

**PART I MINUTES**

**TRUST BOARD MEETING**

OF

**THE LEARNING ALLIANCE (TLA) BOARD OF TRUSTEES (The Board):**

HELD ON MONDAY 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021 at 9am.

**Present:**

Mr D Wootton (DW) (Chair)  
 Mr A Pear (AP) (Vice Chair)  
 Mr R Armstrong (RA)  
 Dr M Ashcroft (MA)  
 Mrs S Dempsey (SD)  
 Mr R McCluney (RM)  
 Mrs D Sinclair (DS)  
 Mrs C Thomson (CT)  
 Mrs J Millward (JM)

**In Attendance:**

Mr M Cladingbowl, CEO (MC)  
 Mr D Twambley – COO (DT)  
 Mrs N Phillips-Director, Finance & Governance (NP)  
 Mr J Routs – Director of Marketing and Communications (DMO)

**Absent:**

Dr A Greenstein (AG)

**Clerk:**

Mrs C Gritton

Part 1	
<b>Administration</b>	
<b>1. Welcome &amp; Apologies</b>	<b>Action</b>
The Chair welcomed Trustees and executive team members to the meeting and the meeting was <b>quorate</b> . SD apologised that she would have to leave the meeting at 10am.	
<b>2. Declarations of Interest</b>	
It was <b>noted</b> that there were no additional declarations of interest for items of this agenda.	
<b>Strengthening leadership, collaboration and governance across the trust</b>	
<b>3. Minutes of the previous meetings and matters arising (paper 3.0)</b>	
3.1 The <b>Minutes</b> of the Board meeting held on 22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2021 were <b>approved</b> and will be <b>signed by the Chair</b> on Governor Hub. <b>Matters arising:</b>	
3.2 <b>Update on Chimney House status</b> –The history and current structure of the Chimney House Alliance (CHA) was explained. <b>Trustees asked what TLA objectives are met by being a member of CHA.</b> It was reported that all schools must offer a teachers’ careers’ framework with a Government agreed curriculum. The CEO has spoken with the Director of the Cheshire Teaching School Hub who has indicated that they intend to use the CHA to deliver some, but not all training. <b>It was agreed</b> that to maintain control over a coherent approach to teacher education, TLA will focus on the established teacher education programme formed in Knutsford. TLA Headteachers have been consulted and agree to this approach and expansion into Primary teaching is being considered.	
3.3 <b>Work on standardisation</b> - this item was discussed under item 6 on the agenda.	
<b>4. Trust Finance Update</b>	
Papers 4.0 Finance Update, 4.1 Year to date performance and 4.2 School Condition Allocation were uploaded to Governor Hub before the meeting and <b>were received</b> .	
<b>4.1. Year-to-date performance and progress on budgets</b>	
4.1.1 It was <b>reported</b> that overall, the Trust performance is strong, and the forecast year-end result is positive. A net surplus of £364,000 is currently anticipated against a budgeted surplus of	

<p>£214,000. Reserves are expected to exceed the 5% GAG target at approximately 9% by August 2021.</p> <p>4.1.2 The key drivers for the increased surplus are strong results for CHS and KA/CSS. Sir William Stanier School (SWS) is the only school that has reserves predicted to be lower than the TLA target of 5% of GAG. It was noted however, that the school joined the Trust in a deficit position and reserves are being incrementally built at 1% a year to ensure SWS can maintain required staffing levels without detriment to its budget.</p> <p>4.1.3 COO explained the budget process for 2021-2022 is currently underway and work continues with Headteachers to refine the numbers ready for submission to the next Finance &amp; Staffing meeting. <b>Trustees asked whether budget setting is curriculum led, as opposed to staffing led.</b> It was <b>reported</b> that TLA schools' budgets are built from the curriculum up and staffing is then modelled around that. This budget setting process is less familiar to some TLA schools than others, so the finance team are working more closely with those schools so that this model is followed. <b>Trustees noted that some Local Governing Board (LGB) members had enquired as to whether they would receive schools' finance figures at LGB meetings.</b> It was <b>confirmed</b> that LGBs would receive those figures, but that there may be some discrepancy between LGB expectations and Board intentions as to what figures should be provided. The COO agreed to prepare and provide to LGBs with regular summaries of financial information.</p> <p><b>4.2. School Condition Allocation (SCA)</b></p> <p>4.2.1 COO reported that confirmation of the Trust's SCA had been received and totalled £813,000. <b>Trustees enquired as to the normal timetable for receipt of SCA and the reason for the delay this year.</b> It was reported that the delay had been queried but that no specific reason had been given. <b>Trustees asked whether there is a timeframe within which SCA funds must be spent.</b> Funds can be carried over for 1 year beyond the year to which it relates. This will enable funds to be built up over 2 fiscal years to fund larger projects if required. A review of TLA estates is currently underway to identify any larger projects. Trustees <b>were in agreement</b> with the proposal from the COO that for this first year, the funding will be shared pro-rata basis (based on census figures) with a small contingency to be held centrally. Longer term, the Trust intends to implement a needs-based bidding system.</p> <p>4.2.2 <b>Trustees enquired whether there are additional funds available for larger projects such as rebuild or extension.</b> It was reported that it is possible to obtain basic need allocation funding through the Local Authority, as utilised for both Congleton High School (CHS) and Black Firs Primary School (BFPS) current projects. The expectation is however that material repairs and emergency maintenance should be covered by the SCA funds. Additionally though, the Trust's strong reserves position can also supplement need. <b>Trustees asked whether the contingency could be rolled-over every year.</b> It was reported that all spend must be within the SCA timeline, but the Trust is able to allocate a contingency each year if required. [10.00am - SD left the meeting].</p>	
<p><b>5. Policy Update</b></p>	
<p>The <b>Policies</b> had been uploaded to Governor Hub before the meeting and had been <b>received</b>. <b>Trustees asked whether the Policies are compliance-based and are best-practice models. Trustees further asked whether the overarching principle to Policy structure was to have centralised Trust Policies, refined at school level as needed.</b> It was <b>confirmed</b> that this was the overarching principle, providing context regarding responsibilities and levels of delegation.</p> <p><b>5.1 Health &amp; Safety Policy – Trustees noted that</b> the TLA Audit and Risk Committee has oversight of Health and Safety issues <b>and asked whether the Board ought to have strategic Health and Safety updates on its agenda.</b> It was <b>agreed</b> that <b>ACTION:</b> The Board will receive strategic Health and Safety updates at Board meetings. It was <b>reported</b> that those updates will not conflict with the responsibilities of the TLA Audit and Risk Committee, being received at Board level for information only. <b>The Health and Safety Policy was approved by the Board.</b></p> <p><b>5.2 Complaints Policy –</b> It was <b>reported</b> that the ESFA had written to two of the schools in the trust to advise that the Complaints Policy was not compliant. A central TLA policy had therefore been written (with approval sought and given from ESFA). Chair's Action had been utilised to approve this policy. NP advised that an LGB had since requested a clause regarding vexatious complaints be included. The revised <b>Complaints Policy was approved by the Board.</b></p>	<p><b>Clerk to include on Agenda</b></p>

## Improving Education and Opportunities

### 6. CEO report

The Board **received** the CEO Report

#### 6.1. Update on COVID-19

6.1.1 It was **reported** that no groups have needed to isolate since the latest return to school and there have been no significant staff absences. The two Headteachers who were out of school have returned. The Trust has issued guidance to Headteachers around employer responsibilities. Risk Assessments have been completed and the CEO is encouraging Headteachers to safely resume visits to lessons and a more visible presence around their schools.

6.1.2 **Trustees asked whether the Executive have seen schools' recovery plans and whether they are effective so far.** The CEO reported that he has seen all schools' recovery plans and that additionally he is currently undertaking a 2-day review at each school, which will include assessing Trust confidence in assessments, recovery plans and capacity to deal with issues which might arise. The CEO **reported** that he is confident that schools are where they need to be at this stage, focusing as they are on lost learning, engagement and behaviour and mental health and wellbeing.

#### 6.2. Update on Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs)

6.2.1 It was **reported** that TAGs will be robust and that 3 out of 5 TLA schools' processes have been approved. Careful monitoring of assessments so far have led to detailed consideration of recovery plans in subjects for groups where gaps are being discovered. **A Trustee recommended that going forward, there should be greater consideration in assessment around retaining knowledge from the curriculum, rather than through tests** and the CEO confirmed that those conversations are being had with TLA Headteachers. The Executive is mindful of the additional pressures staff may experience with the TAG process, but there has been no increase in staff absence, nor any union issues raised. Trustees **noted** that the TAGs appeals' process may result in some additional staffing requirements during the school summer holiday. It was **reported** that the TLA staff attitude currently is one of teamwork and support with a view to completing successful TAG processes at all TLA schools. The Chair thanked CT for her insight into the process from the exam board's perspective, this had been most useful.

6.2.2 Standardised staff training will support staff in Covid recovery and there is an appetite across TLA schools for the creation of a TLA approach to best-practice training. A Trustee advised that TLA think about how the Trust assesses quality of teaching and what is expected at each professional level, linked to CPD. There followed a discussion about performance related pay, which will be explored in more detail in future.

6.2.3 Primaries will provide standardised assessments in Reading, Writing and Maths, Years 4 and 5 being a priority focus and all Year 7 will sit standardised assessments to help staff understand gaps and abilities.

6.2.4 Trustees were encouraged to read the TES article, written by an SWS teacher. The CEO **reported** that best-practice, invigorating teaching is happening in many areas in TLA schools which can be shared amongst all its schools and that the schools are feeling the benefit of being part of TLA.

6.2.5. The Chair **reported** that schools are receiving good advice from the Executive and thanked the CEO and Executive team.

### 7. Growth

#### Position Paper and Strategy Discussion

7.0 **Growth Position Paper, Slide presentations 7.1 Looking Ahead 1 – emerging policy landscape and 7.2 Looking Ahead – considering options** were uploaded to Governor Hub before the meeting and **received**.

7.1 The COO ran through the slides and Trustees agreed with the contents. During discussions, recurring themes for consideration were:

7.1.1 **What does TLA have to offer as a USP?**

7.1.2 **What can TLA do to sell itself more impressively than all other Trusts, looking to grow? and;**

7.1.3 **What is TLA prepared to market which might be different or edgy?**

7.1.4 There followed a discussion around TLA's strengths and weaknesses and around possible Trust selling points. It was **agreed** that whilst TLA's identity as a 'local' Trust, which supports individual school identity is a very important factor, Trustees must **note** that growth itself necessitates organisational changes, sometimes requiring increasing systematic controls. The Trust must also therefore rely on its track record of successful growth and merger and build on its track record of

adding value, building relationships and driving improvement. Whilst sending a positive, supportive message to Head teachers, TLA must be able to encourage schools to always strive to improve and together show demonstrable improvement impact. <b>ACTION:</b> It was <b>agreed</b> that the CEO and COO will prepare a strategy document for growth, based on the Growth Position Paper and the principles discussed. The Chair thanked the CEO and COO for their work on this.	CEO/COO
<b>8. TLA Marketing Strategy</b>	
<b>Paper and Strategy Discussion</b>	
8.1 A report was presented by AP on Branding in business and how it can be applied to a MAT. Trustees agreed this was a useful think piece. <b>ACTION:</b> The report will be uploaded to Governor Hub after the meeting. The Chair asked that other Trustees consider what expertise and skills they can advise the Board on over the next year. <b>Papers 8.0 TLA Marketing Strategy and 8.1 Developing the brand</b> were uploaded to Governor Hub before the meeting and <b>were received</b> .	Clerk to upload
8.2 Paper 8.0 contained a recommendation that the Trust Board approves the overarching strategic approach to marketing and branding of the trust, and the outline marketing plan proposed by the DMO. <b>Trustees noted the opportunity to make best use of all schools' email footers with consistent TLA branding. A Trustee asked whether the proposed marketing strategy may be too ambitious, given the size of the Trust.</b> It was <b>reported</b> that it the strategy is a phased approach, aligned to growth size. Marketing is a continual development of brand and Vision and Values and the COO <b>reported</b> that the finance team will ensure that there is capacity to serve the marketing ideas. <b>ACTION:</b> The corporate identity which sits behind the schools will be on all school branding by September 2021. <b>The Board</b> thanked DMO for his work, <b>received Papers 8.0 and 8.1 and approved the Recommendation</b> as referred to herein.	JR
<b>9. Strategic safeguarding update</b>	
AP <b>reported</b> that all safeguarding is in good order. <b>ACTION:</b> The CEO and AP will discuss the safeguarding role at The Oaks Academy with regard to the Deputy Headteacher's resignation. NP reminded Trustees that there is a Trust safeguarding session being held, online, on 8 <sup>th</sup> June at 4pm.	CEO/AP/NP
<b>Fostering local identity and ethos</b>	
<b>10.Feedback from Chairs' Forum</b>	
The Chair thanked AP for attending the Chairs' Forum in his unavoidable absence. AP <b>reported</b> that it had been a positive meeting and discussions were had in a positive, constructive fashion. There were no strategic nor material matters to report.	
<b>11.Feedback from Trust Board to LGBs</b>	
Nothing to report.	
<b>12.AOB</b>	
Nothing to report.	
<b>Date and Time of Next Meeting: Monday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 at 9am Meeting closed at 11.35am</b>	

ACTIONS		
AGENDA ITEM AND ACTION	By When	By Whom
5.1 The Board will receive strategic Health and Safety updates at Board meetings.	Clerk to include on Agenda	Clerk
7.1.4 The CEO and COO will prepare a strategy document for growth, based on the Growth Position Paper and the principles discussed.	12/07/21	CEO/COO
8.1 AP's Branding Paper to be uploaded to Governor Hub.	ASAP	Clerk
8.2 The corporate identity which sits behind the schools will be on all school branding by September 2021.	Sept. 2021	JR
9. The CEO and AP will discuss the safeguarding role at The Oaks Academy with regard to the Deputy Headteacher's resignation.	12/07/21	CEO/AP/NP
<b>DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING – Monday 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021 at 9am</b>		