

DRAFT MINUTES
GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST
MAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Monday 29th March 2021 (7.00 p.m) by Zoom

Present: C Midgley (Chair) A Bennett OBE (CEO)
J Fryer K Inwood
J Midgley J Power
E Brooke

In attendance: Clerk (N Oliver), COO (J Firth), CFO (A Rawson), PA (N Foulkes)

1. Apologies – A Birt, I Jaffar, J Nellis
2. Declaration of Interests – C Midgley, J Midgley and A Midgley (Raynville) are related.
3. Opening remarks and governance update
The CEO (A Bennett) commented that the core leadership team were pleased with how well the MAT's schools had responded to reopening. In view of expected changes to the educational landscape (academisation), growth remained a priority for the Trust
4. Minutes of 8th February & Matters Arising
The draft minutes had been amended to take account of BHP audit recommendations. Approved for publication, but with the Chair to email approval in lieu of a wet signature.

Communication strategy verbal update (J Firth, COO): ICT infrastructure has been independently reviewed. No major issues at any of the five schools, but a strategic plan and coordination across sites is needed moving forwards. Next steps include Trust-wide antivirus software (substantial saving) and working towards a single broadband provider (current contracts will be migrated, but some are running until 2022). The SLT's wider plan is to move from individual maintenance and support providers to an in-house infrastructure manager employed across the Trust (part-time in the first instance), with apprentices/technicians as the MAT grows. This could mean having both a manager and SLAs in place until March 2022. Trustees discussed the risks and options, with advice from J Power. The COO will continue working up the requirements and Job Description.

Feedback from Raynville re. new Reserves Policy (J Midgley): this has been followed up with the Principal (A Midgley) and subsequently with the CFO (A Rawson) and Chair (C Midgley), then discussed in detail at Finance & Premises. The CEO & CFO are to develop a proposal for the Trust's July meetings, then to be taken to the five Principals (see *Self-Assessment*).

5. Correspondence, including ESFA - None
6. MAT reporting
The CEO's Report summarises current positioning, risks mitigated, a wellbeing event (Press article) and support for any schools affected during reopening. Exclusions at Carlinghow continue to be an area of focus (children with complex needs). Communications and emails have been streamlined (new Leadership Update Briefing Paper shared with Trustees) and the new processes are working well/well received.

The Trust has undertaken its own Staff 'Ofsted' Survey across all five academies on reopening. Schools have already responded to their staff and any trends will continue to be tracked and reported at Standards Committee, alongside sense checking through face-to-face SIP visits in Summer Term (one early, one late). The Chair of Trustees (C Midgley) welcomed these initiatives and added that it would also be helpful for the Committee to see standards positioning (where children are; how well they are doing).

Safeguarding audits continue, cross-referenced with SIP visits and internally checked (QC) across the new GHAT structure. The Chair emphasised the need for rigour, this being a key area of Ofsted focus.

As a growing leadership team, a new structure has been developed and published on the MAT website (PDF organogram with linked teams and leaders; will develop further via case studies). From the perspective of maintaining standards in a challenging school such as Carlinghow, KI challenged whether there was sufficient support and experience to allow a Principal to also fulfil a Trust-wide role. The CEO responded that the additional commitment was limited to ½ day p.w. and the new Assistant Principal (at Carlinghow - requested by the LGB) added further capacity. The Principal had also brought in her own school improvement team on joining. The CFO confirmed that the school had been supported in its journey, irrespective of the financial position. The Chair of Trustees agreed that, for all five Principals, their key priority was to have the highest standards in their own school in the first instance.

Requests from LGBs included governance training to be provided centrally by the Trust. The CEO concluded by asking for any input outside the meeting re. consortium bidding, as opposed to direct commissioning; this would be new territory for the Trust.

Financial reporting

The CFO referred to the Management Accounts as at 18.3.21. Trustees noted that the Bowling Green Academy (converted 1.12.20) nine month position is now included and their £25k in-year deficit is a positive opportunity to address school improvement needs, with a new Principal appointed w.e.f. April. The Trust's overall position is:

Total Trust income = £9.675M

Total Trust expenditure = £9.879M

In-year balance (deficit) = £203k*

*includes £146k on SCITT Premises development; excluding this the in-year position would be £57k deficit, including Bowling Green.

Financial approvals had been discussed at Finance & Premises, with three transactions requiring MAT Board approval in line with the Scheme of Delegations - as documented in Agenda item 7.2b: Staff absence insurance, Payroll & pensions and PFI. All three were formally approved, but with an amended PFI figure (from F&P Committee) of £263,268.

Self-Assessment

Trustees ratified the School Resource Management Self-Assessment, which had been discussed and agreed at F&P Committee (to return to ESFA by 15th April). Responses and commentary to the checklist were noted, with one outcome (Question 27):

"... Work is progressing in considering how best to use reserves within the Trust and will be further considered as part of the 21/22 budget setting process, including introducing the concept of 'sharing reserves' ahead of any possible formal pooling. To be further considered at the July 21 F&P meeting and reported to the July Trust Board ..."

Trustees considered the accompanying dashboard (Q42) and any potential follow-up actions. The Chair of Trustees noted that the commentary was helpful and queried the date of last published data (May 2019). The CEO reported that the intention was to use the dashboard as the basis of a user-friendly template to be shared around the five schools for the first time: 'similar schools' metrics will drive efficiencies and improve outcomes across the Trust. But with five schools it is also easier to see how finances do not always correlate directly with outcomes (e.g. Carlinghow vs Greetland). K Inwood commented that some are legacy costs which build-up historically and unavoidably over time (e.g. average teacher costs), but below average outcomes could and should be tackled as a priority via Local Governing Bodies, SIP meetings etc. Discussion of the dashboard concluded with C Midgley (Chair of Trustees) and K Inwood (Chair of Standards) commenting on the outstanding quality of reporting to the Trust Board.

COO report

Trustees heard a verbal update from the COO (J Firth). A response to the latest Local Plan proposals has been prepared (deadline 9th April), supported by Greetland's LGB. The CEO highlighted that the Trust ideally needs land to build a Free School: current school buildings are not fit for purpose and unable to absorb the Trust's own expected pupil numbers, there is no spare capacity at West Vale and no access to the land set-aside by the developer at Sunnybank for school expansion (Document ref CC116, site LP0177):

"As part of (CMBC's) discussions with the site promoter an additional site specific consideration has been agreed ... to allow the eastern part of the site, which could not be accessed for housing, to be land for potential expansion for the Greetland Academy".

E Brooke urged the CEO/COO to counter the Council's projections of future pupil numbers (CC121 'Pupil Projections and Housing Trajectory') in the Trust's consultation response. This would be a first step towards proving demand in any future bid.

Policies approval

No updates to report.

7. Standing Item - specific MAT Board decisions

Minutes of previous meeting 8.2.21 - **approved**

Trust Management Accounts - **approved**

Financial approvals (x3) required - **approved**

Financial health and resource management standards met - **agreed**

8. AOB

The COO will provide K Inwood with Safeguarding Lead (Bowling Green) guidance.

9. Future Meetings

Confirmed: 24th May 2021 (Standards at 6pm / MAT Board 7pm, by Zoom).

Detailed arrangements tbc: 19th July 2021 (F&P/MAT).

- to decide nearer the time whether this is a virtual or hybrid meeting (Calderdale Public Health are advising no meetings in person this year).