

## Minutes of the St Ralph Sherwin CMAT Trust Board

18 May 2023 – 6:00pm-8:00pm

Directors Attending: Sarah Noon (Chair), Helena Carrazedo, Margaret Hyde, Clare McKenzie, Chris Maher, Paul Medcalf, Nick O'Brien, Martin O'Dowd and Reverend Deacon Richard Walsh.

Directors Apologies: Jennifer Lawrence and Keith Wharam.

Non-Directors Attending: Kevin Gritton, Simon Redfern, Mary Robson (HR Director), Duncan Whitehouse and Jo Williams (Clerk).

Non-Directors Apologies: Peter Giorgio (NRCDES)

### Agenda Item 1 **Welcome, apologies and opening prayer.**

The meeting opened with a prayer.

### Agenda Item 2 **Notification of conflicts, business and pecuniary interests**

There were no business or pecuniary interests relating to matters on the agenda.

### Agenda Item 3 **Confirmation of the minutes of the meeting held on the 23 March 2023 and actions arising.**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23 March 2023 were confirmed as a correct record of the meeting.

The actions arising were noted with the following matters highlighted:

- A report to be added to the HR and Staffing Committee work programme regarding steps being taken to make SRS CMAT an employer of choice. The report to include an update on internships.
- Directors are encouraged to review the minutes and reports available on Trust Governor for their link schools to inform their challenge at Trust Board meetings.

- Future complaints reports to provide trend data over time to enable the tracking of themes.

Agenda Item 4

**SRMA Report and Financial Recovery Action Plan Update**

Two reports had been circulated in advance of the meeting:

1. The SRMA report and additional analysis undertaken by Mr Redfern.
2. An early draft of the Financial Recovery Action Plan.

The School Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) had undertaken a benchmarking exercise relating to staff ratios across all the CMAT schools. Two key metrics formed the basis of this benchmarking, which were:

- **Teacher contact ratio** (number of teaching periods divided by the total possible number of teaching periods). Teachers are entitled to 10% PPA. The optimum ratio is 78% contact ratio at primary school and 76% at secondary.
- **Pupil to staff ratio.**

This was important at the start of the exercise as it provided a consistent and transparent benchmark across all 25 SRS CMAT schools.

It was this that formed the baseline of the SRMA recommendations.

**Does the 78% contact ratio assume a degree of leadership and SEND capacity?**

Yes, it includes leadership capacity and wider responsibilities. As an example, a school had contacted Mr Redfern today requesting another 0.4 teacher.

**A Director challenged whether the SRMA report took account of wider factors such as the growing number of pupils with SEND?**

Mr Redfern stated that he had evolved and built on the data produced by the SRMA so as to layer on wider contextual information for each school. This included the numbers of EHCP and SEND pupils and it formed the baseline for one-to-



one conversations with Headteachers to further tease out the context for each setting.

Additionally, there were other elements that would be non-negotiable from the Board's perspective including the appointment of Chaplains in a Catholic MAT and key central functions such as the School Improvement Team.

Except for the recruitment of one Director for Performance and Standards, Central Team recruitment had been paused. School by school recruitment was subject to review as part of the one-one discussions with Headteachers based on the benchmark data.

Mr Redfern highlighted that the element of the report with the highest degree of risk was the projected income generation targets. The SRMA had highlighted that a MAT of our size could aim to generate 6-10% of self-generated income. A target of 3% for 2023-24 had been included in the projections given the CMATs starting point. Comparisons with St Thomas Aquinas CMAT highlighted that self-generated income was in the region of 2%. DRET, who the Trust were also speaking to deliver 1% of self-generated income.

There was the potential to increase income from, for example, sports facilities at the Trust's secondary schools. For small rural schools in Glossop the challenge would be much greater. The SRMA had however indicated that higher income generation was achievable as evidenced by other MATs.

### **Did the SRMA give any concrete examples of where we could generate additional income?**

No, not in specific detail but discussions with the other CMATs were ongoing and further advice would be sought from the SRMA.

The other key area was the catering contract with more work needed to ensure it was delivering value for money. Conversations had begun with Derbyshire County Council with whom the Trust had awarded its catering contract.

**A Director challenged why meals were being sold at below cost price?**

Conversations were also ongoing with the CEO of DRET to understand their catering model.

Page 30 of the report highlighted the likely savings that could be made on a school-by-school basis. This was an initial long list of savings following a steering group meeting that included the CEO, CFO, HR Director, Acting Director for School Improvement and the Governance Manager.

**A Director challenged the extent to which progress had been made towards the target savings outlined in the SRMA report.**

Mr Redfern responded by stating that the cumulative savings of the proposals agreed to date amounted to £1.8m of the £2.1m that needed to be saved. This continued to change on a daily basis as further staff changes including resignations were added.

Not all resignations would be taken as savings as it was essential vacancies were replaced where they were key to frontline delivery in schools.

The Directors welcomed the progress being made but highlighted that the data being presented, whilst very comprehensive, gave the original position and the projected forecasts should all savings be delivered. It would help if future iterations of the report to Directors gave the current position making it easier to track progress towards the goal.

These savings brought together knowledge of each school including known maternity leaves, retirements and fixed term contracts. This was not a top down plan but rather the baseline for dialogue with each Headteacher as part of the one-one conversations that were taking place.

Mr Redfern highlighted that considerable work had been undertaken to refine the data since the point at which the SRMA had undertaken his initial analysis.

The SRMA report provided benchmarked indications as to where savings could be made.

A Director highlighted that Page 59 of the report pack included a memorandum dated the 10 February 2023. In that memorandum is listed some short and longer term savings, some of which don't appear to have transitioned over to the Recovery Action Plan such as telephony services and TLRs?

Mr Redfern stated that the memorandum was a list of potential savings that had been devised some months ago. Some such as the telephony contract had already been delivered and the savings incorporated into the projections. The TLR review was likewise going to be considered but given salary protections the savings would not be realised in the short term.

The second report was the draft Financial Recovery Action Plan. The conversations with ESFA had been largely in regard to the headline figure that would need to be borrowed and the savings that would need to be made to ensure SRS CMAT remained financially viable.

The Recovery Action Plan was split into seven key opportunities reflecting the SRMA recommendations and an additional one capturing wider opportunities to make financial savings across the CMAT.

Certain assumptions had been made in projecting future year income and expenditure. The assumptions included no additional income from central government to fund nationally agreed pay awards in the future, energy price increases of 30% in 2023-24 and 5% thereafter and 3% year on year teacher salary increases for 24-25 and thereafter, again unfunded by central government.

It was also important to be sensitive to asking Headteachers to reduce staffing whilst at the same time also asking them to maximise self-generated income through lettings for example. There needed to be a clear strategy going forwards.

The action plan was ambitious but achievable.

Mr Gritton had contacted a CEO of another large Trust (DRET) that has been through a similar process of cost reduction to gain insight as we progressed on this journey of cost reduction. Mr Gritton welcomed feedback and challenge from Directors as to the milestones set out in the plan.

As regards stakeholder feedback Headteachers, whilst not happy at having to make staffing reductions understood the need for action. They had flagged that staffing across schools was already tight. One Headteacher had been more defensive about making changes and had been communicating directly with the CEO and the Chair of Governors with the Chair of the Trust Board.

**A Director challenged whether falling pupil numbers in some schools had been factored into the projections?**

PAN has been reviewed on a school-by-school basis and improvements had been built in where there was clear projections of increasing pupil numbers. It is not possible to factor in growth across every setting therefore this is targeted to where known increases have been projected.

In some schools, falling pupil numbers had been apparent for some time but firm action had yet to be taken to align staffing levels with the revised class sizes. In some cases, school leaders had been awaiting Ofsted and were inevitably worried about making too significant a change in advance.

Headteachers had welcomed assurances that a transparent benchmarking process had been used to determine savings. Whilst change was always challenging it was positive that all settings were being treated in the same way.

**A Director sought assurances as to the feedback from Headteachers on the proposals and their wellbeing in managing these changes in schools?**

One-one meeting had taken place with all Headteachers with the opportunity to work through line by line the outcomes from the benchmarking exercise and the proposals for each setting. Conversations with primary colleagues looked closely at class sizes and the potential to combine classes where appropriate if pupil number were low. It was important to note that the same conversation was taking place with every Headteacher, taking account of the individual context of each school. Reducing classes and in line with falling pupil numbers is something that some schools had been doing in the Trust for a number of years.

In many cases Headteachers had brought their own solutions to the table. In some schools, especially secondary schools, the

average class size for Key Stage 3 was 30, but in many of our schools it was currently 24. In general, Headteachers were very supportive. Mr Gritton and Mr Redfern have had follow up conversations with Headteachers to address any ongoing concerns or queries.

Mr Gritton had been continuing to visit schools as normal in his role as CEO. On one visit he met with staff and answered questions. Staff welcomed the openness in which information was being shared and appreciated that the Central Team were also being subject to savings.

### **Directors challenged whether the proposals risked impacting on the quality of education or safeguarding in schools?**

The use of nationally set benchmarks helped in developing stretching targets which wouldn't compromise the quality of education. Mr Gritton, as a former experienced Headteacher was acutely aware of not compromising the successes the Trust had achieved in its Ofsted and Catholic School Inspections and wouldn't preset a plan that risked safeguarding of pupils or staff.

A common question was why had the Trust ended up in this position and why action had not been taken before to address the financial sustainability of the CMAT. Staff were assured that despite the changes the focus remained on preserving the quality of education and safeguarding.

### **A Director challenged whether savings made in the Central Team would add further workload onto Headteachers that were already having to manage these changes and the wellbeing of staff?**

This was being given careful consideration and handovers of Central Team staff that were leaving were being carefully reviewed so as not to adversely impact upon staff in school. Some of these roles did not exist in other CMATs so it was in part how SRS CMAT had developed its staffing structure over time.

In-year mobility, based on the census, was having a positive impact with more pupils joining schools in the Trust. As funding is lagged then this will have a small positive impact in future years. Pupil projections across primary remain relatively low.



There is a bespoke marketing plan in place for each school where projected pupil numbers were low.

Now that Mr Redfern had developed the financial model across the entire Trust it would be used as a baseline for conversations on an annual basis. As pupil numbers increased or decreased it would be a starting point for discussion when new recruitment requests were being made.

Further opportunities would be explored over the medium term. At this stage, the priority remained on the largest savings that could be realised in the short term. The impact upon pupils, staff and local communities was at the forefront of planning as the changes were communicated and implemented.

The Recovery Action Plan avoids the need for redundancies which, with redundancy costs, would mean the savings were not realised in the short term. Options were being considered such as offering a member of staff a role in another school where there was a vacancy but where the data evidenced their current school was overstaffed.

#### **Has consideration been given to offering voluntary redundancies?**

It has been carefully considered and has not been completely ruled out as it is in the policy. The risk with voluntary redundancy was that the people choosing to leave may not be where the savings were most needed.

Mr Redfern reiterated that assumptions had been made regarding future pay rises given the best information available currently. This included an assumed ongoing rise of £1,925 for support staff. As a flat rate figure this would result in a larger percentage increase year on year for lower paid staff than for support staff at the higher end of the pay scale.

The Recovery Action Plan was ambitious recognising the need not only to break even but also build up reserves and at some point begin the process of paying back the loan received by ESFA.

In regard to staffing the Trust would have a clearer idea after the 31 May when the teacher resignation deadline was reached as to what wider impact there might be.



**Page 20 of the Recovery Plan details average leadership costs, however School A and School B are high compared to the other 3 secondary schools, but they do have the lowest average staff costs. Are these schools using more ECT's or are SLT all at the top of their grades?**

There are a variety of factors contributing to positions i.e. new Headteachers may make changes and staff may be less experienced. The exercise of the SRMA is a headcount review not a salary review. The reasons for differences are likely to be quite complex, but the need for quality of education is the aim and to recruit the best people regardless of profiles. We are not pushing to recruit staff at the bottom end of their scale.

It is important that stakeholders see that the Central Team is equally making savings. Given the importance of school improvement it was important to recruit to one of the Director of Performance and Standards Posts. The primary post will remain vacant for 12 months.

In addition, the Data Manager post and SEND Lead post will not be advertised after both officers received a promotion outside of the Trust.

The CEOs PA has not been recruited to on a permanent basis whilst that post is reviewed.

Local Governing Bodies appreciated the challenges the Trust faced but wanted re-assurances that teaching and learning and safeguarding would not be negatively affected locally. A Governance Symposia was planned for the following week which the Chair of the Trust Board would be attending to seek feedback. This feedback would be reported back to the Trust Board.

**A Director challenged whilst there was clear evidence, based on the numbers, for the proposals how would the changes impact upon the character and Catholic culture of the Trust?**

The loss of jobs, even if not through redundancies, was unsettling and inevitably would impact morale. The position the Trust is in however leaves no choice but to make challenging decisions for the long-term sustainability of the Trust. Mr Gritton has been in dialogue with the Chief Executive of DRET. They had taken far greater cuts.

Redundancies lead to further costs in the short term. There is so much at stake. That is why the Trust have been so careful in its communications and having one-one dialogue to understand the impact at a local level. The Trust is determined that whilst nobody would want to make these decisions in an ideal world we want to do it in a way that doesn't compromise the Catholic vision and ethos that is the foundation of the CMAT.

**A Director challenged whether the model factors in the greater risk of staff absence and sickness if staff feel a loss of morale or have to take on additional duties following the reductions in staffing.**

There is a need to keep an eye on the wider picture and track trends as the changes are implemented. HR is looking at standardised reports via iTrent so all HR managers present the same report with the same cut-off date to all Trusts. This data can be monitored and used to capture qualitative information. It was noted that a staff survey was being issued which may also capture feedback around staff morale and wellbeing.

In terms of leadership succession planning then it was important to note that there was the added requirement for senior leaders to be practicing Catholics and the challenges this at times presents in terms of recruitment.

**Is there any age-profiling of staff as there is now no retirement age?**

Retirement opportunities may give us an indication of likelihood of staff retiring. An aging population over 45 has been presented to the HR and Staffing Committee, however the Trust cannot force or assume people will retire when we expect them to.

**A Director challenged what action was being taken about the SRMAs comments in regard to actions around supply staff savings.**

Mr Gritton responded stating that initial discussions had taken place with an umbrella body with access to 9 staff agencies that could potentially resolve staff shortages and deliver reduced costs.

### Had there been any feedback from Local Governing Bodies?

There was a Governance Symposia scheduled for the following week and feedback from that will be shared with the Trust Board. Having undertaken a review of LGB minutes and receiving direct feedback emerging themes included:

- a. An appreciation that the Trust was overstaffed based on national metrics but the pressure on staff locally was intense. The recovery plan would be tough for 18 months but within that time it was hoped that the year-on-year shortfall could be addressed.
- b. LGBs were keen to understand the scrutiny the whole Trust was under and whether the central team would be required to make savings.
- c. It was a challenging time for Headteacher's trying to recruit in difficult market conditions but being delayed in advertising until the outcome of conversations around financial sustainability made it even harder.
- d. It was important to ensure support to SEND pupils wasn't compromised as part of making financial savings.

The Financial Recovery Action Plan was still in development. The final version would be presented to the Trust Board for approval.

The Trust would receive a Financial Notice to Improve. This would likely be in June. This would be a public document. A communications plan was in place for all stakeholders.

With the agreement of the Board to the draft plan it will be shared with ESFA along with the draft minutes of this meeting.

Agree actions:

1. The financial model to be updated by Mr Redfern to provide a 'live' column listing the progress made in real time towards the target figures.

2. The Recovery Action Plan to be a standard item on the Trust Board agenda going forwards.
3. Conversations with the Trust's catering provider to continue with a strategy in place after half term.
4. Any questions from Directors, governors or staff to be shared via Mr Whitehouse so responses can be written and fed back.
5. Following the Symposium on 23 May 2023, feedback will be provided to Directors on how it has been received.

7.50pm – Reverend Deacon Richard left the meeting

Agenda Item 5: **Board Committee Feedback**

Finance & Estates - 2 May 2023

- ESFA and SRMA were the main focus areas which will feed into this evening's discussion.
- An additional meeting is to be scheduled to focus on estates.

2. Audit, Risk & Governance - 2 May 2023

- The audit programme was considered including the following areas:
- Cyber security
- HR system
- Safeguarding audit including scoping from KG regarding support from STACMAT Safeguarding Director.
- Risk Register
- Falling birth rate
- Impact of Teacher strikes
- Building programme update

3. Catholic life - 4 May 2023

- Reporting of Catholic life needs to be reviewed to provide a better structure for reporting.
- CSI training

- School A and School B both achieved outstanding for Catholic Life and Collective worship and good for RE.

Agenda item 6: **Chief Executive's Update**

Mr Gritton provided the following update

- Despite the financial challenges the Trust remains forward-looking and planning for the future.
- Sarah Lockyer has been appointed as Director of Performance and Standards with effect from the beginning of September 2023, and she is also the most experienced CSI Inspector in the Diocese. Sarah will work with School Improvement leads from the other Trusts and safeguarding will feed into this role too.
- Strategic planning and Risk register - Planning is ongoing for 30 June 2023, which will include a SWOT analysis for all functions. Key themes are to be provided to Directors by 12 June. The focus of 30 June will be how to link our values and virtues which will then inform the structure of the strategic plan.
- The Risk Register structure is working well.
- A Deputy Headteacher has been appointed at St. Edwards this week.

Agenda item 7: **Governance Manager's Report**

Mr Whitehouse provided the following update:

- An annual governance assurance statement has been completed and submitted to Companies House within timescales on 14 February 2023
- The Trust's Annual Report has been submitted to Companies House within the deadline of 31 May 2023.
- A complaint had escalated to the DfE against the Trust following a Stage 3 Complaints Panel in November 2022. Evidence had been submitted and an outcome is awaited.
- A First Tier SEND Tribunal has been brought against St. Philip Howard CVA. A review of practice is taking place with the school and the Trust's solicitor and Governance Manager to consider wider lessons.

Agenda item 8: **Policies for approval**

SEND policy:

- Minor changes have been made based on national guidance, and statutory roles have been set out.
- Paragraph 7.4 regarding the SEND Lead it to be amended since the resignation of the current post holder.
- The policy was unanimously agreed.

Low level concerns policy:

- The policy sets out how low-level concerns should be reported, recorded and investigated. This is in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education.
- The policy was unanimously agreed.

Agenda item 9: **Other matters**

There were no Directors only matters to consider

2. Date of next meeting:

- Finance and Estates committee meeting (Estates focus) - date to be agreed via email.
- Full Trust Board meeting - Thursday 6 July 2023, 5-7pm

Agenda item 10: **Closing prayer**

The meeting ended with a prayer.