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Waterton Academy Trust

Minutes of a Trust Board Meeting

DATE: Tuesday 15 th July 2025	TIME: 6pm	LOCATION: Centre for Excellence, Waterton Academy Trust
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Attendees

Chair:	S Johnson	
Trustees	S Bates	L Hutton
	K Davies	C Nicholson
	T Dennant (from item 3)	J Wathen
	A Goudie	
	J Henson	
Attending:	D Dickinson (<i>CEO</i>)	M-C Bretherton (<i>DCEO</i>)
	C Love (<i>CFO</i>)	
Clerk:	L Clark (<i>Head of Governance</i>)	
Apologies:	L Harrison, J Shaw	

		ACTION
1.	Welcome, and apologies for absence	
	<p>The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. Introductions were made for the new CFO, C Love, and for prospective trustee T Dennant.</p> <p>Apologies for absence had been received and were accepted from L Harrison and J Shaw.</p>	
2.	Appointment of new trustee	
	<p>The Chair asked T Dennant to leave the room for the consideration of this item.</p> <p>The HoG (Head of Governance) drew attention to the report which provided an overview of the appointment process under article 58 whereby the Trust Board can co-opt trustees, since the maximum number of trustees (10) have been appointed under article 50 (Member appointed trustees).</p> <p>Trustees reviewed the detailed expression of interest, and the CEO and Chair summarised the positive meetings they had had with T Dennant. It was felt that his breadth of senior project management expertise in the FE and MAT sector would be valued by the board and meet a skills need, and his appointment would add further capacity.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees unanimously approved the appointment of T Dennant for a 4-year term of office.</p> <p>T Dennant was asked to re-join the meeting and updated on the discussions. He thanked the board.</p>	

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	The HoG will progress the formalities and trustee induction.	HoG
3.	Declarations of Interest	
	The standing register of declarations of interest was noted. T Dennant will be asked to complete his now he has been appointed.	
4.	Review of minutes and matters arising	
	<p>The minutes and confidential minutes of the meetings held on 18th March 2025 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.</p> <p>The Head of Governance provided an update on the actions, and it was confirmed that all actions had been undertaken or would be covered during this meeting. The minutes and confidential minutes listed above were signed by the Chair as a true and accurate reflection of the meetings.</p>	
4.a	Minutes and feedback from committees	
	<p>- People Committee</p> <p>J Wathen, Chair of the People Committee provided a brief summary of the committee meeting held on 30th June 2025 which had included two substantive items. The committee had reviewed the Head of People and Partnerships report with key highlights including; work on succession planning, HT development days, wellbeing strategy, appraisal framework and the ITT programme.</p> <p>An update had also been provided on the apprenticeship business plan. There had been a deliberate slight pause in the pace of progression in some areas to enable the new CFO, who joined after Easter, to bring her insight to the business planning and growth strategy. Recruitment has been very positive for the level 5 programme. The committee had tasked ELT with conducting a brief options appraisal around future strategy in conjunction with the advertisement for a Head of Apprenticeships role.</p> <p>In response to a question, it was confirmed that the codification of leadership work is the same as the leadership pathway.</p> <p><i>A discussion was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</i></p> <p>- Audit and Risk Committee</p> <p>A Goudie, Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee provided a brief summary of the committee meeting which had been held prior to this trust board meeting. The committee had received a comprehensive update on cybersecurity and the progress made against IT challenges; the re-write of the procurement policy; the interim external audit management report; the annual scrutiny report tracker; and risk. The committee had scrutinised the reports, and received assurances that work was on track in all areas.</p>	
5.	Safeguarding / Health & Safety	
	<p>Trustees' attention was drawn to the update on the CEO report regarding the safeguarding case and how assurances made to the trust from external agencies regarding a joint communications strategy had not been upheld. The CEO has written to the LADO and police on this matter. The situation required a great deal of sensitive management and time and support to parents and the community, but things have now stabilised, and the CEO praised colleagues for their support and handling of the situation.</p> <p>There had been a fire at Crofton Infants (CIS) which had been caused by a fault with a fridge (the fridge had been PAT tested and had complied) and was contained within a</p>	

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	<p>small kitchen area. The new arrangement whereby the fire services are called straight away worked well and the fire service were complementary about the speed and organisation of the evacuation of the school.</p> <p>There were no other reportable safeguarding or health and safety matters to bring to trustees' attention.</p>	
6.	CEO Headline Report	
	<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>An overview of current growth was provided including conversions, conversions and SEND expansion. The CEO summarised the progress towards the conversion of Kings Oak (KOLC) and the proposed approach.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>A discussion was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</i></p> <p>Resolution: Trustees approved the academy conversion of KOLC.</p> <p>A question was asked by a trustee on the growth strategy. The CEO summarised the work of the ELT on identifying trusts (MATs and SATs) and schools in the geographical area whose values align with WAT, and the range of networking activities undertaken. There are a number of schools currently in conversation with WAT and should these progress then robust, detailed due diligence will be completed for presentation and review of trustees. WAT's approach is to continue to develop presence and strong reputation in the local partnership areas, remaining steadfast with the vision and values of WAT. Attention was drawn to the Conditions of Care which the trust work within, which will be reshared with trustees.</p> <p>The CEO drew attention to the update within the report on the SEND expansion. The Expression of Interest (EOI) for the establishment of a new academy, mirroring the successful Newstead model was approved, and a full application has now been submitted to the DfE. Preparatory work is underway, with a view to opening in September. The new provision, to be named Hammer Lane Academy (HLA), will be based at Charlston and offer 30 Key Stage 1 places for pupils with Communication and Interaction (C&I) needs.</p> <p>The Trust has also been approached by Barnsley Council and is holding conversations around further opportunities to support Barnsley's capacity requirements. The proposed pupil numbers and final arrangements are yet to be confirmed; further details will be shared with Trustees as they become available.</p> <p>Capacity reviews with the trust central leadership team have taken place to ensure the trust growth can be met.</p>	CEO
7.	Trust Strategy Update*	
	<p>The DCEO provided a brief summary of the trust development plan (TDP) highlighting how the trust had evaluated against the 5 pillars of a successful MAT as set out by the DfE with a review in place each year.</p> <p>Following the action at the last meeting a comment around impact has been added for each.</p> <p>The DCEO highlighted the progress report which provides a synopsis of where the trust is in relation to the range of strategies in development. There are a significant number</p>	

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	<p>of projects and lots of work ongoing; for example around oracy which will be a focus on the trust-wide inset day.</p> <p>In response to questions, the DCEO explained the strategy around quality first teaching and the evidence-based work ongoing at school level to create a codification of language and approach.</p> <p>A trustee posed a question on the timeline adherence of the procurement strategy and digital transformation strategy and whether there were risks inherent in this. The DCEO explained that this had been discussed, reviewed and scrutinised in detail by the Audit and Risk Committee and accelerated progress is being made towards the revised date and potential risks have been mitigated effectively.</p>	
8.	Governance Structure Report*	
	<p>The Head of Governance (HoG) drew attention to the report outlining the wider review of the governance structure and reporting function which had been undertaken and the proposal set out to enhance scrutiny, oversight and assurance, and to more effectively satisfy the requirements of the Academy Trust Handbook, particularly in relation to financial scrutiny.</p> <p>A review of the effectiveness of the Hub Boards has been undertaken by the HoG with input from the ELT, Chairs of the hub boards and the clerk to the hubs. There have been a number of challenges with the hubs including, attendance, capacity, lack of consistency of representation, which has led to less effective scrutiny and challenge. It is proposed that the reshaping of the committee elements of the trust board is required. The creation of a dedicated finance committee and a standards committees should replace the Hub Board arrangement. Both committees would be constituted with a majority of trustees and therefore this would ensure that trustees have more detailed knowledge and oversight, therefore fulfilling their core strategic governance functions. Meetings will be held on Teams to assist with trustee capacity.</p> <p>The Chair reiterated his endorsement of the proposal and welcomed the assurance that the committees will bring, and this was echoed by ELT.</p> <p>The HoG confirmed that the ASC Chair Network will continue to meet termly with key communications shared to be disseminated to the ASCs. Other opportunities to enhance communications between layers of governance will be explored including co-opting skilled governors to trust board committees where appropriate.</p> <p>Trustees discussed and were unanimously positive about the proposal and confirmed the resolutions.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees reviewed the effectiveness of the current structure and approved the;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal of the hub boards from the governance structure - Establishment of a Finance and Resources Committee - Establishment of a Standards Committee <p>Next steps will be for trustees to express preferences for which committees they serve on – HoG, with support from the CEO, to contact trustees.</p>	HoG/ CEO
9.	Finance Main Report*	
	<p>The CFO introduced the report. Trustees confirmed that they had read the report and the CFO highlighted key headlines, with opportunity for questions.</p>	

Attention was drawn to page 2 of the report, summarising the P9 RAG rated forecasts with RAG rated categories to highlight risks to the current forecast. The consolidated position stands at a surplus of £154k. Key risks include the impact of agreed support staff pay award (April 25), capital reclassification, premises costs including utilities, and ICT and software licence renewals.

The central trust forecast is a deficit of £306k compared to a £116k at P7. Explanation was provided to trustees as to the reasons for this which includes the delay in conversion of KOLC, c£40k+ on IT digital improvements which were necessary across the trust, and maintenance costs which have been brought into the central trust budget.

The reserves position of £2.2m (8.5%) was highlighted. A question was asked about whether there were sector rumours that if a trust has more than a certain level could there be a clawback. ELT stated that this would only apply if reserves were much greater, and historically WAT have always aimed for around 8%. For a primary MAT, the ELT confirmed that the trust is in a healthy position.

The CEO reiterated the importance of all schools having the same IT offer to ensure the trust's vision of success is a shared experience for all. A comprehensive IT kit audit has now taken place across all schools which is crucial knowledge for the trust to inform decision making. Whilst this has impacted financially on the central budget it was felt to be critical for the schools. The edtech group is working really hard on delivery of this homogenised approach ensuring all schools have the appropriate kit and trained staff to deliver the curriculum. For those schools requiring kit, access to reserves will be considered. Some of the work will be quick wins, such as rolling out the new Windows update.

In response to a question, the DCEO confirmed that the Head of Apprenticeship position had always been planned for an autumn 2025 start date, and therefore there had been no impact to the budget in terms of the slight delay in advertising for this post.

There were questions and robust discussion around the summary of each school's budget position. It was highlighted that for some schools it only takes a small matter to tip them into a deficit position due to the size of the school. If a school is felt to require additional staffing or resources, then that investment would be forensically approached and brought to the board should an access to reserves be required. There was a discussion on the detailed work undertaken at Walton Primary (WPA) the past few years to support the school out of their deficit position.

A question was asked about how confident the CFO is in the forecast, and she confirmed that whilst there was still work to do to forensically work through everything, the board should take assurances that there is unlikely to be significant movement from the figures within the report.

The CFO drew attention to page 8 which outlined the proposed 2025-26 budget, reporting a consolidated surplus of £92k. The central budget shows a break-even position, which includes a £33k contribution from apprenticeships. The income assumes KOLC full year and 6 months with the conversion of another school which is at due diligence stage, and the associated central costs related to these schools have also been included where known. The figures also include a proposed IT related capital expenditure of £62k.

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<p>In response to a trustee question, it was confirmed that capital works are required. The focus has been on roofs, and attention will now turn to boilers. However, there is also the Salix bid to take into account, which is payable back over a 3 year period, which will assist with these works. In response to further questions the CEO stated a report has been commissioned on fire doors, and after this a report on toilets will be also be undertaken. Other schools in conversation with the trust may also have capital works required, but this will be reviewed in due course as part of due diligence and reported to the board.</p> <p>Trustees commented positively on the way in which the CFO had presented the report and the clarity of the detail within the report and the graphical visuals. Trustees were asked for feedback.</p> <p>A trustee requested that the report include numbers on roll to allow for comparison and further benchmarking for the board. It was also requested that the graphs include the names of the schools, as well as colours.</p> <p>There were questions and discussion around the financial and resource pressures associated with SEND and the government white paper and the ambition of inclusivity for all schools. Waterton prides itself on inclusivity but this can also lead to direction from the LA for the trust to take children where it is not felt to be the most suitable option for the child or for Waterton.</p> <p>The CFO explained that work is being undertaken on the 3-year forecasting and attention was drawn to the underlying assumptions within the report. The final plan will be brought to the finance committee.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees reviewed the report and the recommendations set out and;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approved the proposed 2025-26 Trust budget, including underlying assumptions and allocations, as presented in the report. - Approved the proposed IT capital expenditure budget. - Noted the current P9 financial forecast, including the central team position and updated outlook for year-end reserves. - Supported the continued focus on key areas flagged through RAG analysis, to inform the P10 forecast update and strengthen year-end accuracy. 	CFO
<p>10. Education and Standards Headline Report*</p>	
<p>The DCEO highlighted that the new standards committee will provide even greater more detailed scrutiny moving forwards which will give assurance to the board.</p> <p>Attention was drawn to the report on key stage 2 (KS2) outcomes published last week. Everything is heading in a positive way, and the trust now has a three-year improving trend and are now 2pp above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils also have a three-year improving trend and achieve 3pp better than disadvantaged pupils nationally. For pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEND K), the trust has seen a significant improvement in their outcomes in 2025, with 36% of pupils achieving the combined expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths. However, for pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan there has been a slight decline from last year, although outcomes are still broadly in line with National Averages for this group of pupils.</p> <p>However, performance remains variable between schools, with some schools making significant progress year-on-year and others showing less consistency. There is a</p>	

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piece of work required around equity, and ensuring all schools within the trust are achieving strong outcomes. The context of some schools, such as CTA and KMA were highlighted, and progress made is strong but isn't reflected fully in the outcomes just yet. There is a concern that SKA's outcomes remain low; however the school has huge challenges around mobility, SEND, and due to community challenges. At WRA, it was anticipated that there would be a more significant improvement - the results fell short of forecasts and will require further analysis. CPS and NJA achieved phenomenal results.

A question was asked about how practice is disseminated from schools who are doing exceptionally well. The DCEO explained that culturally all HTs are working together with the vision of 'success is a shared experience.' There are numerous examples of collaborative working and support between HTs and their schools to embed quality practice and learn from schools who have developed initiatives and strategies to drive improvements. The monthly key priorities report is also shared with HTs as a reference point. The work on succession planning is also creating professional development opportunities to upskill and share practice, with a real sense of everyone contributing to the success of all schools.

It was also highlighted that attendance is vastly improved. Across the trust there is shared culture to improve, and it is the ambition for combined attainment to be reaching 70% over the next couple of years.

A question was asked if there was a risk when onboarding new schools that the culture of the trust will be impacted. The DCEO explained that vision, values, culture are a critical part of conversations and due diligence, and induction of new schools is vital, supported by data.

In response to a question on greater depth results, the DCEO indicated that securing higher greater depth outcomes will be the next piece of work. There is rigour in target setting, which has moved to being centrally set for each school and HTs have welcomed this approach. The Head of Data and Assessment has forensically approached this, with a high level of precision and the education team have worked very closely with HTs.

There were questions and discussions on SEND and the work undertaken by the Head of SEND and Inclusion to map provision and provide training to schools to ensure resources are used well and in the right places. This, along with increased attendance, has had a significant positive impact.

The DCEO also explained that the standards committee will receive a greater level of detail by pupil characteristics for enhanced scrutiny and oversight.

There have been challenging school level reviews, but these are leading to positive improvements. The CEO and DCEO will be carrying out more visits to review learning environments, which trustees are also invited to.

Trustees were updated that use of AI, including using AI to reduce teacher workload and admin burden is a focus of the trust inset day in September. The ed-tech group have been undertaking pilots and early opinion is very positive. For example, the time saving for completed a 'my plan' is hugely significant. Attention was drawn to the brief summary in the report, the digital transformation strategy and the impact on time and

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	<p>therefore money. The sector is waiting for the DfE guidance in this area, but the board received assurance from the policies the trust has in place. Work is also being undertaken on writing a digital wellness curriculum – J Bean (HT at CPS) attended a conference in Singapore on this and is bringing the knowledge gained to the trust. There was a discussion on ensuring that AI tools are used for appropriate purpose such as resource creation, but that creativity is not lost. A comment was made about trustee involvement and ensuring that use of AI/ AI strategy is reviewed by a committee.</p> <p>Trustees commented very positively on the trusts' innovative approach to AI.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the DCEO for the comprehensive report and the excellent work to date.</p>	DCEO
11.	<p>Operations Headline Report*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 11.1 HR - 11.2 Estates - 11.3 IT Services - 11.4 Data governance 	
	<p>The CEO drew attention to the report and provided a brief top line summary of key headlines.</p> <p>Through questions and discussion, it was noted that the HLTA absence has been disproportionately impacted as it is a very small group and there have been some specific health related absences of individuals within this group. It was also highlighted that the ethnicity of staff does reflect the demographic of the communities the schools serve. A trustee asked if top line ethnicity data of pupils could be included within the report.</p> <p>Estates work remains positive, and it has been agreed to appoint an apprentice to the estates admin team to support with workload, and to purchase an additional van for the maintenance team.</p> <p>A question was asked if there is the IT expertise in-house to support with the use of iPADS and digital curriculum. The CEO responded that the ed-tech group have a breadth of skills and expertise and work closely with colleagues to support across all schools and also manage internet safety.</p>	CEO
12.	<p>West Yorkshire Pension Proposal</p> <p>The CEO drew attention to the documents which had been added to Teams outlining the proposal to bring together a group of MATs to work collectively with a view to consult with the WYPF and share the cost of engaging an independent actuary to assist.</p> <p>Trustees commented favourably on working together with a consortium of MATs on this and approved.</p> <p>Resolution: trustees approved the proposal to join the group.</p>	
13.	<p>Accelerating SEND Autonomy & Practice (briefing paper)</p> <p>The CEO drew attention to the briefing paper with the recommendation that the trust do not proceed, and that the money which would need to be spent on this would be better spent on something else of greater need.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees reviewed and confirmed that the trust would not proceed with this.</p>	

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14.	<p>Policy Update*</p> <p>An update was provided that the Procurement Policy referenced had been considered, reviewed and approved by the Audit and Risk Committee.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees confirmed approval of the Procurement Policy.</p>	
15.	<p>AOB</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">- PAN (SKA)</p> <p>The DCEO explained that permission is sought to go out for consultation to reduce the current PAN of 62 at South Kirkby Academy (SKA) to 60, from September 2027. It is hoped this will help with the issue of mobility.</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees approved the proposal to consult on a reduction of PAN at SKA from 62 to 60.</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">- Bank account</p> <p>The CFO explained that approval is sought for the trust to open an instant access deposit account with Barclays, at a savings rate of 3.75% and merge the other savings account as this account had more favourable terms. A question was asked if there was a daily withdrawal limit and/or a charge. The CFO will double check, and notwithstanding this, trustees approved.</p> <p>Resolution: trustees approved the opening of the account.</p>	
16.	<p>Feedback to/from Hub Board and ASCs – Questions, Comments and Concerns*</p> <p>Discussed under item 8.</p>	
17.	<p>Identification of Confidential items</p> <p>A discussion within agenda item 4a and 6 was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</p>	
18.	<p>Confirmation of date and time of next meeting</p> <p>The autumn trust board meeting was set for 11th November 2025 at 6pm.</p> <p>The AGM was set for 11th Dec 2025 at 6pm.</p> <p>The Chair highlighted the importance of trustees visiting schools and having an understanding of the communities in which they operate within. Trustees were invited to attend any of the scheduled CEO and DCEO visits to schools – dates to be circulated and trustees to book on.</p> <p>Invites to other trust events such as sports awards, performances, competitions, children’s parliament will also continue to be circulated and trustees encouraged to attend where capacity allows.</p> <p>The Chair and CEO thanked trustees for their continued support to Waterton and for the expertise they bring to the board, on what has been another positive school year.</p>	HoG
MEETING CLOSED: 8pm		

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

ACTIONS			
Item	Summary of Action	Who?	When?
2	Trustee appointment - progress the formalities and trustee induction.	HoG	Asap
6	Reshare Conditions of Care	CEO	Asap
8	trustees to express preferences for which committees they serve on - HoG to contact trustees.	HoG and CEO	Asap
10	Ensuring that use of AI/ AI strategy is reviewed by a committee.	DCEO	Autumn term
11	Include ethnicity data of pupils on HR reports for demographic context	CEO	Next mtg
18	Circulate dates of CEO/DCEO school visits, and other trust events	HoG	Ongoing