

Minutes of the St Ralph Sherwin CMAT Trust Board

6 July 2023 – 6:00pm-8:00pm

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

Directors Apologies: Paul Medcalf and Helena Carrazedo.

Non-Directors Attending: Rev. Simon Gillespie, Peter Giorgio, Kevin Gritton, Simon Redfern, Mary Robson, and Duncan Whitehouse (Clerk).

Non-Directors Apologies:

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 18 May 2023 and actions arising.**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 18 May 2023 were confirmed as a correct record of the meeting.

The actions arising were noted and the error of dates would be corrected.

Agenda Item 4 **Financial Recovery Action Plan Update**

Mr Redfern set out the updated financial position and Financial Recovery Action Plan. Since the last meeting there had been ongoing dialogue with ESFA. Work was underway to complete

the Budget Forecast Return which was due for submission by the end of August.

Following further modelling of the 3-year budget forecast the Trust was now predicted to breakeven in 2023-24.

The triggers for improvement in the forecast position were a:

- £0.8m improvement in income.
- £0.7m reduction in non-staff costs.
- £0.3m improvement in support staff costs.
- £0.6m improvement in utility costs.

Mr Redfern had discussed these changes with ESFA before modelling them in the forecast and it was agreed that the changes were sensible.

The Chair highlighted that a draft Notice to Improve had been received in the past 24 hours. There was the opportunity to review it for factual accuracy prior to it being made public.

A Director challenged whether the forecast included the most up to date pupil projections both in terms of additional pupils but also where there were falling roles.

Mr Redfern confirmed that account had been taken of the latest data around confirmed admissions for September and projections thereafter. Overall, it remained the case that in some primary schools the numbers of pupils leaving Year 6 was greater than the number of pupils entering the school. This would inevitably have an impact in reduced funding over a number of years. Some schools were however becoming increasingly popular and oversubscribed.

Further steps would be taken to model net migration in-year to further build on the accuracy of the model.

The Chair challenged whether the paying back of the loan had been accounted for in the figures presented?

Mr Redfern stated that the forecast presented didn't take account of the loan, as yet, either in terms of the loan income received or the repayment figures. Loan repayment would be factored in once the timescale for repayment became clearer.

A Director highlighted that whilst the changes had placed us in a stronger position it still remained very tight, and that vigilance would be needed at all levels if the Trust were not to slip back into a deficit position due to a few small unforeseen costs.

Mr Gritton stated that dialogue was ongoing with ESFA on a weekly basis. These conversations continued to be constructive, and a draft of the Financial Recovery Action Plan had been submitted. Feedback was awaited on the draft. Work was ongoing to extend the actions in the plan over the medium term and the alignment of the plan with key risk areas.

He was working with CEOs of other trusts to learn how they had addressed similar financial issues including Trusts which had similar small schools in rural areas. This included how they were structuring their staffing and leadership teams in response to changing pupil numbers.

A Director wished to put on record that whilst there was still much work to do the progress to this point had been rapid and significant and that Mrs Noon, Mr Gritton and Mr Redfern's commitment to this point should be recognised. Also, the efforts made by the Headteachers and staff across all 25 schools should be recognised.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Financial Recovery Action plan be revised in line with any feedback from ESFA.
- 2) That an additional Trust Board meeting be scheduled for early August to enable final sign off the BFR and FRAP prior to submission.

Agenda item 5: **Trust Board committee annual summary of work and impact:**

The Chair of each committee had submitted a written summary of the key areas of focus for each committee over the past 12 months. Each Chair took the opportunity to summarise their report.

Mrs McKenzie highlighted the focus the Audit, Risk and Governance Committee had had on scrutiny of the Trust's internal audit programme, the risk register and the policy framework.

The meeting directly prior to the Trust Board had been an opportunity to reflect on the past year and consider the focus

for the coming twelve months which would include a sharper focus on key procedural areas, including finance and the policy framework.

Reverend Deacon Walsh highlighted the focus that the Catholic Life Committee had had on the development of the chaplaincy service across the Trust and the focus of delivery of Catholic Life. For the coming year there would be a greater focus on the delivery of RE across the Trust.

Mr Maher highlighted the high number of Ofsted inspections that had been carried out across the Trust over the past year and the positive outcomes from these. The committee had also focussed on the revised School Improvement Team model.

Going forwards the committee would continue to have a focus on the support in place for red rated schools but also the wider supportive school improvement offer. The committee would also want to ensure that the impact of the financial decisions currently being taken don't impact negatively upon pupils and the quality of education provided by the Trust.

Mr Wharham highlighted the focus the HR and Staffing Committee had had on the implementation of the Trust's new HR system and the support in place for schools as they managed the impact of industrial action over the past twelve months.

In line with the Trust's strategic priorities there would be an ongoing focus around recruitment and retention next year given the local and national challenges in this area.

For the Trust Board, Mrs Noon highlighted that it had been quite a year not least in regard to managing the financial position the Trust found itself in. She wished to formally put on record her thanks to all the Directors, many of whom were new to the Board this academic year.

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

Mr Gritton provided an overview of his report that had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

Dialogue was taking place with Sarah Lockyer, as the new Director of Performance and Standards who would be officially starting in September, and the revised wider School

Improvement Team. The team had a clear set of priorities in supporting schools going forwards and ensuring compliance.

Support would also be sourced from best practice within the Trust including from schools in the Trust including Blessed Robert Sutton which had achieved its outstanding judgement this year.

Mrs Quirke had also agreed to take on an Executive Head position providing additional capacity to support St Mary's New Mills following the resignation of the existing Executive Headteacher.

The Central Services Review would be circulated over the coming days. The survey had been pared back to aid ease of completion and would focus on key questions around the Trust's culture and support to schools from individual service areas.

All feedback would be analysed and used to inform the Trust's strategic direction and continuous improvement of central functions. Feedback would be high level and wouldn't identify individuals giving feedback although Mr Gritton was eager to understand any specific issues that Headteacher's or Chairs of Governors had to be able to respond promptly to the matters raised.

The feedback would be analysed over the summer and feedback provided at the start of the Advent term.

A Director queried what action was being taken to promote the success of recent Ofsted inspections in order to encourage admissions to Trust schools.

Mr Gritton stated that there was a marketing plan in place for schools where numbers were low or falling. Schools were proactive in promoting themselves in the local area with support from the central team around wider marketing.

The Chair challenged what support be in place for SEND pupils following the departure of the Trust's SEND lead who had gained a promotion to another Trust.

Mr Gritton responded stating that part of the SEND Leads legacy was the strong network of SEND leads across the Trust's schools which would retain much of the knowledge and support that has been created over the past few years. SEND and support to vulnerable pupils was central to the work of the

Trust and there had been a detailed handover and existing action plan that would ensure that continued.

The Chair stated that she would be attending the upcoming Headteacher's Meeting in order to hear the views of Heads and seek informal feedback.

6:00pm – Mrs Lawes left the meeting due to another engagement.

Agenda item 7: **HR Director's Report**

Mrs Robson introduced her report highlighting that in addition to the report she asked that two policies that had been circulated in advance of the meeting be approved, namely: Annual Leave Policy and the LGPS Pensions Discretions Policy.

The key dialogue taking place with all of the CMATs within the Diocese was the evolution of the policy around performance managing teachers and senior leaders in schools.

The proposal was to decouple teachers pay progression from performance. This would enable a more effective focus on personal development and growth and better identification of career progression opportunities.

The new approach would fit seamlessly with the national Trust Quality Descriptors around fostering a supportive working environment, supporting evidence based continuous development, effective line management and a focus on staff wellbeing.

Mrs Robson highlighted that significant work would be needed over the coming 12 months to review policies including the pay policy, performance and capability as well as dialogue with staff, unions and stakeholders. There would also need to be a programme of training and development for all staff.

The new approach would facilitate easier identification of career pathways and progression routes across the Trust which would aid retention.

Pay was generally a poor means of addressing poor performance. Removing the focus on pay freed managers and staff to have a constructive dialogue about areas of strength and development and a focus on means of improving performance where necessary without the defensiveness of it

impacting on pay. This was a key part of the shift towards a coaching approach to leadership rather than simply the stick of pay being potentially withheld.

Mr Gritton endorsed the direction of travel stating that it was an exciting opportunity at a time when recruitment and retention was so challenging across the sector. It provided a key means of implementing consistency and quality of coaching from the outset.

Mrs Robson was keen to ensure there was a focus on deliverability and to introduce a new system that delivered the quality of conversation without generating additional time implications for leaders. The new approach would have less of a focus on twice yearly conversations and more emphasis on ongoing coaching dialogue throughout the year.

The one ask of all CMATs at this stage was a small contribution from each Trust to fund dedicated capacity across the Diocese to support the implementation of what would be a complex and large-scale project.

The Chair queried the exact nature of the financial commitment each Trust would be asked to commit?

Mr Giorgio highlighted that as a Diocese this was an exciting opportunity that had the ability to make all of the CMATs an employer of choice. It would show a clear commitment to staff across all of our schools and in turn support recruitment and retention.

As regards the financial cost of the seconded post that would help support implementation then the financial contribution would be towards the cost of that person's salary. Conscious of the wider financial position of the Trust the NRCDES would be willing to assist SRS CMAT through potentially a multi-year payback of the cost.

Deacon Richard supported the principle of a professional coaching dialogue and a focus on ongoing development. **He did challenge whether decoupling pay would in fact have a negative impact if people felt that their performance would not be financially recompensed.**

Mrs Robson highlighted that the change was likely to have a positive impact with a longer-term view of staff development rather than an annual cycle of performance management which

in effect led to the accrual of evidence for one point in the year and the bureaucracy that sat behind the current process.

National evidence had proven that pay wasn't in and of itself a motivator. The approach would in effect mirror that already in existence for support staff who progress up a scale annually unless on a support plan.

A Director stated that they felt that linking pay and performance was outdated and hence agreed to the way forward. It was essential however that there was effective training in place for the new model to get the best from it. It was also essential to ensure it didn't add greatly to workloads of staff in schools.

Mr Gritton highlighted that it would be a tight timescale for implementation for introduction in 2024-25. The Trust was fully committed to the proposal but any support in delaying any additional costs would be helpful given the current position of the Trust.

A Director was broadly supportive but stated that it was important to be clear that such a shift wouldn't be cost free, either financially and certainly in terms of time and capacity, certainly for the set-up stage.

A Director highlighted that it was a positive step to decouple pay from performance. It would support the research led approach to continuous improvement at a Trust, school and staff level.

Resolved:

- a) That the Board agree in principle the shift to professional coaching discussions with pay and performance no longer being linked for teachers and leaders in schools.
- b) That Mrs Robson confirm the precise cost of the contribution asked of each CMAT to fund the seconded role to provide capacity to deliver the project.

In regard to the two policies that had been shared in advance of the meeting the comments were as follows:

Annual Leave Policy – The changes reflected national pay awards and the increase of one day in the annual leave allowance for support staff. There had been discussion at the

HR and Staffing Committee previously. The trade unions had not made any comments on the amended policy.

LGPS Pensions Discretions Policy. – there had been no changes to the policy.

Resolved: that the Annual Leave and LGPS Discretions Policy be approved by the Trust Board.

Agenda Item 8: **Governance Manager's Report**

Mr Whitehouse introduced the report highlighting the annual review of complaints managed at Stage 2 and Stage 3.

Feedback from LGBs regarding the financial position of the Trust had been collated and included in the report. There was broad understanding of the challenges being faced by the Trust but an ongoing call for communication of the issues.

Another Director felt that the feedback from LGBs wasn't too critical but highlighted the importance of also feeding back to parents and carers and wider staff. The key message being that despite tough decisions being made the focus was still on ensuring that any savings would not impact on the quality of education for pupils.

Agenda item 9: **Policies: Health and Safety Policy**

The updated Health and Safety Policy had been circulated. The policy was unchanged from the previous version other than to highlight that the Trust commissions Derbyshire County Council's Health and Safety Team to deliver training and guidance to ensure compliance across the Trust's schools.

Resolved: that the Trust Board approve the updated Health and Safety Policy.

Agenda Item 9: **Any other business:**

- Appointment of Chairs 2023-2024
- Confirmation of Link Directors 2023-2024
- Confirmation of the Trust Board calendar 2023-2024

Resolved: it was agreed unanimously that Sarah Noon would continue as Chair for the academic year 2023-24.

It was agreed unanimously that the following Directors would continue to chair the relevant committees for 2023-24:

Audit, Risk and Governance Committee – Clare McKenzie
Catholic Life Committee – Reverend Deacon Richard Walsh
Curriculum & Standards Committee – Chris Maher
Finance and Estates Committee – Paul Medcalf
HR & Staffing Committee – Keith Wharam

Clare McKenzie would continue as Link Director for Safeguarding. Nick O'Brien would continue as Link Director for SEND.

Directors were asked to provide feedback on the Trust Board calendar and confirmed dates would then be circulated prior to the end of term.

Deacon Richard led the Board in thanking Mrs Noon for her leadership of the Board over the past year and focus despite the challenges faced by the Trust.

Mrs Noon wished to have put on record her thanks to all Directors, Father Simon Gillespie, Peter Giorgio, Kevin all the team at the Diocese and all the staff across the Trust for their dedication and commitment over the past 12 months.

Agenda item 10: **Closing prayer**

The meeting ended with a prayer.