

Q and A Response

Dear Parents/Carers

Thank you for the questions submitted.

In the interests of openness and transparency we have taken the time to collate and record, across the six schools, all of the questions raised. You will find the questions have been organised into categories to provide a clearer overview of the specific aspects raised.

The responses provided are given in good faith, having been reviewed by officials in the Regional Schools Commissioner's office.

CONSULTATION:

The decision to convert appears to have been made already. How have views of teachers, staff and parents been considered?

No application has yet been submitted to the DFE. However, the governing board of each of our schools has voted to move forward with the process to this point.

Informal staff consultations took place in our schools during the summer term. We are currently consulting informally with parents.

Is this definitely happening and why are parents being told so late?

No application has yet been submitted to the DFE and therefore this has not yet been approved by the Head Teacher Board or the DFE. There haven't been any trustee appointments nor any appointments made to the roles of CEO or finance director. However, the governing board of each of our schools has voted to move forward with the process to this point.

Some parents have expressed concern that we are coming late in the process to parent consultation. However, we have actually started the process earlier than required – as we consider this to be good practice to consult informally with parents as well as staff.

As you will see on the DFE flowchart (see ppt. on school website), we are not yet on the first formal step (i.e. applications submitted); the guidance from the department for education is for the formal consultation process to start after the application has been made.

Guidance on specialist solicitors' Browne Jacobsen website is as follows:

'some schools consult with key stakeholders both before and after they make their application. However, the Academies Act 2010 simply requires that consultation is

completed before the funding agreement is signed, which is usually around two or three weeks before the planned conversion.'

Why no consultation with parents?

We are currently consulting informally with parents to ensure that information is shared and also to ensure that parents and other stakeholders have the opportunity to put questions forward and have these answered.

Why has consultation been by-passed?

We are currently consulting informally with parents to ensure that information is shared and also to ensure that parents and other stakeholders have the opportunity to put questions forward and have these answered. If the process reaches the stage of formal consultation, this would be managed by the firm of specialist solicitors tendered such as Browne Jacobsen or Anthony Collins.

Is this notification rather than consultation?

We have notified parents that the governing board of each of our schools has voted to move forward with the process to this point. We are now consulting informally with parents to ensure that information is shared and that parents have the opportunity to put questions forward and have these answered.

Why are we only just being told?

Each of our Governing Boards have been incredibly rigorous in their approach to this proposal and have carried out their elected duties and responsibilities with great rigour and diligence. This has taken a considerable amount of time. Each Governing Board of our schools totally independent from the other, subsequently exercised their duties to move forward with the proposal of forming the Sutton Coldfield Learning Partnership. Once this point had been reached, informal consultation took place with staff in the summer term and we are consulting informally with parents this term.

Do we have a say over any changes?

We are consulting informally with parents to ensure that information is shared and that parents have the opportunity to put questions forward and have these answered. The decision for a school to convert lies with the school's governing board.

Why weren't parents involved earlier on in the process?

Some parents have expressed concern that we are coming late in the process to parent consultation. However, we have actually started the process earlier than required – as we consider this to be good practice to consult informally with parents as well as staff.

As you will see on the DFE flowchart (see ppt. on school website), we are not yet on the first formal step (i.e. applications submitted); the guidance from the department for education is for the formal consultation process to start after the application has been made.

Why was the letter presented as a ‘done deal’?

The letter notified parents that the governing board of each of our schools has voted to move forward with the process to this point. We are now consulting informally with parents to ensure that information is shared and that parents have the opportunity to put questions forward and have these answered. If the process reaches the stage of formal consultation, this would be managed by a tendered firm of specialist solicitors such as Browne Jacobsen or Anthony Collins.

Where is the list of the pros and cons/advantages & disadvantages?

We have put pros and cons on our school websites for parents to see the points we have carefully considered with our Governing Boards as part of the process undertaken to date. Each of our Governing Boards have been incredibly rigorous in their approach to this proposal and have carried out their elected duties and responsibilities with great rigour and diligence.

What consultation plans and timescales do you have for the key groups of stakeholders before progressing?

We held our first meeting with parents on 20th September 2018 as part of our informal consultation. We endeavoured to answer as many submitted questions as possible through the course of our presentation.

We are also responding to submitted questions and those posed at the end of the meeting through this Q and A document which will be made available on our school websites.

In addition, there is every likelihood of additional meetings in our own schools with our own parents and local communities. If the process reaches the stage of formal consultation, this would be managed by the firm of specialist solicitors tendered such as Browne Jacobsen or Anthony Collins.

Is this an official consultation meeting?

We held our first meeting with parents on 20th September 2018 as part of our informal consultation. If the process reaches the stage of formal consultation (i.e. application made to and approved by DFE), this would be managed by the firm of specialist solicitors tendered.

When will there be a full consultation to discuss the pros and cons for this application?

We have put a pros and cons document on our school websites for parents. These have been thoroughly explored by each school’s elected governing boards as part of the decision making process and the decision which each governing board has taken independently of

each other to proceed to this stage in the process. Informal consultation is still ongoing. If the process reaches the stage of formal consultation, this would be managed by a firm of specialist solicitors tendered such as Browne Jacobsen or Anthony Collins.

A large majority of secondary schools are academies but a smaller percentage of primaries are. Why, then, has this decision been taken?

As mentioned in our presentation, schools really are working within huge financial constraints and other incredibly difficult circumstances that leads us to making some very uncomfortable and unpalatable decisions. We feel the strength created within a MAT will help us to deal with the challenges ahead in a proactive manner. The proposed MAT will hopefully allow us to continue with the successes that we have enjoyed so far in order for us to maintain current standards of education in our individual settings. The task of sustaining current levels of performance with diminishing staff and other resources is becoming more and more challenging. We believe our proposed Sutton Coldfield Learning Partnership will be equally as successful as the local MATs that we currently have in our area. Currently around 70% of secondaries and 30% of primaries are academies. The number of secondaries converting has now stabilised but the number of primaries converting continues to increase.

Why can't the schools carry on working closely together without being an academy?

Schools really are working within huge financial constraints and other incredibly difficult circumstances that leads us to making some very uncomfortable and unpalatable decisions. We feel the strength created within a MAT will help us to deal with the challenges ahead in a proactive manner. The proposed MAT we believe will allow us to continue with the successes that we have enjoyed so far in order for us to maintain current standards of education in our individual settings. The task of sustaining current levels of performance with diminishing staff and other resources is becoming more and more challenging. One of the main aims and benefits of forming a MAT with schools with whom we already work effectively is to strengthen school improvement and pupil outcomes (performance) in all our schools across the MAT. We have a wealth of highly skilled and experienced staff and high quality practice in each of our schools so are well placed to support each other with school improvement. The formal structure of a MAT would also ensure a greater accountability to each other for standards in each of our schools. The MAT schools would still be held to account by the LA, the DFE and Ofsted.

We believe that forming a MAT would give us greater financial control because money currently retained by the LA from each school's DFE budget allocation would come directly into our MAT. In addition, opportunities such as joint procurement and purchasing would have a positive impact on school budgets. There is some funding available to academies (not to LA maintained schools) through a bidding process for capital/building projects. One of the roles of the finance team would be to seek additional funding on behalf of the schools in our MAT.

Other benefits of a MAT include staff recruitment and retention, professional development opportunities for staff – as outlined in the powerpoint presentation (please see school websites).

How long is the consultation period?

The average timeframe for conversion is 4 to 6 months (including formal consultation) but could of course take longer. We are currently consulting informally with parents. We haven't yet made an application to the DFE so the process is likely to take longer.

What are the disadvantages if the schools are not converted to a MAT?

As Head Teachers of Local Authority schools, we have enjoyed the support and provision that the LA previously had to offer. But the ever-changing landscape and the demands within education, alongside diminishing budgets and a significantly reduced LA capacity, has led to a rapid decline of what the LA can do for our schools in our context. It is of course difficult to predict what the LA role will be in the future, but at the moment we need an alternative solution and having looked at a number of alternatives our model of preference is to form a MAT.

The services that the LA used to provide as a 'Core Offer', not an exhaustive list but provision such as; educational psychologists, speech and language provision, pupil and school support, school and governor support, professional development for staff, bursary support for new Head Teachers, newly qualified teacher induction and bursary support for professional development to name but a few, have now all gone. Despite still having an allocated Designated Service Grant taken from our school budgets, we simply do not get the services or support in several areas of need that we previously enjoyed. If we as individual schools want any type of support, we have to pay for it.

Many if not all LA services are now traded services and we have to buy in what we can but with no additional income in to our school budget share to take account of this much needed provision at our schools. It is simply not cost effective, or a good use of a Governing Board or Head Teachers' time, to individually and constantly negotiate the costs of these traded services that was a duty previously carried out by the LA.

Due to the success, context and status of our schools we have no additional LA support, as we simply do not fit the criteria for school improvement work or support. Unfortunately, the LA simply do not have the capacity to do this work and actually commission the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) to carry out this area of their work for them, at a cost of £1.3 million. This is a traded service that the LA commission and the capacity of school improvement support is likely to get worse as so do our budgets.

The diminishing responsibility and capacity of the LA saddens the Head Teachers of all the schools proposing to form the MAT. But for us not to take reasonable steps to appropriately safeguard the current positions of our schools is not something we feel we can wait for.

Schools really are working within huge financial constraints and other incredibly difficult circumstances that leads us to making some very uncomfortable and unpalatable decisions. We feel the strength created within a MAT will help us to deal with the challenges ahead in a proactive manner. The proposed MAT will hopefully allow us to continue with the successes that we have enjoyed so far in order for us to maintain current standards of education in our individual settings. The task of sustaining current levels of performance with diminishing staff and other resources is becoming more and more challenging. We believe our proposed Sutton Coldfield Learning Partnership will be equally as successful as the local MATs that we currently have in our area.

Why do the schools wish to separate from the LA?

As Head Teachers of Local Authority schools, we have enjoyed the support and provision that they previously had to offer. But the ever-changing landscape and the demands within education, alongside diminishing budgets and a significantly reduced LA capacity, has led to a rapid decline of what the LA can do for our schools in our context. It is of course difficult to predict what the LA role will be in the future, but at the moment we need an alternative solution and having looked at a number of alternatives our model of preference is to form a MAT.

The services that the LA used to provide as a 'Core Offer', not an exhaustive list but provision such as; educational psychologists, speech and language provision, pupil and school support, school and governor support, professional development for staff, bursary support for new Head Teachers, newly qualified teacher induction and bursary support for professional development to name but a few, have now all gone. Despite still having an allocated Designated Service Grant taken from our school budgets, we simply do not get the services or support in several areas of need that we previously enjoyed. If we as individual schools want any type of support, we have to pay for it. Many if not all LA services are now traded services and we have to buy in what we can but with no additional income in to our school budget share to take account of this much needed provision at our schools. It is simply not cost effective, or a good use of a Governing Board or Head Teachers' time, to individually and constantly negotiate the costs of these traded services that was a duty previously carried out by the LA.

Due to the success, context and status of our schools we have no additional LA support, as we simply do not fit the criteria for school improvement work or support. Unfortunately, the LA simply do not have the capacity to do this work and actually commission the Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP) to carry out this area of their work for them, at a cost of 1.3 million pounds. This is a traded service that the LA commission and the capacity of school improvement support is likely to get worse as so do our budgets.

The diminishing responsibility and capacity of the LA saddens the Head Teachers of all the schools proposing to form the MAT. But for us not to take reasonable steps to appropriately safeguard the current positions of our schools is not something we feel we can wait for.

When will consultation be organised for community e.g. future parents of the schools?

There is every likelihood of additional meetings in our own schools with our own parents and local communities (including, for example, the future parents of pupils in our schools) as part of the informal consultation – as well as during the formal consultation once an application has been made to the DFE and approved by the Head Teacher Board.

GOVERNANCE:

MATS are best placed to design the governance structure that will work best for their schools.

Who is responsible for the appointment of trustees?

The 5 members appoint the trustees. The members' role is voluntary and candidates will be initially identified by the headteachers and their governing bodies. They must have a broad range of skills/experience i.e. education, legal, financial. The proposed members will be reviewed by the head teacher board before approving the formation of the MAT. 5 members (the maximum permitted) bring a greater range of opinions and experience leading to more robust decision making. Members establish the ethos, vision and how the MAT will be governed. Members are appointed to act in the best interests of the MAT and not to represent an individual school.

Who are the trustees and how will they be appointed?

The constitution of the board of trustees is set out in the trust's Articles of Association (AoA). It is essential there is a wide range of professional experience able to deliver on their dual purpose of building strategy to deliver great outcomes for children alongside the culture of accountability that is necessary throughout the partnership. They are appointed by the members on their ability, skill and experience to effectively oversee the management of the MAT. Nominations, expressing an interest are invited from the existing governing bodies.

What is the proposal for how the board of trustees will be selected?

See above.

Should proposed roles be made transparent?

Recruitment is through robust and transparent processes against a clear articulation of required skills which are set out in a role specification.

What is the process of appointing a financial director and board of trustees, who will they be?

The trust must have a suitably qualified Chief Financial Officer (CFO) appointed by the trust's board. The Chief Financial Officer and trustees are people with the right skills, experience and qualities. The DFE funds free support for recruitment of skilled people through Academy Ambassadors – a national organisation established to recruit senior business leaders to serve on boards.

And who will they be responsible to? *See the response to the question about accountability below.*

How will we ensure the board of trustees and finance are fit and proper to oversee and manage the MAT?

They are required to demonstrate they have the skills, knowledge, experience against, as described above, a robust recruitment process and an exacting role specification. Trustees must also demonstrate a commitment to a shared vision for the direction and governance structure of the MAT.

Is the board of trustees to be representative of all schools on an equal basis or on pupil size?

No. The priority in appointing trustees to the board is the best match of appropriate skills and experience. However, as the relevant skills can be found in our current governing bodies nominations from within each existing Governing Body are invited.

Will each school still have a board of governors?

Yes – called the Local Governing Board (LGBs). The MAT board will have very close links with individual schools through the LGB and actively take into account and respond to and escalate issues the LGB identifies.

Will each school still control decisions on how they are run?

Yes, governance functions will be delegated by the board to local governing bodies. The terms of delegated decision making will be published on each school's website. In addition, individual Headteachers sitting on the central team alongside the CEO will shape decision making. Each school will continue to manage and be accountable for its own budget allocation.

Who will oversee the leadership of each school?

The day to day running of the school will still sit with the HT and Local Governing Board (LGB).

Who will be the decision makers for each school?

Delegated powers will be given to the Local Governing Boards for specific individual school issues.

Will there be a CEO? How is a CEO elected?

Yes, the board of trustees must appoint a senior executive leader in a MAT this should be the chief executive officer. The CEO is accountable for standards across all schools.

The make-up of the board of trustees – is there an extra tier of management or extra work undertaken by employees/volunteers?

In the MAT roles are complementary and non-duplicate for the board, any committees or Local Governing Bodies (LGBs). Some roles will be centralised Finance/HR and aspects of administration overtime aligned e.g. Management Information Systems (MIS). This rationalisation will create a more efficient organisation and management of work.

If there is a three-tier system headteacher/governors/trustees, what is the role of the governors going to change to?

Local Governing Boards (LGBs) will have delegated powers related specifically to individual school issues.

Will any accountability be given to parents by trustees?

Yes. There must be mechanisms for enabling the board to listen, understand and respond to voices of parents/carers, pupils, staff, local communities and employers.

Can parents be represented on the board of trustees?

There remains a requirement on all academy trusts to involve elected parents in their governance. Effective arrangements must be in place to engage with parents and the wider community to seek their views and feedback. In the proposed MAT governance structure two elected parents would sit on each individual school's Local Governing Board. Parents involved in governance have valuable knowledge and perspectives to bring to bear in discussions and decisions. They also guarantee there is always a link between governance and the parent community.

Who will be in charge of the MAT?

The day to day responsibility of running the individual schools within the MAT remains with the Headteacher of each individual school. The Board of Trustees will be the elected group responsible for ensuring the MAT is achieving its goals and objectives as they are responsible for the performance of the whole MAT. There will be a CEO who is also the named Accounting Officer and they will collaboratively work with the members, trustees, head teachers and local governing boards to ensure the MAT is successful.

Which school will lead the academy?

There is no requirement for any one school to lead the MAT. All schools will be equal partners within the MAT.

In becoming a MAT, you describe: a structure of newly appointed board of trustees, a salaried financial director who will work with existing head teachers and governing boards. Which senior salaried post will take overall responsibility and accountability for this newly formed business?

The CEO is named as the accounting officer with overall responsibility for ensuring compliance. An academy trust is a charitable company and has charity status.

How much approximately will a finance director cost the SCLP?

It is not possible to give an exact figure at this time. Salaries of a CEO and Finance director are determined by the trustees. Trustees must ensure that their decision about levels of pay follow a robust evidence-based process and are reflective of the individual role and responsibility. Proposed CEO pay would be included within a pay policy, under similar terms of senior leaders. The trustees would be mindful of existing pay structures and salary range. The Academies Financial Handbook 2018 strengthens the expectations for setting executive pay.

Who is the trust answerable to?

The Trust is answerable to the Secretary of State for Education via Education and Skills Funding Agency and must operate within the mandatory requirements of the Academies Financial handbook. With autonomy comes increased accountability for achieving high standards and increased financial efficiencies and sustainability. Health checks are carried out by Regional School Commissioner and the LA will continue to monitor outcomes for pupils. The governance structure also builds in accountability i.e. Members hold the trustees to account in relation to the MATs ethos, vision and governance. Trustees hold the CEO to account for the educational performance of the schools and their pupils and their staff. Trustees must demonstrate the MAT is conducted in accordance with company and charity law. In addition, the trust and Local governing board are answerable to the community they serve, particularly parents and children.

Will you have a sponsor for improving the performance of the schools?

No. As successful schools, choosing to convert, there is no requirement to have a sponsor and neither are we seeking to have a sponsor. The strength of the proposed MAT, as is true of some of the most successful MATs, is the existing strong partnership between the schools in our proposal. The proposed MAT would be entirely independent of any existing MAT, MAT chain or sponsor. Where issues have arisen these are mainly where schools have joined an existing MAT or agreed to a sponsor without carrying out full due diligence to know exactly what terms and conditions re governance, delegated powers, level of individual school's autonomy and financial control they are agreeing to.

Who will be the chairperson of the MAT?

This position would be determined by the trustees.

Who are the key partners?

DFE, EFSA, RSC, LA, local community i.e. parents.

FINANCE:

Where will the funds come from for the additional leadership staff?

The only additional leadership staff (paid roles) would be the CEO and Finance Director. It is anticipated that these salaries would be funded by the money currently paid by each school to Financial Services, plus the money currently retained by the LA from each school's DFE budget allocation.

Will it mean increased funding for the school?

There is a conversion grant of £25,000 per school. Often conversion costs are significantly lower than this. More funding is available to academies through a bidding process for capital/building projects. One of the roles of the finance team would be to seek additional funding on behalf of the schools in our MAT. In addition, we believe there are savings to be made through joint procurement/purchasing – as outlined in responses below.

Will the budget be split evenly?

Whilst the total budget for all the schools would come from the DFE to the MAT, each of our schools would then be allocated a budget share which matches what we currently receive and additional funding such as the pupil premium or special needs funding would be 'ring-fenced' to the school with the specific pupils in receipt of this funding. It is not the case that the total budget would be split evenly between the 6 schools.

How do we know the money for our children's education is not going to be spent in another school?

Whilst the total budget for all the schools would come from the DFE to the MAT, each of our schools would then be allocated a budget share which matches what we currently receive and additional funding such as the pupil premium or special needs funding would be 'ring-fenced' to the school with the specific pupils in receipt of this funding.

Is the school budget going to be shared with other schools?

Whilst the total budget for all the schools would come from the DFE to the MAT, each of our schools would then be allocated a budget share which matches what we currently receive and additional funding such as the pupil premium or special needs funding would be 'ring-fenced' to the school with the specific pupils in receipt of this funding.

What happens to school assets (land)?

Land and buildings would be leased from the LA on a 125 year lease on a very low/nominal rent.

Will accounts be independently audited?

Yes. A rigorous annual audit process would take place and this would be reported on fully to the board of trustees and the local governing boards. We would ensure that checks and processes would be more rigorous than currently under the LA, and as such there would be a minimum requirement written into the articles. Annual accounts are also submitted to and scrutinised by the Education & Skills Funding Agency, an executive agency of the DfE, on a yearly basis.

Will additional costs of extra management and admin staff be offset by the savings or out of the school budget? If so, how much?

The only additional leadership staff (paid roles) would be the CEO and Finance Director. It is anticipated that these salaries would be funded by the money currently paid by each school to Financial Services, plus the money currently retained by the LA from each school's DFE budget allocation.

The salaries for these roles have not yet been decided but would be in line with Local Authority guidelines based on role, number of staff/pupils, demographics etc.

How is funding shared between the different schools given that they are all of different size, demographic and Ofsted rating?

Whilst the total budget for all the schools would come from the DFE to the MAT, each of our schools would then be allocated a budget share which matches what we currently receive and additional funding such as the pupil premium or special needs funding would be 'ring-fenced' to the school with the specific pupils in receipt of this funding.

Can I see evidence of financial planning and impact on the individual school?

A rigorous annual audit process would take place and this would be reported on fully to the board of trustees and the local governing boards. MATs are required to publish their annual accounts on their website so these would be easily accessible for parents to view.

Are any of the proposed schools in deficit? If, so what impact would this have on funding for each school?

There is still a long way to go and an enormous amount of due diligence that will need to be carried out if the proposed MAT is actually going to happen. There are significant eligibility criteria that need to be adhered to if any school has an intention to become part of a MAT and if any school is not able to meet these, any potential conversion will not be approved or allowed. One eligibility criterion is that any school with a deficit budget has to have a robust

plan to demonstrate that the deficit can be addressed within the financial year. The budgets of the other schools forming or joining a MAT cannot be used to clear the deficit of another school within the MAT.

The reality is that all of our school are currently facing significant financial challenges. One third of Birmingham schools currently have a deficit budget. We believe that forming a MAT would give us greater financial control and opportunities such as joint procurement and purchasing would help to address the financial constraints we all face.

How can you ensure the performance of each school is not going to suffer by trustees forcing concentration on the less excellent schools?

Each of our schools is constantly striving to ensure that pupils' educational experience and outcomes are the very best they can be. One of the main aims and benefits of forming a MAT with schools with whom we already work effectively is to strengthen school improvement and pupil outcomes (performance) in all our schools across the MAT. We have wealth of highly skilled and experienced staff and high quality practice in each of our schools so are well placed to support each other with school improvement. The formal structure of a MAT would also ensure a greater accountability to each other for standards in each of our schools. The MAT schools would still be held to account by the LA, the DFE and Ofsted.

What guarantee the school won't suffer financially because schools distribute a larger proportion to the same size, lesser excelling schools?

Whilst the total budget for all the schools would come from the DFE to the MAT, each of our schools would then be allocated a budget share which matches what we currently receive and additional funding such as the pupil premium or special needs funding would be 'ring-fenced' to the school with the specific pupils in receipt of this funding. We anticipate that all the schools in the MAT would benefit from savings made through joint purchasing – such as potential total savings across the MAT schools of £21,420 against the total £53,281 we currently pay to the LA HR services, if we went with a different HR provider.

Are there any plans to centralise any functions? Would this involve redundancies?

There are no immediate plans to centralise any functions although the skills and expertise of the staff in our schools e.g. around finance, personnel etc could benefit other schools within our MAT. There are no plans to make any redundancies.

What outsourcing will be done? Are there financial gains to this? What impact will this have on existing staff?

There are no plans at the present time for any outsourcing each school isn't already doing. For example, we currently all buy into the LA HR, payroll and pensions service. One estimate for HR, pensions and payroll from a different provider gives a projected saving of £21,420 across the 6 schools against the total £53,281 we currently pay to the LA HR services. Additionally, we currently each outsource for cleaning, school meals and grounds maintenance for example. These are potentially services we could outsource collectively at a

better, negotiated cost to the schools – or could bring ‘in-house’ and employ our own cleaners across the MAT – if this was financially beneficial to our schools.

Will you allow parents to view the school expenses (transparency)?

A rigorous annual audit process would take place and this would be reported on fully to the board of trustees and the local governing boards. MATs are required to publish their annual accounts on their website so these would be easily accessible for parents to view.

What financial security can you offer for existing staff at your schools?

All staff pay and conditions would remain exactly the same as they are now because of the protection of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE).

What are the projected financial benefits?

Each school currently has to negotiate its own contracts, with the exception of insurance. The LA does not negotiate contracts on behalf of the schools. Joint procurement, where the MAT schools would purchase a service or commodity as a groups of schools (e.g. photocopier hire, grounds maintenance, exercise books), could enable us to make savings. An example given in the meeting on 20th September was of a local MAT (admittedly larger than our proposed MAT) where they were expecting to make 25% savings on gas and electricity through joint procurement. It is difficult to give exact examples but one estimate for HR, pensions and payroll gives a projected saving of £21,420 across the 6 schools against the total £53,281 we currently pay to the LA HR services.

Having seen the Panorama documentary on Monday 10th September 2018, what assurances can you give us that this sort of thing will not happen here?

There has clearly been malpractice in some MATs – in the same way as there has been in some authority maintained schools across the country over time. In terms of our proposed MAT, a rigorous annual audit process would take place and this would be reported on fully to the board of trustees and the local governing boards. We would ensure that checks and processes would be more rigorous than currently under the LA, and as such there would be a minimum requirement written into the articles. Annual accounts are also submitted to and scrutinised by the Education & Skills Funding Agency, an executive agency of the DfE.

How can a MAT make efficiencies on contracts compared to the LA?

Each school currently has to negotiate its own contracts, with the exception of insurance. The LA does not negotiate contracts on behalf of the schools. Joint procurement, where the MAT schools would purchase a service or commodity as a groups of schools (e.g. photocopier hire, grounds maintenance, exercise books), could enable us to make savings. An example given in the meeting on 20th September was of a local MAT (admittedly larger than our

prosed MAT) where they were expecting to make 25% savings on gas and electricity through joint procurement.

Where will the funding for the financial director come from?

Currently, each of our schools buys into Financial Services. The cost to each school varies slightly but is around £3,000. This money (6 x £3,000) could be put towards the cost of the finance director. In addition, some of the money currently retained by the LA from each school's DFE budget allocation would fund the Finance Director and CEO roles.

How will the MAT impact on individual school funding?

We believe that forming a MAT would give us greater financial control because money currently retained by the LA from each school's DFE budget allocation would come directly into our MAT. In addition, opportunities such as joint procurement and purchasing would have a positive impact on school budgets. There is some funding available to academies (not to LA maintained schools) through a bidding process for capital/building projects. One of the roles of the finance team would be to seek additional funding on behalf of the schools in our MAT.

STAFFING:

What are the consequences for the current staff at these schools? (hours, work, job security)

For current staff, contracts and pay and conditions will transfer as currently under TUPE arrangements. Job security will remain as stable as it is currently.

Will any of the schools be allowed to employ teachers without QTS? Are the schools planning to employ unqualified teachers to help reduce rising staffing costs?

There are no plans for any school to specifically employ teachers without QTS / unqualified teachers to reduce staffing costs.

What will be the qualified to unqualified teacher staffing ratio?

As is the case currently. Teacher recruitment is a national issue at the moment but it is expected that the opportunity to work within a successful MAT will aid the recruitment of talented, professional teachers as and when positions become available.

Will teachers be expected to work across the various schools?

For existing staff, any redeployment across the various schools would be an agreed move due to career progression / a professional development opportunity. For newly appointed staff, it is likely, subject to board approval, that staff will have a mobility clause within their contracts meaning they could be redeployed across the MAT where this is relevant and appropriate.

Will existing staff be protected in terms of their contracts, pay, working conditions, pensions etc? Are staff happy with the proposals?

Yes, TUPE regulations will ensure this is so and existing staff will be given written assurances advising them of this. Teachers will also continue to be protected under the teachers' pay and conditions document that will be adopted by the MAT. In the most part, staff accept the proposals, having trust and confidence in the schools existing leadership teams.

How many new staff roles will be created and what will these be?

On its formulation, the MAT will have to appoint a chief accounting officer, usually given the role of chief executive officer. This role will carry the ultimate responsibility for the performance of all schools within the MAT. It is difficult to determine any additional 'new' staff roles, if any, that will be created initially. However, the MAT will seek to offer the greatest possible provision and educational entitlement in all facets of the curriculum to meet the needs of all children. Therefore, it is possible that overtime, appointments may be made to ensure the highest quality provision in PE/sports, music, the arts, foreign language and professional special educational need across all the schools.

Is the MAT planning to retain all staff on existing T & Cs (ie burgundy book)?

Yes.

Will the proposed conversion have an effect on the teachers' pay and conditions?

No as the school teachers' pay and conditions document will be adopted by the MAT.

ORGANISATION:

Will becoming a MAT have any impact on school hours, for example, moving to a 4 1/2 day week?

There are no immediate plans to implement a 4 ½ day week across the MAT. Schools that are currently resorting to this measure are doing so out of financial necessity.

Will admissions criteria change? If so, how?

There will be very little change to admissions criteria and schools will still be statutorily obliged to admit children as per current arrangements. Any greater control the MAT may have over its admissions arrangements would likely be applied to prevent the school being directed by the local authority to exceed its pupil admission number i.e. take above the recommended class size of 30, where doing so would be to the detriment of existing children

Would children have opportunity to move across the MAT?

Children would have the same opportunity to move across schools within the MAT as they do now, i.e. subject to a place being available and the meeting of admission criteria. However, it is rare for primary age children to move schools.

Will the uniform of each school change?

Absolutely not, each school is proud of its uniqueness and school uniform is a contributory factor to this.

Will the schools' names change?

Absolutely not.

Can the MAT give a commitment they will be willing for individual schools to remain at their current sizes for the foreseeable future?

The potential to alter school size is not a contributory factor in the decision of any school within the proposed MAT and there are no plans for any school within the MAT to expand currently. Any change to this would be out of necessity within the local area and would be subject to board approval and the result of relevant consultations with all stakeholders including the local authority.

Will schools retain their individuality in a MAT organisation?

Absolutely. Each school is proud of its unique identity and part of the reasoning behind founding a MAT rather than joining an existing one is to ensure this uniqueness is retained.

What are the long term and short term goals?

This is a very relevant but broad question. As is the case currently, each school will continue to set an annual school improvement plan detailing its improvement priorities and actions to be taken to meet these. In addition, the MAT as a collective will also publish an over-arching improvement plan based on a comprehensive evaluation of its current strengths and areas for development. Broadly speaking however, short-term goals are to build on successful working partnerships with increased accountability to drive collaborative working for the benefit of all children within the MAT. Long-term goals are to drive cost savings across the schools by seeking and negotiating best value, developing exciting career opportunities for our staff working in an innovative trust and most importantly, to build on each school's current successes in creating and delivering a world class and future proof education for all children within the MAT.

The plan is to enlarge the MAT. Is this anticipated to include any secondary schools in the future? There are no immediate plans to enlarge the MAT. All school leaders feel the initial priority is to establish a successful, collaborative MAT in the first instance. Any potential enlargement in the future would be a decision taken at board level subject to necessary consultation.

What do you mean by stakeholders?

Stakeholders include all of those who have a direct 'investment' in the welfare and/or the success of the schools currently or MAT in the future, specifically children, parents, staff,

Governors, relevant local community members, local businesses and other professionals with a direct affiliation to any specific school.

Can you give some examples of challenges in education that you are facing and why becoming a MAT will better support these examples over and above the current North School collaboration? Why not just stay as the North Schools' collaboration?

These were explored during the presentation, the slides to which are available on each school's website. School funding remains one of the key challenges facing schools both locally and nationally with analysis from the institute of Fiscal studies suggesting that schools are facing an 8% reduction in pupil spending when compared to 2010. Due to additional capital funding bids open to academies, procurement opportunities available through collective purchasing, potential savings that can be achieved through the standardisation of certain processes and maximising staff efficiency through collaborative work, it is expected that significant savings can be made across the MAT. Certainly, some studies have shown that a well-run MAT can lead to potential savings of approximately £49 per pupil on 'running expenses', potentially leading to a saving of approximately £100k across the proposed MAT as a whole. Equally, teacher recruitment is another burning issue in education and there are currently over 250,000 qualified teachers choosing not to enter the classroom. Whilst it may not be deemed an issue in any of the current schools within the potential MAT, it is expected that the professional development and career enhancement opportunities available within the MAT, combined with sharing of practice/resources to help staff better maintain a healthy work life balance will support the recruitment of the very best teachers as positions become available within the MAT.

As a MAT, will you follow the national curriculum?

Yes, absolutely.

Will school holidays change?

This has not been discussed as yet but there is a possibility this could happen, should the MAT deem there to be a positive impact that would result from this. Any significant changes however would first be put to consultation.

Why have your schools chosen each other to partner?

As was detailed during the presentation, the schools are all 'like-minded' and have a successful record of collaboration over the past few years. All schools feel the time is right to cement this collaboration under more formal arrangements in order to bring further strengths and benefits to the partnerships.

Have the schools been forced into this decision?

Absolutely not. Each school involved believes, from the information coming from the department for education, that academisation is still the inevitable direction of travel for

education and that each would sooner be involved in the founding of a MAT and subsequently contributing to its core vision, values and ethos rather as opposed to joining an existing MAT. Each school believes in the advantages that can be gained from forming a successful MAT.

What will the impact of the academy on plans regarding behaviour and movement of pupils across the MAT?

Each school is unique and therefore will retain its behaviour policies and plans that serve it so well although there will be the opportunity for sharing of 'best practice.' There is a possibility of children moving schools across the MAT where there are available space/s and subject to the meeting of admission criteria. When relevant, such a move may be under the arrangements of a 'managed move' but just as is the case currently however, these occur very rarely for children of primary age.

Will schools retain their existing policies and procedures or will they be aligned across the schools?

Each school is unique and therefore will retain its own policies and procedures in the first instance. However, over time it is likely that there will be an alignment of some policies and procedures where this is in the interests of best practice and to avoid repetition of tasks / unnecessary bureaucracy.

OUTCOMES:

Will the education of the children be first and foremost?

Absolutely, this is our focus currently and will remain our first and foremost concern. This is something that all schools involved feel strongly about and is in fact part of our compelling reason to form a MAT to ensure that the children remain at the heart of our MAT guiding everything that we do.

Exactly how do you plan to improve outcomes and opportunities for our children under academy status?

Outcomes will improve for a number of reasons including;

- *Opportunities for schools to work with specialist teachers across the MAT will help schools to drive standards in teaching and learning.*
- *Childrens 'learning experiences will be enhanced, subject specialists can be deployed across the schools.*
- *CPD opportunities and training for staff can be sourced and shared across the MAT and will therefore help to raise standards in teaching and learning.*

What are the consequences for my child's education provision (holidays, consistency and hours)?

There are no plans to change the school day, school times will remain the same, as will holidays.

What is your vision, mission, ethos?

'Our vision is to create an outstanding educational environment where excellence, personalised learning and enrichment opportunities develop our children in to confident, independent, lifelong learners, who are equipped to make a positive contribution and achieve their full potential as responsible citizens of the future'

What will the MAT look like? How will this be measured for parents to see how this benefits their children?

Our proposed structure of governance can be seen on slide 12 of the MAT PowerPoint that can be found on our school websites.

It consists of a board of Members who appoint a board of Trustees/Directors and then there sits a central team of 6 Head teachers and then each school has its own Advisory or Local Governing Board. All information regarding school performance indicators will still be displayed as they are now. In addition to this we will add information to our individual school websites about the overall performance of the MAT and the advantages/benefits that the MAT has for all our children.

How will you ensure continuous improvement in learning?

What are the educational benefits? Impact on quality of education? Predominantly this will be through a shared approach and school led system of sustainable school improvement at a strategic level and through effective collaboration with clearly defined levels of accountability. This will include;

- *School to school reviews undertaken by the schools in the MAT.*
- *Sharing of effective practise across the MAT, what works and improves outcomes for pupils.*
- *Developing pupil interactions and sharing ideas across the schools within the MAT, i.e. through the school councils, class ambassadors and peer mediators, etc.*
- *Shared teaching and learning policies, systems and protocols.*
- *More effective resource planning across the schools, sharing teachers, deployment of staff if they desire.*
- *CPD shared across the MAT and the use of specialist teachers to improve teaching and learning within subject specific areas, this will drive school improvement across the MAT.*
- *Coaching and mentoring of new or less experienced staff by more experienced members of staff.*
- *Creating greater opportunities for career progression and this will improve staff retention.*

- *Enabling Head teachers to focus and apply themselves to the task of improving and maximising standards in teaching and learning and subsequently raising standards of achievement and maximising potential outcomes for pupils.*
- *Sharing premises and resources.*

Ofsted: What will the impact on reporting cycles be?

There will be no impact on Ofsted reporting cycles.

Your vision is to create outstanding educational environments? How?

By making financial savings, we will be able to invest more money in to our schools

- *Sharing of effective practise across the MAT, what works and improves outcomes for pupils.*
- *CPD shared across the MAT and the use of specialist teachers to improve teaching and learning within subject specific areas, this will drive school improvement across the MAT.*
- *Coaching and mentoring of new or less experienced staff by more experienced members of staff.*
- *Enabling Head teachers to focus and apply themselves to the task of improving and maximising standards in teaching and learning and subsequently raising standards of achievement and maximising potential outcomes for pupils.*

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

If the HTB (Head Teachers' Board) application is unsuccessful, what would happen?

Each school would ask for a detailed explanation as to why the application has not been successful and take advice on whether to appeal the outcome. If still unsuccessful we would try to build upon the collaboration that we have already enjoyed and the MAT would not go ahead.

If the proposal did not proceed, would the schools be forced to convert to a MAT in the future?

Currently the only schools that can be forced in to a MAT that they have no control of are schools that have been rated by Ofsted as 'inadequate'. The Regional School Commissioner in collaboration with the DfE will seek a 'sponsor' for the school and they will be forced in to an existing MAT that will not be of their choosing. Early in 2016, George Osborne announced an academisation plan, under which all schools in England would have to convert to academies by 2020 or be committed to converting by 2022. However these plans changed, now ministers say that the 'goal' of academising all schools remains a focus but that the focus remains on schools that are 'clearly failing.'

If HH becomes part of the proposed MAT, what considerations have been made about the partnership with Town Junior and the need to support effective education and opportunities for families with siblings in both schools?

Just like now, schools can continue to collaborate and the existing relationships between schools that provide places to families and siblings can only be improved. You can have two MATs working collaboratively to further strengthen existing relationships. If HH becomes part of the Sutton Coldfield Learning Partnership they will continue to work as they do now with their local feeder school. The work that is done now such as shared staff training, moderation activities and transition for pupils would all continue.

PTA: will the PTAs be across the schools or separate?

Each of our current PTAs do an amazing job and they will be kept separate across each school. There may be opportunities for representatives of each PTA to meet as a collective and share fund raising ideas and an events calendar to avoid clashes of organised community fundraisers.

Will funds raised by each PTA still go the school they are representing?

Definitely, this will not change as parents/carers raise money for the school that their children directly attend, so this will remain as it is organised now.

Where are the meeting minutes to support this and how do we find them?

It is our intention to publish the minutes of all FGB meetings on to the school website, you will be able to access the minutes other than the items that are marked as confidential or redacted to ensure that we are compliant with the General Data Protection Act- May 2018.

Who would you like to bring into the MAT in the future?

At this present moment in time there are no plans to bring any other schools in to the MAT. We need to ensure that we get it right for ourselves in the first instance, as bringing six schools together is already a challenge. We need to ensure that we are creating a sustainable MAT and bringing any other school in too early would be detrimental to what we are trying to achieve. This may happen in the future when our MAT feels that the time is right.

Additional questions submitted at the end of the presentation on the 20/9/18:

Who ultimately decides if the conversions happens?

Any proposed conversion will ultimately be made by the DfE in collaboration with the independent Head Teacher Board who will scrutinise all eligibility criteria. The Governing Board of each school have voted to move forward with the proposal and will also be consulted throughout the conversion process as they will also play a crucial role in determining if the conversion happens.

Do you plan to ballot your staff and publish the results?

There is no statutory requirement to carry out a staff ballot and publish any results in relation to this. All staff at our schools have been kept informed of the MAT proposal and they will be formally consulted prior to any signing of a master funding agreement which is the process that we have to follow and will be carried out by the appropriately appointed legal representatives.

Do you plan to ballot parents and publish the results?

As with staff, there is no statutory requirement to carry out a parental ballot and publish results. All stakeholders will be formally consulted at the appropriate time and again the consultation will be carried out by the appointed legal representatives.

What happens to the schools we leave in LA control?

Are we financially disadvantaging schools who are already financially challenged? Each schools' governing board has to make the right choice for their own school. If schools wish to remain under LA control it is because they have decided that is right for them. All schools whatever their delegated status are financially disadvantaged as there have been significant funding cuts to education, each school has to determine how they can best serve the needs of their children in this challenging and ever changing landscape of education.

How will leadership within the MAT be structured?

Please see the power point presentation on our school websites as there is a diagram showing the structure of leadership and governance.

Will the Heads report in to the CEO?

Each HT will work in collaboration with the CEO to ensure each school within the MAT is successful. The CEO and Head Teacher Board will report to the Board of Trustees to ensure there are effective lines of accountability in place.

What will the scheme of delegation look like?

This has still to be determined and is an important document that will be required by the Head Teacher Board when they are looking at our application of our proposed MAT. As soon as this document is completed at the appropriate time it will be shared on the school websites.

How can you guarantee that any money saved will go back in to schools for children?

All schools, whatever their status are measured by their performance outcomes and any money saved will allow us to source the best provision for our children. Current allocated budgets have to be used on the children attending our schools, this is no different in a MAT.

Why is it more time consuming now to make savings than it would be as a MAT?

We would have one person who would centralise this important aspect, ensuring that savings can be identified through economies of scale and negotiation of traded services etc. At the moment each school is doing this independently and therefore not a good use of time or finances.

Why are some Capital Funding bids only available to MATs?

This is because the government have 'ring fenced' this funding and only made it available to MATs.

How can you ensure that audits will definitely take place and will be scrutinised?

It is a legal requirement and has to take place annually, not like current LA schools that are only audited approximately once every five years.

How can you assure everything you are saying you want will happen if you have not got anyone in place for CEO or Trustees?

Part of the application process is to ensure that due diligence has been carried out to ensure that the appropriately skilled people are appointed to the positions of Trustees and CEO. It is still to be confirmed but it is likely that these crucial positions will be taken up by existing members of the schools' organisation that is already in place, as they possess the necessary skills sets that are required.

As Heads, the Trustees will sit above you, so how can you ensure that the children will be put first?

The whole performance of the MAT will be measured by the successes of the pupils that are in it. Any person appointed to the role of Trustee will know that they are representing all children of the schools that are in the MAT. They have a duty in this role to ensure that all needs of the children are put first.

Does the MAT intend to follow the National Curriculum?

Yes, this is a statutory requirement for all schools and an increased focus of Ofsted inspections, to ensure that all schools are delivery a balanced, broad and rich curriculum that is fit for purpose in their context.

If a school or some schools are not happy with the MAT is it impossible, as things stand, to leave the MAT and revert back to an LA school?

If any school within the existing structure of the MAT are not happy, they will have to give seven years notice in order to leave the MAT. It is not impossible to leave a MAT and if a school decides to do so, there must be a compelling reason and after the seven year notice period they will revert back to an LA school if the LA are still in existence.

Why choose to form a MAT now when there could be a change of Government?

Academisation of schools was first introduced in 2002 and 16 years later after changes to the leadership of government it is still a priority. Current statistics show that approximately 72% of secondary schools and 29% of primary schools are academies. This number has risen significantly over the years and the pace of change is not forecasted to slow down even if there is a change of government. Unless there is a call for an early General Election, current government are with us until 2022.

How are the Trustees appointed and who are they likely to be?

As long as they are able to fulfil the necessary skills set that is required, it is likely that the Trustees will be appointed from the existing governing board members of each school proposing to be part of the MAT. The DfE will look at the portfolios that are submitted for the position of Trustees and if they feel the necessary skills are not being represented on the Board they will signpost us to DfE Academy Ambassadors that have already been quality assured to carry out this vital role

Who are the Trustees accountable to?

The Trustees will be accountable to the Members who will be at the top of the organisation. Two out of a possible 5 Members will also be on the Board of Trustees as a legal requirement which again sets out clear lines of accountability.

The trust board is also accountable to the Department for Education through the Regional School's Commissioner for the West Midlands and the Education & Skills Funding Agency.

What power would Local Governing Boards retain?

You will see from the power point presentation on the 20/09 that our structure of governance does indeed retain LGBs. They will play a crucial role in determining the individual agenda items that will come up at each school, which will act as an effective mechanism for Trustees to make informed decisions that have the desired impact in each school across the MAT.

Is the MAT likely to grow in size?

As mentioned previously, the stability of our schools in the newly proposed MAT is the absolute priority. As and when this priority has been established, we will work in collaboration with the DfE to look at any proposed growth of the MAT.

How do we have input in to who is going to be the CEO?

Any appointment to any post in school currently does not have the input from parents and this will also be the case within the MAT structure.

How will teaching standards be assessed under MAT status?

Exactly as they are now but across a larger organisation to ensure that there is consistency of practice within the MAT.

How will the central leadership roles (Financial Director/CEO) be funded long term?

Schools currently pay for a number of traded services including those related to financial management. It is anticipated that all schools will pool resources including the procurement of all traded services which will lead to savings being made that will fund all central leadership roles.

How do you propose to ensure that the required skill base is present in the Trustee Board to ensure effective control and decision making?

Question answered above.

What is the proposed consultation process?

There is no set template or blueprint for consultation and this process be managed by the legal representatives that are selected by the schools. The allocated conversion grant will cover the costs associated with consultation and conversion.

How do you increase capacity when working in a MAT?

Decreasing the number of duplicated tasks that take place in each individual school will lead to a natural increase in capacity.

If you have external investment, how does the constitution of the MAT protect against influence on education by the investors?

At this present moment in time, there are no plans at all for external investment. We are not looking for any company sponsorship and therefore, there will be no influences from external factors that have a negative impact upon educational provision at our schools.

How will the top slice of funding work within the MAT?

This will be determined in the Articles of Association with the agreement of all schools who are proposing to be part of the MAT.

If parents/stakeholders say no to the proposed MAT will it be stopped?

Any proposed conversion to academy status is not the decision of parents/stakeholders.

Why have the governors of each school not formally consulted with parents before agreeing to form a MAT?

It is not a statutory requirement to consult at this stage. Governors have fulfilled one of their core functions of 'setting the strategic direction of the school,' they have been designated to carry out this responsibility as part of their role of governance.

How does the MAT propose to protect the needs of children with additional educational, physical, development, psychological needs; who will be deemed as having a negative outcome on the schools' academic listing?

We are local schools for local children whatever their needs! We will continue to follow previously approved policies that ensure pupils have access to our schools whatever their needs. As a MAT we believe that we can improve existing LA practice across our schools by utilising the expertise that we have in relation to meeting the needs of our pupils. We are looking to build upon and improve our existing provision, so that pupil needs can be met more effectively.

Are any of the schools within the existing partnership choosing not to be included within the proposed MAT?

All of the six schools that have been exploring the proposed MAT right from the outset are included with the proposal moving forward. No one has been left out!

Once the MAT is established can further schools be added at a later date? Can schools leave and under what circumstances would this be possible?

Please see above responses in relation to these questions being asked.

Many academies are now advertising for unqualified teachers as a cost saving exercise. What is to stop this from happening at our schools in the future?

As mentioned previously, schools performance is judged by academic outcomes in early Years, phonics, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. The quality of teachers that we have at our schools has a direct impact on the outcomes. We would not want to jeopardise any of our schools' performance by increasing the number of unqualified teachers at our schools. We need to ensure the consistency of the quality of teaching and learning experiences at our schools and this can only be achieved by utilising the best teachers in posts available at our schools.

Will parents have input in to the running of the schools once the MAT is in operation?

It is extremely unlikely that parents will see any difference in the day-to-day management of the schools. Individual schools are currently run without input from parents, other than those that are elected as parent governors on the Governing Board. In this role they are not elected as parental representatives but have a duty to ensure they are carrying out governor core functions, which include:

- Setting the strategic direction.*
- Holding the Head Teacher to account for the educational performance of the school.*
- Ensuring financial health, probity and value for money.*

Any parents that are elected to be a Board Member or a Trustee will be held accountable for the effective running of the MAT, there is no other parental involvement when running schools within a MAT structure.