

MINUTES
GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST
MAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Monday 24th May 2021 (7.00 p.m) by Zoom

Present: C Midgley (Chair) A Bennett OBE (CEO)
A Birt K Inwood
I Jaffar J Nellis
J Midgley J Power
E Brooke

In attendance: Clerk (N Oliver), COO (J Firth), CFO (A Rawson), PA (N Foulkes)
A Midgley, Director of Leadership and Governance (to Item 7.1)
D Worthington, Director of School Improvement (to Item 7.1)

1. Apologies – J Fryer
2. Declaration of Interests – C Midgley, J Midgley and A Midgley (Raynville) are related.
3. Opening remarks and governance update
The Chair (C Midgley) informed Trustees that, to keep pace with Academies Financial Handbook requirements, he would be leading a skills audit by the end of Term and the Clerk would be coordinating a regular dialogue with Members. This year’s audit would be a self-review (internal), with an external review in 2022. In response to increasing pressures to make Members more aware, the draft minutes of Board meetings will be shared initially, with follow-up by their December 2021 AGM having reviewed other best practice in the sector. Members will be asked to contact the Chair if they wish to discuss any items further.
4. Minutes of 29th March 2021
5. Matters Arising
The draft minutes were approved for publication, with the Chair to email approval in lieu of a wet signature. There were no matters arising, not already on the agenda.
6. Correspondence, including ESFA
Trustees noted the Annex G annual grant assurance process (18 grants) which is in hand.
- 7.1 MAT reporting – CEO
GHAT growth/Organisational Effectiveness
On 28th April, the Education Secretary announced a growth period with all schools to be part of a strong multi-academy trust (MATs seen to be a strength during the pandemic):
[gov.uk/government/news/drive-for-stronger-school-system-to-benefit-all-pupils](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/drive-for-stronger-school-system-to-benefit-all-pupils)
Current awareness at GHAT is around future MAT growth needs and recognition that the Trust’s capacity for growth is underpinned by organisational effectiveness, in addition to school improvement. The latest SIP reports - shared with Standards Committee - and GHAT’s national presence confirm that the Trust is contributing to (and learning from) a stronger system. The website and outward-facing offer is under continued development (interactive content to follow) and growth prospects including hubs, mergers, secondary schools & CofE Diocese were shared with Trustees.

Due to COVID restrictions, meetings were held remotely during 2020-21. The Chair (C Midgley) has sent a confirmation email to the clerk dated 20 th July 2021, to record that these minutes were reviewed and approved at the next Board meeting (19 th July 2021).

J Power asked for further insight into the growth plan and any boundaries on how the Trust could/should grow. The CEO (A Bennett) & Chair confirmed that the preference is to scale up around the three core hubs in Calderdale, Kirklees & Leeds; the original Business Plan was for six schools per hub - predominantly primary (a lack of secondary offer would be a weakness). Trustees were reassured that due diligence on both sides will continue as the MAT grows, building on risk management processes undertaken when the MAT's existing Academies joined. The Chair added that the strategy has to be a judicious balance of high-performing schools and capacity-givers, together with a selection of schools in other categories. The CEO explained DfE's "try before you buy" proposal.

Several Trustees emphasised the need for a clear position on 'GAG pooling' and end of year surpluses - *discussed later in the meeting*. The CEO commented that the growth plan requires an entire change management strategy, including scale up of the Trust's business management processes.

In response to further questions, the current position re. new premises was explained by the CEO. Business teams need to remain school-based (clusters of expertise), with a new professional base and meeting space for the small core team aligned with one of the hubs – ideally Calderdale, being local to three existing Academies (Greetland, West Vale and Bowling Green). In choosing a new base, the CEO remained conscious of external perception re schools interested in joining. Cost-effective short term solutions to move the current team locally were being explored, to provide space for new appointments. In the longer term, a secondary partner would bring additional premises capacity. E Brooke offered her expertise in property.

CEO Report

The CEO Report confirms that attendance and exclusions are secure, with Standards Committee reassured re. Carlinghow. Summer Term 1 SIP visit reports and current positioning have been summarised alongside a draft SEND review from Carlinghow, but the CEO emphasised that as the Trust grows, high level implications and Trust-wide summaries will become the focus for the MAT Board, rather than individual detail.

Standards Committee had acknowledged that 4 out of the 5 MAT schools are in a strong position and improving rapidly, with Bowling Green having only recently joined.

Update from Directors

The CEO introduced the two Directors in attendance. Andrew Midgley and Dani Worthington summarised the current "offers" within the Trust. Leadership offers include the Trust's own 'in house' standards (12 units) for new and aspiring leaders, including financial management. SIP visits are followed up with offers - examples given of coaching and support in place at Bowling Green, including financial support to the new Head. As part of his governance remit, AM has oversight of LGB meetings to ensure consistency of reporting and understanding. DW outlined case studies which will be added to the website to market what is offered as a Trust, at all different levels: schools sponsored to join (CH), chose to join (RV) and benefiting from a designation (without joining the Trust), supplemented by views of parents and children.

The Chair of Finance (J Midgley) welcomed the levels of support across the Trust, but questioned the financial impact on individual school budgets. It was explained that support is currently written-in to contracts, commissioned, or in-kind, but the intention is to scale to a system of offers as the Trust grows.

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Local Governing Bodies

The Director of Leadership and Governance (A Midgley) summarised key points from recent LGB meetings:

Bowling Green	focussed on a 30 day plan, supported by the MAT team
Raynville	future staffing, roles and retention
Carlinghow	new 'Thrive' provision for EHCPs. Future planning re staff turnaround to drive up standards
West Vale	queried the Trust's policies on Long Covid and Governor training. Nominated Governors for Safeguarding and Catch-up now in place.

Trustees were advised that a bespoke LGB training programme is planned from September, with some key areas to be addressed in Summer Term.

The Directors, Andrew Midgley and Dani Worthington left the meeting at this point.

7.2 MAT reporting – CFO & COO

Financial reporting

Trustees received the annotated Management Accounts (7.2a) as at 30.4.21, with a current forecast of £1,783,093 carried forward at the end of 2020-21 and an in year deficit of £117,505 (excluding £146k for SCITT premises development, this would have been a £28k surplus including Bowling Green).

In year forecasts for 2021-22 and 2022-23 were noted, with "Trust Trends" highlighted as follows, including the movement of the School Improvement team into the MAT:

- School Improvement expenditure planned: staffing support at Bowling Green and West Vale in future years; pandemic recovery
- Closure of Teaching School Alliance August 2021 and movement of capacity to support the Trust School Improvement Team
- Continued Trust growth: future years forecasts assumes an additional 5 schools in 22/23; increasing to 6 in 23/24
- School improvement drive in 21/22 results in in-year deficit, returning to sustainable in-year surplus in 22/23

Forecasts were accompanied by a separate document (7.2b) '**Trust Budget Planning Assumptions, May 2021**' detailing all the changes since March 2021 including GAG updates and (expected) public sector pay freezes.

In response to the Chair of Trustees and Chair of Finance, the CFO (A Rawson) was confident in the growth forecast for 2022-23 which included the necessary additional expenditure (audit costs etc) linked to the additional income (top slice) expectations.

The CFO introduced a paper on '**Centralisation and Use of Reserves**' (7.2c) which included a Q&A briefing for Trustees, recommendations and proposed timeline. Further research had been undertaken to allow discussions to continue from the previous Board meeting, mindful of the need for early clarity of offer prior to any decisions in July.

Trustees were reminded that any decision to adopt a new/refined reserves policy by the year end, applicable to all current and future academies, sits at Trust Board level.

[discussion excluded for publication] **The MAT Board agreed that reserves be centralised and Trustees were in support of the Chair's proposals for next steps:**

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- **A clear reserves policy to be in place by September, for any potential new joiners**
- **The policy to be agreed at the July MAT Board meeting**
- **CEO & CFO to engage with the five Headteachers prior to July**

The CEO noted that this could be progressed as part of the organisational effectiveness meeting after Half Term. Comments from Trustees would continue to be welcomed.

Financial approvals required (Grounds Maintenance and Building Cleaning contracts) were detailed in Agenda item 7.2d. A further item was tabled by the CFO, as part of the MOU between GHAT (Research School) and Oldham Sixth Form College - with apologies for not having been received prior to the meeting; transfers of grant funding to the college (core funding £16,650 & capacity funding £19,500) were required to support year end payments. **All of the above approvals were formally agreed by Trustees.**

Chair of Standards report

SIP reports had been shared with Standards Committee and were mainly very positive. In response to a question from the Chair of Trustees re West Vale, the CEO responded that the Director of School Improvement (D Worthington) was aware and the school has been connected to the team at Carlinghow to prevent any plateauing.

COO report

Trustees heard a verbal update from the COO (J Firth) re. compliance; appointments to support capacity and growth; safeguarding quality assurance (alongside SIP visits); risk alerts in relation to cyber security; short-term and longer term plans re MAT premises.

CIF budgets are being re-visited, with tenders exceeding grants offered (Greetland and Raynville). This is likely to be an ongoing problem for any awards in June re. West Vale. Trustees noted that MATs with at least 3,000 pupils receive a school condition allocation to deploy strategically across their estate - to address their own priority maintenance and expansion needs, unlike smaller Trusts who have to bid for funding through the CIF.

8 Standing Item - specific MAT Board decisions

Minutes of previous meeting 29.3.21 - **approved**

To receive the Trust Management Accounts - **approved**

Financial approvals required - **approved**

Plans for Trustee skills audit and dialogue with Members - **agreed**

To progress the centralisation & use of reserves paper - **agreed**

9 AOB

- Potential short-term premises for the core team were noted (Stainland Library EOI).
- Stage 3 Hearings to examine CMBC's Local Plan begin on Tues 15th June, including 16th June (2pm): "*Options for primary provision in Elland and Greetland area*".

10 Future Meetings

Detailed arrangements tbc: 19th July 2021 (**F&P at 6pm / MAT Board 7pm**).

- to decide nearer the time whether this is a virtual, hybrid or in person meeting

Trustees noted the proposed calendar of meetings 2021-2022.

In closing the meeting, the Chair of Trustees and CEO thanked everyone for their contributions and input as a supportive Board.

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