

DRAFT MINUTES
GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST
MAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Monday 15th July 2024 (5.00 p.m.)

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

In attendance: N Oliver (Governance professional), J Firth (COO), A Rawson (CFO)
Director of School Improvement, D Worthington
Director of Governance, A Midgley
Observers: David Purdon, Vicky Stoneman & Mark McManus

1. Apologies – None.

2. Declaration of Interests

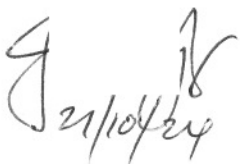
C Midgley (Chair of Trustees) reiterated his family relationship to J Midgley (Chair of Finance and Premises) and A Midgley (Director of Governance). The CEO (A Bennett) repeated a declaration that her daughter is marking AQA Geography papers. D Worthington (Director of School Improvement) is related to the proposed new Trustee, M McManus.

3. Opening remarks and governance update

The Board agreed unanimously to a proposal from the Chair of Trustees: to recommend David Purdon, Vicky Stoneman & Mark McManus to Trust Members for appointment as Trustees for a four year period, w.e.f. 1st September 2024; subject to any upcoming Companies House requirements (ECCTA 2023). The three new Trustees were welcomed to the meeting as observers.

For the benefit of the new Trustees, the Chair of Trustees highlighted that DfE's Regions Group meeting with GHAT (8th April 2024) had agreed that the Trust's priorities for the year ahead, alongside attendance, were: 1) To focus on improving Academies in the Trust which are not currently secure in their standards, namely, Colne Valley and Nields. 2) To continue exploring opportunities for collaboration more widely in the sector. 3) To fill vacancies on the Trust Board. Reporting is circulated in advance (uploaded to a new SharePoint platform), accompanied by RID (Risks, Issues, Decisions) summaries for all areas for ease of reading.

Following initial discussions at the previous MAT Board meeting and positive feedback from a subsequent Chairs meeting, Trustees agreed to trial the revised LGB & Board Plan (Option 2, as circulated) with now 4 sub-committees – *Finance, Estates Management, School Improvement, Workforce* – running in parallel, prior to 4 Board meetings (committee clerking and quorum arrangements tbc); with the advantage of full coverage of all DfE expectations (including holding senior leaders to account, interrogating data and questioning the executive), increased opportunity for specialist Trustees, closer alignment to the Trust's core teams, more regular reporting and fully meeting statutory guidance and ESFA Handbook '**musts**'. I Jaffar and J Power agreed to begin envisioning a new strategy-setting event which will set the ambition for the year in September. The Trust website will be refreshed after this event, to better engage potential new joiners.


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In recognition of the skills which they are bringing to the role, Trustees agreed a proposal that Safeguarding Trustee (V Stoneman) and HSE Trustee (M McManus) should be filled by the new Trustees, once in post. J Midgley is stepping down as Chair of Finance and Premises due to other commitments and will be replaced by D Purdon.

TIAA's Assurance Review of Governance Strategic Control (July 2024) was received and discussed. The review had considered the role and operation of the Board, Committees, LGBs and the Senior Leadership Team; governor recruitment, induction and training; and links between LGBs and the Trust Board. The overall assessment was of '**Substantial Assurance**' ("*a robust system of internal controls operating effectively to ensure that risks are managed and process objectives achieved*"). It had been agreed to draft a recruitment policy (by December 2024) and to consider an annual appraisal process during the course of the next academic year. Alongside this, the Chair reiterated that the External Review of Governance (Summer Term) and LGB Self Review (Spring) will take place in 2024-2025.

4. Minutes of 20th May 2024

5. Matters Arising

The draft minutes were agreed.

The CEO had kept Trustees updated between meetings, where appropriate, as follows:

- 1) 2024-25 meetings and dates: *consultation at Chairs network meeting*
- 2) April 2024 Management Accounts and MFG updated finance positioning: *JN updated re. MFG; April accounts sent to Chair of Trustees & Chair of FP*
- 3) Attendance Working Party: *CEO Paper 1*
- 4) CVHS (IEB): *extended for Autumn Term in light of continuing improvement*
- 5) Secondary teaching vacancies: *update included in COO workforce report*
- 6) Digital Infrastructure review: *ongoing*

6. Correspondence, including ESFA


Bridget Phillipson, Secretary of State for Education (8th July, letter received). Online event noted.

Confidential GHAT update (15th July, by email): the CEO had contacted Trustees and Members with a staffing update. The Trust Board reviewed the current proposal and next steps outlined, with further updates to follow. The CEO was thanked for the actions taken so far, to mitigate any potential risk.

7.1 MAT reporting – CEO (A Bennett)

The CEO Report and briefing points, linked items, running records, statutory reporting and Academy Dashboards (**Item 7.2**; updated July 2024) were taken as read. RID reporting remains the same as May 2024, with the main limitations being around attendance, CVHS and digital / growth themes. Of the two schools joining mid-year, Colne Valley remains the higher priority until GHAT methods becomes routine and practice. Nields remains a risk but not an issue and is a case of managing expectations having only joined 1st April 2024.

This year's User Testing, which included School Improvement, show notable improvements compared to 2023 in HR and 2-18 services, plus gains in Finance & Operations/Capital - but with the exception of Digital Infrastructure which remains a point of development need; work is underway to re-evaluate IT positioning - GHAT's own internal structure v external resourcing (A Midgley and J Christian will form part of a new leadership team to support the COO in the next stages). I Jaffar emphasised the need to ensure this is scalable.


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The Trust held its annual Leadership event on 3rd-4th July (CM in attendance) with a theme of setting our GHAT 'one trust culture'. At the end of the two days, a Wordle captured how the Trust's leaders reflect on GHAT's culture: "*Collaborative*", "*Supportive*", "*Inclusive*", "*Innovative*" - a marked improvement in two years. Groups previously working in isolation feel connected and welcomed. There will be a follow-up event on 'delivery'.

Overall, Finance / Operations / Capital / Workforce is a case study of success in harmonising. To be followed through in the gradual implementation of the One Trust Finance Policy over the next two years.

School Improvement

Verified primary data to follow, but K Inwood (Chair of Standards) and J Nellis (Vice Chair) acknowledged the positive overall position against national and areas of strength, including Raynville KS1. Some outliers to be examined, but a better level of data will allow pinpointing against cohort, length of time with the Trust etc. Secondary data due August.

Attendance

Trustees received a report and verbal update from Jimmy Sayles, Executive Principal - Performance and Outcomes, who brings new capacity to the issue.

GHAT's initial Working Party (Raynville, Carlinghow, CVHS, Mirfield Free Grammar) has met three times to date and collected 218 pupil survey responses, plus invited to attend the Co-op Academies Trust Attendance Working Party (via the Research School). EOY breakdown to follow. Outliers to be RAG-rated and linked into individual academy action plans.

Under no illusion of the priority and the working group will be extended to all GHAT Academies (all primaries expected to attend) when it next meets in the new academic year.

J Nellis commented that the initial secondary data ('School level Attendance Data taken from Arbor') was concerning - at less than 90% - and no mention of parents and families (term-time holidays). K Inwood also highlighted the need for tracking of internal truancy.

Trustees agreed the proposed template reporting mechanism, to be aligned to the new governance calendar. The new streamlined MAT Board structure should allow for a better report & challenge on attendance and the Chair of Standards proposed a Standing Item for the School Improvement committee, with triangulation across all committees at Trust Board level. I Jaffar welcomed the attendance strategy as a further element of best practice embodying the One Trust approach.

Director of Governance Report

The Director of Governance (A Midgley) confirmed that there were no LGB issues of note and Governance also came out well in the User Testing.

J Nellis (MFG LGB chair) welcomed the Chairs network meeting which had been held, but highlighted a rising number of parental complaints (a national trend) which was a time-consuming issue for volunteer governors. Welcome support and advice had been received from the COO and Director of Governance, but again a drain on the Trust's existing resources. The Chair of Trustees confirmed that dealing with complaints had been escalated to Government by Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts and went on to suggest that a possible governance admin role (for complaints, exclusions, FOI and GDPR requests) is taken as a task into GHAT's visioning day.

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7.3 Finance and Operations

Management Accounts for Period 10 (June 2024) were received and considered by the Trust Board, with variances fully explained - to ensure compliance and oversight of the Trust's financial position in accordance with the Academy Trust Handbook. The Chair of Finance and Premises confirmed that these had also been scrutinised in detail at F&P Committee and in a pre-meeting between the Chair of Trustees, Chair of F&P and CFO:

	Current report as at 27.6.24	Previously reported as at 31.3.24	Variance
Brought forward	£ 4,538,531	£ 4,521,830	+ £ 16,701
Total Trust income	£31,742,723	£31,141,157	+ £601,566
Total Trust exp	£32,309,948	£31,436,698	+ £873,250
In-year	£ - 567,225 deficit	£ - 295,541 deficit	+ £271,684
End of year forecast	£ 3,971,306	£ 4,226,289	+ £254,983

The Trust's collective end of year forecast £3,971,306 was approved, noting this is 12.5% of reserves as a %age of income - a healthy position (20% or above would trigger ESFA).

Trustees also received the three year budget forecast 2024-25 to 2026-27, accompanied by Budget planning assumptions including Pupil number forecasts.

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
B/fwd balance	£ 3,971,306	£ 3,614,668	£ 3,568,269
Trust total inc	£ 35,881,855	£ 36,700,562	£ 37,664,252
Trust total exp	£ 36,238,493	£ 36,746,690	£ 37,715,580
In year balance	£ - 356,638	£ - 46,399	£ - 51,329
Carried fwd	£ 3,614,668	£ 3,568,269	£ 3,516,941

The EOY forecast 2024-25 of £3,614,668 represents 10.1% reserves as a percentage of income and remains a healthy position (ESFA question anything below 5% or above 20%). In 24/25 there is an in-year deficit of £356k, largely due to MFG with a £302k deficit (linked to lower student numbers October 23, primarily in 6th Form). As a result, 9% of reserves have been used in 24/25 to support the needs and priorities of the Academies and the Trust as a whole. Future years in-year positions improve as MFG numbers are expected to improve. Growth of one primary academy (£50k) in 24/25 & 25/26 is assumed.

The accompanying CFO (A Rawson) reports were received and noted, to meet Trust Quality Description expectations, including a 'RID' reporting summary. The COO (J Firth) 'RID', Estates and Workforce Reports were also taken as read, having been received by Finance and Premises Committee earlier in the evening, with the following headlines noted:

- [Estates] Drax have fully-funded LED lighting, which will reduce energy consumption
- [Estates] The internal audit on Health and Safety was assessed as 'substantial assurance'
- [Estates] Escalating roofing costs at TGA are being re-visited with the Structural Engineer
- [Estates] Fire planning provisions are being followed through with RPA
- [W/force] Recruitment & retention continues to be an area of focus (full detail provided)
- [W/force] SCITT recruitment is underway and there is confidence on recruiting to target
- [W/force] Staff attendance of 98%, an increase of 1.9%, was commended by K Inwood and is also reflected in the outcomes from the Leadership Event. The National College offer is felt to have contributed to this success.

7.4 Trust policies, updates and approvals

Policies review: Trustees ratified updates to the Scheme of Delegation and Lettings Policies x 3 (CVHS, MFG, WV), on the recommendation of F&P Committee.

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Trustees were updated that GHAT's One Trust approach to financial planning (to meet improvement priorities and need across the Trust's schools) will be enacted within 24-25.

Internal control: Following a proposal at the previous Board meeting, RAG ratings are now applied to approvals in between meetings. Trustees received the Termly update (CFO Doc 10) which confirmed details of the two approvals given this Term.

Trustees had received a summary of financial approvals required at the Board meeting (recommended for approval by Finance and Premises Committee):

Installation of LED lighting (fully-funded by DRAX Foundation); Arbor MIS, to extend the current contract (£231,256 / £57,814 pa); Minibus lease x3 - recommended by Business Support team (£44,040 x3); Roof repairs TGA (£33,663 additional costs / £121,377 total).


All items were approved as documented, after confirming that Arbor (the leader in its field, especially re attendance data) does not fall within the remit of the digital infrastructure review.

Following the appointment of TIAA as internal auditors for 2023/24, audit visits have taken place successfully this year as follows: Student Population and Absenteeism; Governance Strategic Control (see Agenda Item 3); Health & Safety; Follow up of previous year audits.

On the recommendation of the Chair of Finance and Premises, the Trust Board agreed to keep under review the appointment of external and internal auditors for 2024/25, with quotes to be reviewed at the Members AGM in December 2024 as usual.

8. Arrangements for the appointment of Chair and Vice Chair, 2024-2025
Trustees invited to self-nominate to the Clerk by 30th August.
9. AOB - The Chair of Trustees reported that an Executive Pay Policy has been drafted and will be brought to the next meeting, following review by HR.
10. Standing Item - MAT Board decisions & Next Steps
Minutes of previous meeting 20.5.24 – **approved**
Appointment of D Purdon, V Stoneman & M McManus as Trustees w.e.f. 1.9.24 – **recommended for final ratification by Members**
Trust Management Accounts 2023-24, Period 10 – **received, discussed and approved**
Budgets 2024-2025 to 2026-2027 – **approved**
Financial Approvals – **agreed, as at Item 7.4**
Scheme of Delegation and Lettings Policies updates – **approved**
Chair/Vice Chair 2024-25: self-nominations to the Clerk by Friday 30th August
LGB and Trust Board Dates 2024-25 – **agreed**
11. Future Meetings (Riverside Mills, except *to be held in a school, probably MfG)
*21st September 2024 (visioning),
21st October, 16th December, 24th March 2025, 7th July (MAT Board / all committees)
*12th July (end of year review)
Members AGM arrangements (16th December) to be confirmed by the Chair/Clerk

In closing the meeting, the Chair extended his thanks to Amanda Rawson for her invaluable contributions to the financial health of Great Heights Academy Trust and its predecessors - as a Governor, Bursar and more recently Chief Financial Officer. The Trust Board & Senior Leaders present were unanimous in echoing these very best wishes.


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