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Waterton Academy Trust

Minutes of a Trust Board Meeting

DATE: Tuesday 11 th November 2025	TIME: 6pm	LOCATION: Centre for Excellence, Waterton Academy Trust
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Attendees

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

		ACTION
1.	Welcome The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.	
2.	Apologies for absence Apologies for absence had been received and were accepted from L Hutton. It was noted that trustees A Goudie, T Dennant and J Shaw were running late and would join as soon as they can. Apologies were later received from J Shaw.	
3.	Declarations of Interest The standing register of declarations of interest was noted and confirmed to be fully updated. The Chair also reminded all trustees to complete the Safeguarding KCSIE refresher. HoG to re-circulate.	HoG
4.	Review of minutes and matters arising The minutes and confidential minutes of the meetings held on 15 th July 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. 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 meeting.	
5	Feedback (and approvals) from committees:	
	(i) Finance and Resources	
	J Wathen, Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee provided a brief summary of the first meeting of the newly established committee meeting held on 20 Oct	

		ACTION
	2025 which had included a detailed review of the Draft year-end forecast summary report 2024-25, and the current position.	
	(ii) Standards	
	<p>C Nicholson, Chair of the Standards Committee provided a brief summary of the first meeting of the newly established committee meeting held on 22 Oct 2025 commenting how robust the meeting had been with comprehensive reporting, and that terms of reference had been agreed. The committee requested that where appropriate school leaders present to the committee on specific themes. The importance of not duplicating reporting was highlighted, and in discussions around exception reporting, the committee had requested that the DCEO will bring a report to the next meeting defining “exception” thresholds with examples to provide more clarity on exception reporting (e.g., safeguarding incidents, performance concerns).</p> <p>The meeting had also included a detailed update on the Year 6 strategy; the significant impact of the attendance strategy; discussion on target setting including mobility; updates on the RISE visits from the DfE; the celebration of the opening of Hammer Lane; and the advances in use of AI including the development of a school self-evaluation tool. The importance of trustee visits to schools to triangulate information was also reiterated.</p> <p>Attention was drawn to the AI session delivered for governors, and the powerful work being undertaken by the trust, aligned with ethical guidelines in this area and retaining a human element.</p>	
	(iii) People	
	<p>S Bates, Chair of the People Committee provided a brief summary of the committee meeting held on 3 Nov 2025. The main focus of the meeting had been around the apprenticeship provision, and the committee had held a robust discussion on the future direction and resourcing of the Trust’s apprenticeship provision. The conversation had centred on whether to prioritise immediate sales and marketing activity to grow learner numbers, or to first redesign the programme to make it scalable. There was also debate on the Head of Apprenticeship post and the skillset required.</p> <p>The committee had concluded that the immediate priority is programme design and scalability, not aggressive sales. There was agreement that the recruitment brief should be revisited by the panel with this in mind, and that the panel should re-group and reconsider the individual who had initially applied and consider an appointment on a fixed-term basis, and the possibility of considering an external consultant.</p>	
	(iv) Remuneration	
	<p>J Wathen, Chair of the Remuneration Committee provided a brief summary of the committee meeting held on 10 Nov 2025 which had included reviewing reports around the appraisal and remuneration of school leaders and the Central Leadership Team. The chair reminded the board that in line with pay policy, performance-related pay outcomes has been removed. There had been a discussion on the expansion of the SEND provision and the strategic role of the Head of SEND and Inclusion who was now also EHT across three SEND provisions.</p> <p><i>The CEO, DCEO and CFO left the meeting.</i></p> <p>The Chair explained that the committee had reviewed and scrutinised the recommendations set out within the reports and agreed with all pay</p>	

		ACTION
	<p>recommendations of school leaders and the central leadership team, highlighting that all recommendations were within pay policy, for board approval.</p> <p>There had also been the review of the executive pay policy which incorporated in best practices from CST and guidelines from the Academy Trust Handbook, and the committee recommended for board approval.</p> <p>Executive remuneration had been considered in line with the policy and against ELT objectives. The committee had reviewed and recommended for board approval the remuneration within the report; for the DCEO to move to the next point within the salary band, which was noted to now be at the top of that band; the CEO was at the top of the pay scale and had been for six years; and the CFO was new in post and therefore was no uplift on the scale. Considering this, and the growth of the trust it was concluded by the committee to be an appropriate point to review the executive leadership arrangements and remuneration holistically of the trust. This would include national benchmarking, consider succession planning, review the executive and central leadership structure and remit of roles.</p> <p>The committee recommended to the board to commission an external reviewer to undertake this. The target timeframe for completion of the review was proposed for the spring trust board meeting.</p> <p>The Chair of the trust board also provided a summary of the CEO appraisal which him and trustee T Dennant had undertaken, which ensures the triangulation of information, and for the board to have confidence of CEO objectives having been met and exceeded.</p> <p><i>T Dennant and A Goudie joined the meeting 6:20</i></p> <p>Resolutions: Trustees approved the recommendations from the committee on the appraisal and remuneration of school leaders, the central leadership team and the executive leadership team, including the CEO. Trustees approved the commissioning of an external review of executive leadership arrangements and remuneration of the trust. Trustees also reviewed and approved the Executive Pay Policy.</p> <p><i>The CEO, DCEO and CFO re-joined the meeting.</i></p>	Trustees
	<p>(v) Audit and Risk</p>	
	<p>The Head of Governance provided a brief summary of the areas of focus of the Audit and Risk committee meeting held on 11 Nov 2025, highlighting that the committee will elect a Chair at their next meeting. The committee had reviewed and discussed the cybersecurity update including progress and plans; the business continuity plan - which is an ongoing piece of work with a working group to be established internally to progress; the Risk Management Policy - recommended for trust board approval (with minor admin changes). The committee had also received an update on internal audit and the tracker and assurance on progress to address actions.</p> <p>Resolution: The trust board approved the Risk Management Policy</p>	
6.	Safeguarding / Health & Safety	
	Trustees' attention was drawn to the update, and reassurance provided to trustees.	

	ACTION
<p><i>A discussion was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</i></p> <p>A health and safety matter around fire doors was reported to the committee. It was highlighted that the whole sector are undertaking reviews relating to this. There has been a significant piece of work on this, and there will be a update in due course to trustees as substantial funding will be required.</p> <p>There were no other reportable safeguarding or health and safety matters to bring to trustees' attention.</p>	
<p>7. 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. A headline of the range of system commitments were shared.</p> <p>As a result of the positive recent DfE RISE meetings (Regional improvement for standards and excellence) the CEO had been contacted by the DfE and advised that the conversion of Altofts Junior School and Jump Primary have been given provisional approval, and both will be granted their academy order next month. Therefore, it is likely that both will join the trust in the summer term. Altofts in particular is strategically very important as Lee Brigg Infants is the feeder school and therefore the children will be continuing at a Waterton school. An update on conversations was also provided, with one school in early positive ongoing discussions.</p> <p>An overview of SEND expansion was also highlighted and the successful opening of Hammer Lane Academy.</p> <p>In light of the Trust's continued growth, both in scale and complexity of offer all members of the Central Leadership Team (CLT) have undertaken a formal capacity review of their respective departments to ensure that areas of central operations are sufficiently resourced, structured, and aligned to meet the demands of an expanding organisation. Leaders will report to the relevant trustee committee on these in the spring term.</p> <p>The CEO updated trustees on the Sharlston Schools Rebuilding Programme (SRP). <i>A discussion was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</i></p> <p>In response to a trustee question, the CEO explained that whilst there have been some challenges in relation to pace of delivery, the trust is working well at a strategic level with Barnsley LA.</p> <p>There were trustee questions on the trust's ability to generate revenue outside of the DfE funding, and the CEO drew attention to the charitable objects in the Articles of Association and how the expansion of SEND provision, pre-schools, and the apprenticeship provision meets those objectives and also generates revenue. The Finance and Resources committee confirmed that they had also discussed this and received reports to review.</p>	
<p>8. Trust Strategy Update</p>	

		ACTION
	<p>The DCEO provided a brief update in relation to the trust development plan (TDP). The trust is at the beginning of year 3 or a 3-year plan, with annual reviews and adaptations. There are a number of significant sector changes impacting upon future strategy including the new Ofsted framework, SEND reform and the forthcoming White Paper.</p> <p>Trustees reviewed the report noting the journey the trust have been on, acknowledging the progress and impact achieved over 2023–2025, as evidenced in the Annual Report 2025, and endorsed the proposal to conduct a full Trust Evaluation later in 2025–26 and participate in a facilitated Trust Evaluation and Strategy Planning Day in the Summer Term 2026.</p> <p>There were questions and discussions on the importance of taking a step back to reflect whilst also retaining focus on the trust’s guiding principles and values. There was also a discussion on ensuring readiness for opportunities arising from the White Paper.</p> <p>The annual report was discussed and commented positively on as a showcase of all the trust have achieved in the past year.</p>	
9.	Governance Report	
	<p>The Head of Governance (HoG) drew attention to the report summarising key highlights. An update was also provided on the Companies House identity verification checks coming into force. Trustees reviewed the recommendations and approved the following;</p> <p>Resolution: Trustees formally approved the constitution of the committees. Trustees reviewed and approved the updated Scheme of Delegation to reflect the change of governance structure; and approved the updated Governance Code of Conduct</p> <p>Trustees were asked for feedback on the new committee structure and trustees noted improved focus, higher-quality discussions, and better challenge compared to the previous hub model of governance. The ELT echoed this feedback and it was felt by all to be a significant step forwards. There had been positive feedback received from the ASC Chair’s network regarding the removal of the Hub Boards. It was discussed that a future step will be to co-opt skilled ASC governors to committees once the reporting framework is embedded.</p>	
10.	Education and Standards Main Report	
	<p>The DCEO highlighted that the new standards committee will further strengthen scrutiny of standards. The aim is to avoid duplication of detail, whilst ensuring the full trust board have headline information, strategic oversight and assurance from the committee.</p> <p>The DCEO provided a summary of key aspects of the report including headline information on targets for 25/26, and the formalisation of the Executive Headteacher (with a Head of School role) leadership model across several schools. The structure increases leadership reach, strengthens school-to-school collaboration, and secures succession, and also works well in ensuring stable leadership during periods of rapid improvement for some schools. The education team are working hard to develop the roles and provide training and support to those colleagues.</p> <p>Trustees were updated on the strategic position in relation to Ofsted, and that the trust is on the front foot with the new guidance for HTs, including a piece of work on</p>	

		ACTION
	<p>digital innovation work in developing a Power App-based self-evaluation and development tool for schools, built to align directly with the revised Ofsted framework. There is also a HT development day planned with an inspector to work through this and the triangulation of the IDSR data.</p> <p>Trustees were thanked for their time in visiting schools with the CEO and DCEO, triangulating information further and providing assurance to the board. Attention was drawn to the reports from these visits, and it was noted that the use of AI to generate these reports had saved time and provides a comprehensive summary.</p> <p>The DCEO highlighted the success of CTA (Cherry Tree Academy) in relation to attendance which at 96.4% is 4.2% higher than this time last year, and there had been a significant reduction in PA. Their strategy and relentless focus are to be celebrated, and the school has been on a rapid journey of improvement.</p> <p>Also celebrated was the external safeguarding audit at LBI (Lee Brigg Infants). This is an extremely rigorous process and the feedback from the proprietor of the company conducting the audit had been exceptionally positive around the safeguarding measures at LBI and the significant positive impact on the children and the wider community.</p> <p>L Harrison provided a brief summary of her attendance at the Trust's Teachers' Council, and the usefulness of hearing directly from teachers, and the importance and meaningful impact of the group. It was agreed that a report should be shared to capture the work of this group.</p> <p>In response to a trustee question on school categorisation, the DCEO confirmed that HTs are aware of the criteria and the conversations around their school. In terms of the TATS (Team Around The School) many of the schools have self-selected for this improvement support and see it as a positive piece of work enabling them to move forwards. In discussion, trustees commented on this positive trust-wide culture of improvement, accountability and collaboration.</p> <p>A trustee asked for more detail on the support, preparation and approach for schools in the Ofsted window. The DCEO provided an overview of the approach which includes ongoing advanced support and preparation, including the Ofsted ready action plan, and the support from colleagues within the central team. There is also support from the DCEO, Director of Standards and the Education Team during the inspection. The collaborative culture of HTs and colleagues from other schools across the trust was also highlighted. Trustees' involvement was also sometimes required, and trustees were thanked for this.</p> <p>There was a trustee question and discussion around ensuring communications to parents are clear and timely with regards to changes in leadership.</p> <p>Trustees thanked the DCEO for the report and commented positively on the establishment of the Standards Committee.</p>	DCEO
11.	Finance Headline Report	
	The CFO introduced the report. Trustees confirmed that they had read the report and the CFO highlighted key headlines, with opportunity for questions.	

		ACTION
	<p>The CFO explained that the full-year forecast now indicates a £105k deficit, compared to the original £21k surplus, mainly reflecting the inclusion of Kings Oak Primary and revised pay assumptions. Trustees were provided with assurance that actions are in place to achieve break-even by year-end. It is anticipated that the P2 report will present a more favourable position. Detailed reforecasting with school leaders is scheduled this half term; results will inform Quarter 1 (P3) management accounts. Unrestricted reserves remain healthy and consistent with sector benchmarks, with the final balance to be confirmed post-audit. The trust has a strong cash balance, forecast to be £3m by year-end. A new cashflow model is in development which will be used to scenario test levels of reserves and for trustees to receive assurance on appropriate levels.</p> <p>Trustees were also updated that the trust is currently part way through an independent VAT compliance review, the focus of which is VAT treatment of fee-paying activities and potential partial exemption implications. Trustees were updated that whilst there is some risk associated with this, it is unlikely to be significantly material.</p> <p>Trustees commented positively on the clarity of the report and the use of graphs throughout. A question was asked around the falling demographic and possible implications particularly for the new build at Sharlston and its size. The CEO provided contextual information on the community and local schools and confirmed the trust's confidence in marketing of the new build school and the ability to fill the places.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>A discussion was deemed as confidential and moved to the confidential set of minutes.</i></p> <p>A question was asked about the PAN at each school in reference to the table included within the report. It was concluded that this was a useful piece of information to include, but that the table be amended slightly to more accurately show where schools were above/below PAN. There was a discussion around the challenge of recruiting pupils in some areas, but also the contextual information on demographics which shows where the trust has recruited to schools with higher numbers of pupils than the LA had predicted.</p> <p>To conclude, attention was drawn back to the finance report. Trustees reviewed the recommendations within the report and resolved the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved the Period 1 (30 September 2025) management accounts including light-touch revisions to outturns. • Noted the Inclusion of Kings Oak Primary budget and within the trust consolidated position and the adjustment to reflect the 3.2% support staff pay award. • Noted the detailed re-forecasting exercise planned for Quarter 1 (P3) management accounts. • Noted that a VAT compliance review is underway with findings expected later this term. 	CFO
12.	Operations Headline Report*	
	<p>The CEO drew attention to the report and provided a brief top line summary of key headlines, explaining that the shape of the report will change as the detail is delegated through the new committee structure.</p>	

		ACTION
	<p>Trustees were advised that all appraisals have been completed and are being digitalised via Bromcom which is improving the linkage to trust priorities. Key estates updates include; Hammer Lane Academy SEN provision was completed on time for September opening; and the £2.7m Salix Decarbonisation Project now underway across six schools. In response to a trustee question, it was confirmed that the school alarm system at SCS is in full working order.</p> <p>There is a significant piece of work around IT and Digital Transformation. This was discussed in detail by the Audit and Risk committee. Cyber resilience training has been planned using simulated threat environments to strengthen GDPR compliance and staff readiness. The trust has undertaken the DfE Technology Standards self-assessment complete, and this has resulted in a major improvement in compliance. In response to questions, the CFO highlighted that it remains an area of risk, but the trust has a grasp on areas of strength (for example, innovative AI practice) and where improvement is a priority. In response to questions, the CFO confirmed that an AI governance framework, and new 3-year digital roadmap are in production. The HoG also drew attention to the recent training session for trustees and governors which was recorded and uploaded to Teams delivered by the trust leads in AI. It was suggested that trustee J Wathen meets with J Bean and M Berry around the AI strategy.</p>	JW (HoG)
13.	Pre-School Proposal	
	<p>The CEO drew attention to the report, outlining the executive proposal of the integration of Waterton Preschool into Waterton Academy Trust, to align early years provision with the Trust's robust governance, financial management, and safeguarding systems—improving oversight, sustainability, and educational quality. Trustees reviewed the proposal including the key benefits, risks and mitigations and timelines of a implementation by September 2026 and agreed in principle to the proposal following legal advice and completion of due diligence.</p> <p>There were trustee questions on the specifics of whether the age range of the schools will need a material change, and the mechanisms of this. The CEO explained that the trust is currently exploring the options and looking at how other organisations have implemented this, and ELT will provide a more detailed paper in due course. There were further questions on the potential reputational risks should the trust not progress with this, the benefits of the schools having a pre-school and the HT having accountability, and it was felt by all trustees to be the right decision to integrate to the trust.</p>	
14.	Heritage Monument	
	The CEO updated trustees on the community heritage monument at Walton Primary Academy, funded by the parish council, and which the pupils will be involved in the design of, with an unveiling at the summer fete.	
15.	Policy Update*	
	Resolution: Trustees confirmed their review and approval of all the policies uploaded to Teams as outlined on the policy update summary report.	
16.	AOB	
	<p>- Parliament</p> <p>The CEO updated the board that the Children's parliament have once again had a very positive start to the year. Pupils are extremely keen and engaged. Part of their</p>	

ACTIONS			
Item	Summary of Action	Who?	When?
3	Re-circulate Safeguarding refresher training	HoG	Asap
5	Progress external review of executive leadership arrangements	Trustees (HoG)	asap
10	Summary report on the work of the Teachers Council	DCEO	Next mtg
11	table be amended slightly to more accurately show where schools were above/below PAN.	CFO	Next mtg
12	It was suggested that trustee J Wathen meets with J Bean and M Berry around the AI strategy.	JW (HoG)	Next term
16	importance of the trust board communicating to schools praising them for outstanding work, such as the LBIS safeguarding audit feedback, and the work at CTA improving attendance. It was agreed that the ELT and Chair would draft communications and send to the relevant HTs and Chairs of ASCs.	CEO	asap
18	Circulate trust board meeting invites	HoG	Asap