it was felt to be the most sensible approach.</p> <p>There was a discussion and further questions on accessing grants and the employment of an individual who can secure grants for schools. It is something the trust have explored in the past with limited success, but the group of HTs now would be more engaged with this and some are already actively securing grants or working with business partners. It is more difficult in primary schools to generate income, as secondary schools have more opportunities for lettings / sports facilities etc, but there are certainly opportunities which can be explored. The Audit and Risk committee highlighted that they had had a similar discussion at their meeting, and this challenge should be posed to HTs/ schools. It was acknowledged that you need someone with the energy, time and knowledge to access these grants, and that this would be an opportunity for the Head of People and Partnerships to explore this with HTs, as well as other elements such as trust annual awards and sponsorship. Trustees with knowledge in this area agreed to support.</p> <p>A recent article in Schools Week relating to large trusts exploring new ways of looking at pensions was raised. It was agreed that there are options, but it would be a bigger conversation and could be looked at in more detail at an appropriate time should trustees agree.</p> <p>A trustee asked what the financial impact would be if the Kings Oak conversion is delayed more than anticipated. The CEO re-iterated that the trust is working hard towards an October deadline, but if this is pushed to January 2025 the impact would be approximately £60k.</p> <p>The consolidated budget report was reviewed, and there was further discussion around the importance of innovation, growth, and the generation of income to ensure future sustainability. The COFO highlighted there are no luxuries within this budget, and there remains a financial challenge.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees reviewed and approved the WAT consolidated budget 2024-25.</p>	
<p>9. Standards Headline Report</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>The DCEO provided a summary of the recent Ofsted inspections which have been extremely positive, with Crofton Infants (CIS), Churchfield (CPS) and Newstead (NA) all having been judged as Good with outstanding features. The inspection at CIS which maintained the school's overall judgement of "Good," suggested that the school might achieve an "Outstanding" rating in a full graded inspection. In addition, Normanton Common (NCPA) had been inspected the previous week and had equally done extremely well. In their recent Ofsted inspection, the apprenticeship provision was judged as outstanding.</p> <p>A brief update on recent annual reviews was provided, highlighting the significant improvements to Kings Meadow (KMA) despite considerable staffing changes. Visually, the environment is hugely improved, but there remains work to be done on strengthening the curriculum. The newly appointed Director of Standards will be based at KMA one day a week to begin with.</p> <p>Outcomes data were highlighted, but a detailed report, including breakdown of data by pupil groups will be brought to the autumn trust board meeting as standards will be the focus of that meeting. There had been strong outcomes in GLD, phonics, KS1 and multiplication checks. Overall, KS2 outcomes have improved with data being very close to target and forecast. However, results were extremely disappointing at Wrenthorpe (WA), and lower than hoped for at Walton (WPA). Outcomes at Normanton Junior (NJA) were expected and cohort specific. Forensic review is underway and will be reported on to trustees. It was highlighted that Churchfield's results were exceptional, and had these had been published prior to their Ofsted, it may have tipped them to an outstanding judgement. Trustees commented extremely positively on this.</p> <p>Overall, attendance in the trust is in line with attendance last year, but it is still lower than the national. The attendance strategy has been reviewed and there has been a reallocation of the time of the EWO to ensure specific focus on CTA, KMA and SCS.</p> <p>Acknowledgment was given to the way in which Headteachers have delivered on the challenges – ELT have held HTs to account very strongly, and they have responded extremely well. The trust team have been phenomenal in their support throughout all the inspections and the resilience that schools and the trust as a whole as shown is exceptional. Trustees thanked all for their hard work.</p> <p>A question was asked about greater depth at KS2 - the DCEO explained that the autumn report to trustees will provide detail on this, but in general greater depth was reasonable, but some schools were lower than where the trust would want them to be. In response to questions, attendance was re-visited and there was a discussion around strategies in place, and the difficulties of reinforcing the importance of education and being present at school in some of the communities of high deprivation which some schools serve. ELT have a strategic oversight on attendance and want to see gains being made on this. Rigour in practice every day is crucial to this, and that level of rigour needs to be in place at the beginning of every school day. The trust are continually seeking new ways to innovate practice. A question was asked specifically about persistent absence at KMA which has the highest figures and if there were safeguarding concerns. The CEO stated that all children are accounted for and procedures in place as appropriate, but children are safer when in school, and the focus is on communicating with families and ensuring children are in school.</p> <p>Trustees commented positively on the standards report and welcomed the analysis being undertaken for review at the autumn trust board meeting.</p>	DCEO
<p>9a. Trust Curriculum Intent</p>	
<p>The DCEO introduced the report which had been available on Teams in advance of the meeting. It was the culmination of extensive collaboration with headteachers and trust leaders, reflecting the</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>collective vision for educational excellence. It is a crucial document for the trust, as it provides a clear and unified vision for the educational experience across all its schools. There will be work on the implementation strategy to come and progress against it.</p> <p>Trustee, L Harrison, was thanked for her input and support on the document. The Hub Boards had also reviewed.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees commented positively and approved the trust curriculum intent.</p> <p>A question was raised about school websites, consistency of information published particularly in relation to the curriculum, and how this can potentially impact upon parental engagement. The DCEO confirmed that work is ongoing on this with the roll out of new websites, with a consistent approach across all. This curriculum intent document also sets out the expectations of information on websites.</p>	
<p>10. Operations Headline Report</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Estates - HR - IT & Digital Services 	
<p>Trustees confirmed they had read the report. The CEO provided a very brief summary of key points in relation to HR, IT and estates. The Estates team are working together well. The number of single call-out jobs has reduced, as jobs are grouped to allow the completion of several small jobs in a day which generates savings. Compliance is strong across the schools. Items in red on the report are general where the team are awaiting parts or certification. A new Health and Safety officer has been appointed and is working well.</p> <p>IT updates include the development of a strategy around portable devices and plans for the new provider to work alongside the Ed-Tech network around pedagogy. The CEO will be working with the new relationship manager of the outsourced IT provider in due course.</p> <p>The CEO indicated that a piece of internal scrutiny work on reporting arrangements is being undertaken, and following this a more efficient and graphically informative reporting mechanism will be implemented for trustees.</p>	
<p>11. Trust Development Plan Update</p>	
<p>A progress update was provided by the DCEO on the trust development plan framed around the ‘five pillars of an effective MAT.’</p> <p>The CLT will review this, and the plan will be updated for the new school year.</p>	
<p>12. Update on Strategies in Development</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sustainability Strategy Update 	
<p>The CEO directed trustees to the strategies update summary which was available on Teams in advance of the meeting. It was noted that all strategies were on track or had been completed within the agreed time frames.</p> <p>The CEO highlighted that the sustainability strategy is now completed with positive feedback from HTs. An implementation plan will be produced, and updates provided to the board.</p>	
<p>13. Pre-Schools</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pre-School Concerns (from matters arising) - Amendments to the Articles of Association (report and Articles) 	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>The Chair introduced this item, noting it had been added as an agenda item from the previous trust board meeting as trustees had requested a written paper on queries raised by the Waterton pre-school trust board (PSTB).</p> <p>The DCEO drew attention to the report which was shared with trustees in advance of the meeting providing a brief summary of the context behind the concerns and discussions with the Executive Headteacher of pre-schools (EHTPS).</p> <p>Comments were requested from trustees who were also trustees of the PSTB. A Goudie summarised the discussions which had taken place the previous week at the PSTB meeting, and the concerns raised by the group around the proposals of charging a square metre charge. The educational benefits of the pre-schools, particularly in areas of high deprivation, and the positive impact this has had on admissions into the schools had been reiterated by the PSTB, which trustees concurred with. Challenges relating to the number of funded places, pricing strategies, marketing strategies, growth into areas where there are more paid places, and income generation had been discussed at length at the PSTB meeting, and this was summarised to trustees. Pricing is difficult as there will be a tipping point whereby families choose not to use a Waterton pre-school due to increased costs.</p> <p>The CEO and DCEO provided further context around the commerciality of the pre-schools and the need for development of marketing strategies, particularly to large new-build housing estates nearby. Trustees were reminded that at present the pre-school does not pay any contribution to utilities, or trust support for back office/central services, and that this proposal was not an additional charge to this.</p> <p>There was a discussion around the fact that schools are being challenged to innovate, think commercially, look at accessing grants, think about generating income, and the pre-schools must also be challenged in the same way. There needs to a strategy in place to market the pre-school provision, attract more families, and showcase the educational benefit of the pre-schools.</p> <p>Through further questions there was robust discussion around the balancing act of the business side / commerciality of pre-schools and the fact that there are tangible benefits to the schools in the trust due to the educational foundation that the pre-school lays; whether there is a need for further competitor analysis; and the government agenda around pre-school funded hours. It was also reiterated that growth must be strategic and sustainable.</p> <p>Trustees were all in agreement around the benefit to the trust of the pre-schools, and reiterated their support of their growth but in a sustainable and commercially viable way and approved the proposal in principle. The ELT will support the leadership of the pre-schools to develop the business and marketing strategies.</p> <p>Resolution: Through robust debate, challenge and questions, there was approval in principle to the proposal. Furthermore, it was agreed that more needs to be done to support pre-school leadership to develop the business aspect of the pre-school work and that this will be reviewed in September and reported back to the PSTB and the trust board.</p> <p>Resolution: The paper setting out the proposed amendments to the Articles of Association were reviewed and approved, with the Head of Governance tasked to ensure compliance and to review the constitution in line with the amendments.</p>	
<p>14. Planned Admission Numbers at CTA and KMA</p>	
<p>The DCEO provided context to the item, explaining that at CTA the PAN is currently set at 45 and there is significant churn in pupils which makes it difficult to implement the curriculum and follow this through. ELT requested permission from the board to explore whether the trust should reduce the PAN, with a consultation process (Oct-Jan) and a new PAN in place for Sep 2026.</p>	

ITEM	ACTION
<p>Initially, there had been the same thinking for KMA but admissions were at 45 for next year, so this will not be reviewed at present.</p> <p>Further context on CTA was provided that the school takes a significant number of pupils from fair access panels, which the trust has limited control over. There was questions and discussions around the financial implications of reducing the PAN, but also the importance of balancing this with securing stronger educational outcomes at the school.</p> <p>A trustee asked if there would be redundancies. The DCEO explained that as this process would take a number of years the trust and school would have the time to plan accordingly, and redundancies would not be anticipated.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees approved ELT to begin the process in relation to the PAN reduction at CTA.</p>	
<p>15. Policy Management / Policy Update</p>	
<p>An update was provided that the policies referenced had all been considered, reviewed and approved by the Hub Boards.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees confirmed approval of the policies set out within the report.</p>	
<p>16. Any Other Business</p>	
<p>None.</p>	
<p>17. Feedback to/from Hub Board and ASCs – Questions, Comments and Concerns</p>	
<p>The Chairs of the Hub Boards provided a brief summary of their recent meetings, and the HoG drew attention to how the Hub Board draft minutes are shared with trustees which provided assurance to the board of the robust scrutiny and challenge.</p>	
<p>18. Identification of Confidential items</p>	
<p>A discussion within agenda item 10 was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</p>	
<p>19. Confirmation of date and time of next meeting –</p>	
<p>The next trust board meeting will be held on 5 November 2024, and the AGM on 11 December 2024.</p> <p>The CEO recorded thanks on behalf of the trust to the trustees for their time, commitment and support during this year.</p>	

MEETING CLOSED 20:05

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

Actions from the Trust Board meeting held on 16 July 2024

Agenda Item N°	Summary of Action	Who?	When?
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4	The risk appetite statement will be shared on Teams for trustees for further comment and review and will be part of the reports for the trust board.	HoG	asap
4	Ensure the committee had those assurances on the financial picture and actual costs and that this was evidenced on the risk register.	CEO	Next mtg
5	Amend agenda to reflect that RR is with A&R committee	HoG	Next mtg
6	An invite was extended to all trustees to visit KMA with the Chair, and to attend CEO/DCEO walk-arounds.	HoG	ongoing
6a	Update report on exploratory merger discussions	CEO	Next mtg
7	New trustees - update all records, undertake an induction with the new trustees, and invite to the next meeting.	HoG	asap
9	Detailed standards report, including breakdown of data by pupil groups will be brought to the autumn trust board meeting as standards will be the focus of that meeting.	DCEO	Next mtg

DRAFT