**BUCKTON VALE PRIMARY SCHOOL**

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY GOVERNING BOARD MEETING**

**HELD VIRTUALLY ON 25 JANUARY 2022**

**PRESENT: Mr Nick Whitbread Parent – in the Chair**

**Mrs Sarah Blake Staff**

**Mrs Jamie Briggs Parent**

**Ms Jackie Brook Co-opted**

**Mrs Zoe Fallows Parent**

**Mr Matt Hartley Parent**

**Mr Arron Leech Co-opted**

**Ms Jenny Ross Parent**

**Mrs Taf Sharif Authority**

**Mr Wayne Williams Co-opted**

**Mrs Deborah Brown Headteacher**

**IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs Rachel Lees Clerk to the Governing Board**

**PROCEDURAL**

**A Welcome**

Welcome and Confidentiality Reminder

The Chair welcomed governors to the virtual meeting held via Teams and reminded them of the confidential nature of the discussions taking place. Google jampad was shared with governors. All governors were present.

A.1 Declaration of Pecuniary/Business/Personal/Conflict of Interest

Governors had no changes to the declarations completed at the Governing Board meeting on 7 December 2021. As a Local Authority (LA) counsellor, Mrs Sharif would abstain from voting but would express her opinions.

RESOLVED: That Mrs Sharif declared a conflict of interest.

**GOVERNING BOARD ITEMS**

**1 Consideration of presentations from MATS and workshop sessions including**

**CEO responses to governor’s questions**

The Chair provided an update as he had asked for some clarification from school regarding the advantages and disadvantages of converting to an academy or remaining under LA control. Following discussion, then a decision would be made as to which MAT (multi academy trust) to choose, whilst the LA would remain an option pending responses from the chosen MAT. The Chair added that, whatever decision was made today, there was a process to be followed notwithstanding consultations with stakeholders and further meetings and conversations would take place.

The Governing Board had several meetings with presentations from three MATs: Tame River Educational Trust (TRET); Great Academies Education Trust (GAET); and Victorious Academies Trust (VAT) as well as workshop sessions. The decision to convert to an academy or otherwise was still in deliberation. The Chair had asked Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher for the reasons why school was considering making this step and the advantages and disadvantages and he shared their response as follows:

**“Advantages**

The current situation for support in Tameside is untenable. We are working as an island alone and it can be very daunting when faced with significant issues.

At the moment the Local Authority SEND is inadequate and support from a MAT CEO to deal with the issues we are facing would be beneficial.

In addition, our current budget is a serious concern. We are heading for a 30K deficit this year and it gets much worse as the years progress. A MAT doesn't have automatic funds to support with that, but it does have the power to tap into funding from external sources for large projects. Buckton Vale has several areas it needs support with on this such as sections of the building, the roof, the playground, and the desire for an outdoor classroom.

A MAT will take up to 5% of the current budget, for this we'd receive support from School Improvement teams, (this would mean we no longer use Carol Thomas saving £5K) HR (we'd no longer use the HR from Tameside) currently costing around £4K. We'd receive support from other schools within the MAT, thus reducing the money we currently pay for some CPD. In a MAT, there is a lot of opportunities for CPD. We have spent a lot of money on training, and this support would reduce our current spending in this area.

The MAT agenda is not going to go away and at some point in the future, all schools will be directed to join a MAT. I want us to be able to choose the right one for Buckton Vale as opposed to being told which one for us.

In the Partnership at the moment all schools are good. How do we get too outstanding if we are not willing to look further afield? How do we know our children are getting the best possible deal?

**Disadvantages**

If we choose to go with a MAT other than TRET, we will need to stop the hub meetings teachers currently attend within the partnership because we don't have the capacity for both.

Staff will be concerned initially about TUPE and the implications of this.

We currently have good support from HR, this will change to the academy support, and this depends on the quality of theirs.

Some MATs do not offer autonomy and would want us to have the same values, uniforms, rules and expectations etc.”

The Chair explained that, at present, school was in a position where they were able to choose their preferred MAT. The discussion today related to whether the Governing Board needed to enquire any further and explore the decision to leave the LA and go with a MAT or remain with the LA. The Headteacher had written to the three CEOs of the MATs with governors’ questions, with a deadline of 14 January 2022 and had shared their responses with governors on 11 January and at the meeting, following which governors were asked to share their thoughts.

*[Governors were given the opportunity to read the documents from TRET, GAET & VAT from 1622-1630]*

A governor had attended governor training in the past which hinted that eventually all schools would be required to convert. If Buckton Vale converted now, the Governing Board would have the freedom of choice to pick which MAT suited school. Another governor commented that they should support the Headteacher.

The Chair advocated exploring MATs further. Given her conflict of interest, Mrs Sharif would abstain from voting. The Chair asked if any governor needed further clarification regarding the next stage of the meeting and, in response to a governor’s question, the Chair confirmed that the Governing Board would not necessarily operate in the current format if school converted to an academy. Another governor agreed that the Headteacher had not been supported by the LA in the way she should have been and acknowledged there had been some hardships, but options needed to be kept open and opportunities explored. It was about the children of the school and support should and could be better.

The Chair then led the governors in a vote to continue the conversation, which was passed by a majority.

RESOLVED: To take the discussion further

The Chair summarised that the Governing Board had heard from three MATs, set up a shared Jamboard for their views and gone back for points of clarification from the three MATs. He asked the Headteacher to talk about each MAT and give her views. The Headteacher confirmed that she did not have a preferred option.

GAET

* Advantages:

They have a significant surplus budget, although she understood that MATs could not pass that money to Buckton Vale, she felt that Buckton Vale could be in an advantageous position with GAET. For example, all Y5 & Y6 children in the MAT benefitted from iPads. She had met with the CEO on several occasions. He had a knowledge and experience of being a CEO and was passionate about getting current schools to a good position as all the current local schools in GAET were currently in a requires improvement situation. He had a tour of the school and spent some time talking to the Headteacher about what he felt the MAT could offer. He was very transparent about wanting Buckton Vale to join GAET.

* Disadvantages:

The Headteacher was concerned about the removal from the Mossley partnership and the connection to Copley Academy. There would be some trepidation from the local community so the Governing Board would have to have a very clear rationale about choosing GAET which was a big barrier as it could potentially lead to a drop in numbers due to the *perception* that Buckton Vale children would then go to Copley Academy. There had also been some challenging times for Copley and Silver Springs so the Headteacher questioned what GAET would be able to offer Buckton Vale, as she was looking for outstanding practice and wanted to be able to compare Buckton Vale to another outstanding school. She was concerned about Buckton Vale being the leaders.

TRET

* Advantages:

The CEO, Drew Duncan, was currently Executive Headteacher at Mossley Hollins High School (MHHS) and Droylsden Academy. The Headteacher currently worked very closely with Mr Duncan, who was a very strong leader but would question his understanding of primary education. He had suggested he would initially learn from Buckton Vale in terms of their desire to get at least one primary school to join TRET. Buckton Vale was already in the Partnership and had worked with the team for a long time, so relationships were already in place. Parents knew the majority of Buckton Vale’s children went to MHHS and that connection was very important to the community, so the community may be keen for a TRET connection. They also had a very strong offer of CPD.

* Disadvantages:

There were only two schools in the MAT and no primary link which was a concern as Buckton Vale would need another primary to work collaboratively. Other primary partners might feel apprehensive about Buckton Vale joining MHHS, which could affect the partnership link so there would have to be change. TRET was also very new MAT.

VAT

* Advantages:

The CEO, Karen Burns, had an excellent reputation. Head teachers currently working with her had nothing but praise about the support she provided. VAT currently had 9 schools, but were proceeding with talks to get 12 schools, all of which were primary schools, which would provide Buckton Vale with a massive amount of support for them and the CPD offer was huge. The Headteacher already had a lot of strong relationships with head teachers in the Victorious MAT. There was potential positive career progression for staffing teams, including secondment, because of the number of primary schools in the MAT.

Although the above was a strength, it was also a disadvantage because teachers would have to move out of partnership hubs as they did not have capacity to be in both meetings. The Headteacher felt that Buckton Vale had already got what they could out of the partnership hubs but questioned how much Buckton Vale could get in terms of next steps and how to move school to an outstanding category.

* Disadvantages:

The Headteacher expressed concern that they had almost 12 schools and thought they would go to 15 which was a lot of schools to be involved with. She would want to understand their plan in terms of how 12 schools would work together. She had spoken to some head teachers about subject ambassadors and leadership which was a real strength of the MAT. She asked about curriculum documents which would be bespoke to the school but ideas would be shared with other schools. She also asked about teachers pay and conditions and the MAT assured her they would continue to be followed (as with other MATs). There would be some changes in the way the office was run as the MAT would take over the financial side but this would be the same for any of the MATs.

Finally, the Headteacher said that she had no preference but felt that GAET was off the list because she felt that the wider school community would not join that MAT.

The Chair and Headteacher welcomed questions from governors:

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| MH | Would we come out of the hub with all three academies? |
| HT | Yes but we could retain some transition connections with MHHS so there would be changes. |
| TS | Is there a possibility of any redundancies? |
| HT | It does not matter whether we go with a MAT or not, BV has to do a whole school staffing review. We currently have 10 classes with 10 teachers, but for September 2022 we will be reducing the teaching team from 10 to 8. One teacher is moving on but we still need to lose one more teacher. It could possibly come to redundancy but several members of staff are looking at other opportunities. |
| Chair | The next phase of conversation with any MAT would be to look at the establishment and structure. |
| JB | Those staff would probably get more support from a MAT. |
| HT | I would welcome support in regards to the whole school staffing review because of the 45 PAN. |
| TS | With all three, there is a concern around losing the partnership element with Mossley and Carbrook. |
| HT | In terms of the Mossley/Carbrook and Stalybridge partnerships, I am still in touch with Stalybridge and Mossley cluster meetings but I would have to decide whether to go to both. I think some of the partnership work is irrelevant as there would still need to be some partnership working eg things we do for the children. There would be some changes as the hub teachers who currently attend could not do that as they would not have capacity to attend both MAT and partnership meetings.  I am currently challenging staff by asking them what is it that the partnership is bringing us over and above what we currently have. It needed a challenge to move on. |
| Chair | We would not lose the feeder to Mossley Hollins. |
| HT | If we went with TRET that would not guarantee a place with Mossley Hollins. |
| JR | Does this mean we would lose competitive sports and debate clubs etc? |
| HT | I do not think that would change because it is part of the offer we have for our children going to Mossley Hollins. From speaking to GAET and Victorious, they are more than happy for us to continue with our partnership work. |
| TS | In terms of Victorious, how many of those schools are outstanding? |
| HT | None at the moment. There are two schools close to an outstanding grading but that was before the pandemic. Where do we get that outstanding support from? The Mossley/Carbrook partnership is really strong but we need to branch out so that we can learn from the strongest possible schools to have the validation that Buckton Vale are providing the best for our children. In a recent moderation meeting, the feedback from the teaching team has been strong with our maths books leading the way every year group. |
| SB | Our teachers are very proud of the work they have submitted to the Partnership from Y1 to Y6. |
| SB | We pay into the Partnership and if we join a MAT will they let us pay into the Partnership eg for sports, maths, Mossley Olympics? |
| HT | We paid into MfL (Spanish) and contribute to Mossley Olympics and attendance. |
| Chair | They talked about the budget meeting and they would break down each aspect of the budget so we would learn whether we would continue to pay that expense. We would have to raise that fairly early. |
| HT | The partnership heads would have the right to vote us out. We need to be aware of that. |
| JR | There is a big disadvantage in TRET in that MHHS has a huge PFI loan. Why does the LA allow the jewel in the crown of our local education system to be taken away from them and how does that allow our LA to palm off massive PFI debt to a charitable trust? We have to seriously consider that there could be a “king maker” scenario when we put ourselves in with a school with a massive PFI loan. Are we aware of any other PFI loans with other schools? It happened in the NHS with smaller hospitals having to close to protect the biggest one. |
| HT | To be transparent, Arundale were a PFI school who were in Victorious but I do not know what financial position they are in. |
| SB | They mentioned the PFI loan and acknowledged there remained legal work with LA and their solicitors. |
| JR | What affect would that massive debt have on the charitable trust? Our LA has been reduced to a debt collection service. |
| HT | The TRET CEO tried to get up to five secondary schools involved in the MATs but because of the PFI situation, several schools ducked out. |
| JR | The only model is what happened in hospitals, which was damning. |
| SB | In the information for Victorious, there are 9 schools not 12. Who are the others? |
| HT | There are talks with several other schools at present which are still confidential. We are one of three that Victorious are talking to. |
| JR | Can we consolidate the information about money to see who is offering the best value deal as an action going forward? |
| HT | Victorious’ finance team have been to Buckton Vale to look at our financial situation and talk about the transition. We have not had information from the other two MATs. |
| JR | One of the options we have not looked at is to go independent. We would not have support but would not be associated with schools who are not outstanding. It would give the Headteacher a chance to lead. We would lose economies of scale but could join with other trusts later. This would put a huge burden on the Headteacher and would not help with her feelings of isolation. |
| HT | That has been mentioned by Louise Moczulski to consider creating our own MAT. |
| JR | We would not have to pay for a CEO on a huge budget, we could look at a different model, which did not need to be a corporate structure and would free us from central government models and we can choose our own agenda. We would have much more freedom with the curriculum and we have a strong curriculum offer. |
| HT | We would have more power if we moved to a MAT. We could create our own curriculum for our children. The social enterprise side of things is something to consider. |
| JR | We may receive funding from the LA for social enterprise initiatives. |
| SB | It sounds like it is impossible. We have a negative budget, which is one of the reasons we are looking at conversion as we don’t have money; we have problems with support; and we have the SEND issue. Being by ourselves would not help. I do not think it is the right way to go. |
| Chair | We as a Governing Board would have to have the skills and expertise to take that forward. We can add it into the vote. |
| JB | From my experience in working in education, a lot of the emphasis needs to be on the teachers and support in school, especially after Covid. We need more emphasis on support and development opportunities for staff and making sure the benefits package is the same or improved as we want the teachers to stay and then the Headteacher has the support. We need to emphasise wellbeing: it is the year of kindness in terms of policies for staff in 2022. |
| HT | We have to accept that at the moment we have a massive recruitment and retention problem in the education sector. We are finding it extremely difficult to get quality temporary teachers into Buckton Vale. There is a massive collective concern about teacher retention and how we keep the best staff. We are in a Catch-22 situation at Buckton Vale as we know we have to do a whole school staffing review, which is a threat to the team, but some will leave. We know that the best staff will get jobs immediately at first interview. |
| JR | When you become a Trust, you can employ people who are not teachers. |
| HT | MATs are allowed to employ teachers who are unqualified. Those jobs often attract HLTA types. |
| JB | That is potentially a plus but if we have unqualified teachers who want to become qualified, it is their passion which reflects on the learning for the child. |
| HT | They have to be good to stay at Buckton Vale, we have high standards and clear systems and procedures for monitoring teachers. |

The Chair felt confident that the Governing Board had received sufficient information to vote for a preference. The Chair had ruled out GAET as there could be a backlash from the school community, but a governor commented that they were strongest with SEND.

A vote took place, with no governors voting for GAET, one for TRET, five for VAT and none for independence. However, both the VAT and independence options required more exploration.

The Chair stressed that, if school chose to go with a specific MAT and to leave the LA, then they could not go back [to the LA]. If anyone felt uncomfortable, wanted more clarity or felt that the decision was going the wrong way, he asked them to request a meeting with himself or the Headteacher. If governors were dissatisfied with the response from VAT, then school had the option to remain with the LA until a further decision had been made. Governors agreed that TRET should be removed from the decision because of the PFI issue.

A governor asked if there was a cost once a decision had been made to join a MAT. She asked that, if discussions were taking place with VAT but then school decided not to go with them, would there still be a charge. The Chair responded that the Governing Board would reconvene if there was a fee. Another governor asked if there was a maximum amount of pupils in VAT to be able to stay within the band to access certain pots of money and the Headteacher responded that the VAT wanted 12 schools because they would be able to access the next level of the funding process.

RESOLVED: That the Governing Board request further information from Victorious Academy Trust

regarding potential conversion to academy status

The Chair and Headteacher would meet to discuss how to communicate with the three CEOs. The Headteacher stressed that the discussions were to remain confidential. She would speak to Jane Sowerby about the Governing Board’s decision to explore joining the Victorious MAT.

**2 Formal decision of the Governing Board**

The Chair anticipated that another Extraordinary Governing Board meeting would be convened in February or March, but before the Governing Board meeting on 21 March 2022, to make a further decision.

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| *Meeting details* |  |
| *Time started* | *1600* |
| *Time finished* | *1745* |