

DRAFT MINUTES
GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST
MAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Monday 18th December 2023 (5.00 p.m)

Present: A Bennett OBE (CEO) J Power - **zoom**
J Fryer - **zoom** I Jaffar - **zoom**
J Midgley K Inwood
J Nellis (Vice Chair) C Midgley (Chair of Trustees)

In attendance: N Oliver (Governance professional)
J Firth (COO), A Rawson (CFO)
Director of School Improvement, D Worthington

1. Apologies – Angela Birt (resignation email received 7.12.23) and Emily Brooke (resigned w.e.f. end of Autumn Term 2023).
2. Declaration of Interests
C Midgley (Chair of Trustees), J Midgley (Chair of Finance and Premises) and A Midgley (Director of Leadership and Governance) are related.

3. Opening remarks and governance update
The Chair of Trustees (C Midgley) confirmed the vacancies for two Trustees. The Board (and Members, earlier in the evening) were invited to nominate suitable candidates, with a non-education background - Business, Premises, Legal, IT, Risk - by the New Year, prior to commissioning 'Governors for Schools' ("finds, places, and supports skilled volunteers as governors and trustees on school and academy boards"). Trustees were also invited to self-nominate as Safeguarding Trustee as soon as possible, as replacement for A Birt.

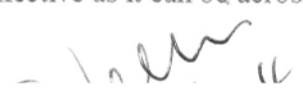
In view of the vacancies, the quorum for Trust Board meetings has reduced from 4 to 3.

Trust Members had held their AGM earlier in the evening. A fifth Member (Andrew Fisher) had been appointed w.e.f. 1st January 2024. The re-appointment of J Fryer as a Trustee had also been ratified, following recommendation from the MAT Board.

Trustees approved the updated MAT Board Terms of Reference. These had been updated in March 2023 initially, then further updated in October 2023 to accommodate the Trust Quality Descriptions. Codes of Conduct for Trustees (updated) and for Local Governors were also approved, on the recommendation of A Midgley, Director of Leadership and Governance. These documents stem from an NGA Model Document (August 2023) which had also been highlighted during the Trust's online safeguarding training (National College) earlier in the Term.

Trustees agreed the Local Governor skills audit and self-review process (modelled on the earlier Trust Board self-review), which had been first proposed at MAT Board in May 2023. LGBs would be asked to return their responses to the Director of Leadership and Governance in Spring 2024.

The Chair of Trustees confirmed that a meeting of LGB Safeguarding Governors had taken place, as a continued part of making governance as effective as it can be across the Trust.


101

Chairs Action: the Trust Board noted that Local Governor terms of office at Bowling Green have been regularised to 2021-2025 (four years from the date of reconstitution), in consultation with the Chair of Bowling Green LGB (K Inwood) and in line with common practice across the Trust, including joining schools.

4. **Approval of Annual Report and Accounts (from Finance and Premises Committee)**
The Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 were approved unanimously - as recommended by Trust Members and F&P Committee, after an extended session with Simpson-Wood Accountants earlier in the evening.

- The Chair of Finance and Premises (J Midgley) highlighted that positive comments had been made by Members and Auditors around the strength of the Trust's finance team and that Simpson-Wood had raised no regularity findings or concerns.
- After lengthy debate of the outcomes from a tender process, Simpson-Wood had been re-appointed for external audit for an additional year, with TIAA appointed for internal control. The scope of internal scrutiny 2023/2024 will be discussed by a sub-group.

5. **CEO Performance Management**

The Chair of Trustees sought Trust Board approval for the CEO Performance Management summary, which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

- The process had been led by the Trust's independent external adviser. A Giles supported by the Chair of Trustees.
- Trustees were in agreement that the CEO's leadership of the Trust continues to be "outstanding".
- In response to the Vice Chair, J Nellis it was agreed that a summary of next year's targets, as cascaded across the Trust's senior leadership team, would be circulated.

The CEO Performance Management process and outcomes were approved unanimously by the Trust Board.

6. Minutes of 18th September and 10th November 2023 (extraordinary meeting re. CVHS)

7. Matters Arising

The draft minutes were both agreed, noting that an extraordinary meeting had been held as the Trust's articles (2017) do not allow fully digital / electronic / email resolutions. The CEO (A Bennett) noted that additional content for the Trust website would follow from this final Trust Board meeting of 2023.

8. Correspondence, including ESFA – None

9.1 MAT reporting – CEO (A Bennett)

The CEO reported on dialogue (CEO, Chair of Trustees & COO) with the Assistant Director of Yorkshire and Humber Regions Group to help frame GHAT's next steps.

The Assistant Director provided reassurance that GHAT is viewed as a strong Trust, but DfE had some 'helpful steers, reflections and next steps suggestions'; in particular to network, share experience, work with similar schools groups (size, deprivation etc) and demonstrate impact in the wider schools community:

- Re-thinking our **volunteering** 'hearts & mind' offers to our locality, to support schools wishing to join us in all areas of need, before any sign-off and costed support.
- Reflecting on how we support those schools 'waiting' to join us, with intervention at pace through pre-partnerships agreements.

- Collaborating regionally, to draw (buy) in and broker support from others at pace, in order to broaden the Trust's reach and support for the academy landscape.

The CEO explained that this current preferred landscape, 'post-White Paper', was driven in part by the financial climate and the Trust Quality Descriptions. In future, there may be a shift from Ofsted inspections operating at the individual school level, more towards Trust-level, reporting on the work of a Trust and its influence.

In light of the above, Trustees discussed a revisited GHAT growth plan ('Consolidation and Expansion Plan') which will be developed for 2024. Strategic governance is in a strong place and the Trust already has a number of impactful designations (English Hub, Research School, SCITT), but GHAT needs to be more proactive in its corporate marketing (to better demonstrate its capacity and expertise, its work with third party schools and its collaboration with other Trusts); any existing "comms" are not landing accurately enough, especially when DfE is researching (desktop research) Trusts.

The School Improvement typicality model has worked well, but is labour-intensive and needs re-positioning as a more sustainable tiered model, categorised according to whether schools are 'RI', 'Good', new to the Trust, or third parties etc. The secondary offer is restricted, but the Trust is already working on a secondary arm with other partners.

Repositioning GHAT's growth strategy would involve **consolidation** (internal restructuring of key posts and positions within the Scheme of Delegation - including supporting the growth of an Executive Leader internally, plus additional trained practitioners/mentors/coaches, to further develop the School Improvement team) and **expansion** (external recruitment of a marketing and comms post; already discussed at earlier Trust Board meetings).

After a wide-ranging discussion of the surrounding issues, Trustees supported the CEO's proposals for the slight change of emphasis and direction in the Trust's growth strategy.

The CEO Report and linked documents circulated in advance were taken as read, with all Academy Dashboards (**Item 9.2**; reporting against School Improvement, Finance, Premises, Governance & Safeguarding) updated as of December 2023 and no LGB issues for escalation to the Trust Board for decision. Key points noted and discussed as follows.

- School Improvement positioning 'RAG' for each school remains as of July 2023. Bowling Green is a model of school improvement: KS2 national progress data in the top three percent for R/W/M (local newspaper article to cascade the success). Raynville retained Ofsted good grade and continues to embed improvements.
- Trustees noted the vulnerability at Marsden Juniors (30-day plan support during a time of leadership instability). Principal recruitment is underway and remains a risk. Similarity to Bowling Green and possible links.
- Reading skills below National at both Marsden (see above, but only joined February) and Carlinghow (was on track, but children new to the school) were questioned.
- CVHS joining remains a risk. Conversion timescale is now set for January 2024, but with ongoing cluster schools focus: Marsden Junior 30-day plan; Nields J, I & N pre-partnership support underway at pace. Behaviour engagement due at CVHS.
- Process mapping and alignment of merged / harmonised 2-18 delivery between TMFG & GHAT ongoing (HR team, Finance, Estates, Digital Infrastructure). Capital risks noted.

—

—

9.3 Finance and Operations

Management Accounts for Period 2 (October 2023) were received and considered by the Trust Board, to ensure oversight of the Trust's financial position in accordance with the Academy Trust Handbook. CFO (A Rawson) report received and noted, providing full context, variance comments and pupil number updates.

	Current report as at 31.10.23	Previously reported to Trust Board as at July 23	Variance
Brought forward	£4,138,168	£ £3,794,088	+ £344,080
Total Trust income	£30,125,427	£32,756,098	- £2,630,670
Total Trust exp	£30,340,829	£32,665,593	- £2,324,764
In-year	- £215,402 deficit	£90,505 surplus	- £305,907
End of year forecast	£3,922,766	£3,884,593	+ £38,173

The Trust Board endorsed the excess reserves proposals of Finance and Premises Committee (in line with the existing Reserves Policy) and also the proposal to further review the Reserves Policy, as part of the wider process review - to better allow the Trust to meet the Trust Quality Description (Reserves) "*aligns resources to expenditure priorities across all its schools*".

Finance and Operations correspondence - noted

9.4 Trust policies, updates and approvals – None

10 AOB – None

11 Standing Item - MAT Board decisions & Next Steps

Minutes of previous meetings 18.09.23 & 10.11.23 – **approved**

MAT Board Terms of Reference (updated) – **approved**

Code of Conduct (Trustees) & Code of Conduct (Local Governors) – **approved / signed**

Local Governing Body skills audit and self-review process – **agreed**

GHAT Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23 – **approved**

CEO Performance Management process & outcomes – **approved unanimously**

Trust Management Accounts 2023-24 – **received, discussed and approved**

12 Future Meetings (Riverside Mills)

18th March 2024 (Standards Committee / MAT Board)

20th May 2024 (Combined Standards & Finance / MAT Board)

15th July 2024 (F&P Committee / MAT Board)