



THE LEARNING ALLIANCE

PART I MINUTES

TRUST BOARD MEETING

OF

THE LEARNING ALLIANCE (TLA) BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

HELD ON MONDAY 14th December 2022 at 9:15am.

Present:

- Mr D. Wootton (Chair)
- Mr A. Pear (Vice Chair) (AP)
- Mrs C. Thomson (CT)
- Mrs S. Dempsey (SD) (Until 10:53am – Items 1-5 and 7.1 and 7.3)
- Mr R. Armstrong (RA)
- Mr M. Ashcroft (MA)
- Mr R. McCluney (RM)

In Attendance:

- Mr M. Cladingbowl - CEO
- Mr D. Twambley – COO

Clerk: Dr A. Howells – Director of Quality (AH)

Apologies:

None

Part 1	
Administration	Action
<p>1. The Chair <u>welcomed</u> everybody to the meeting. <u>Apologies</u> were received and accepted as recorded above and the meeting was <u>quorate</u>. The Chair thanked all Trustees for their work for TLA. Items 7.1 and 7.3 were taken out of Agenda order to facilitate SD’s input, but recorded in Agenda order for ease of reference.</p> <p>2. The Chair declared his membership in Cheshire Community Foundation, with regard to Item 5.3 but Trustees were assured that this membership was not a conflict of interest with regard to the matters at hand. There were no other declarations of interest for the matters on the Part 1 Agenda.</p> <p>3. Paper 3.0 The <u>Minutes</u> of the <u>Board meeting held on 5th October 2022</u>, uploaded to Governor Hub (GH) prior to the meeting, were approved and will be signed by the Chair on GH. <u>Matters Arising</u> – AH is progressing disaster recovery planning and has begun work on the business continuity document. It was reported that the Government have indicated that schools will receive supplemental funding to relieve rising costs, which may mitigate risks for TLA schools in a secure financial position, but may not be as effective in risk mitigation for those less financially secure. [ACTION CEO/COO/CHAIR] The TLA Finance and Staffing Committee will consider the impact of supplemental funding when more information becomes available and the CEO and COO will draft a letter on behalf of the Chair (on behalf of the Board) to the ESFA to note the Trust’s recognition and appreciation of the indication of supplemental funding. The Action Log was updated as noted thereon.</p>	<p>CEO/ COO/ Chair</p>

4. Governance Matters	
<p>4.1 Paper 4.1 <u>The Learning Alliance 2022 -Draft Accounts 13-12-22</u> (Trustees’ Report) was received and approved. LC reported that the audit was an unqualified, clean audit report, unmodified for regularity. LC spoke to the Trustees’ Report, asking Trustees to note in particular:</p> <p>4.1.1 Crewe UTC’s fair valuation of assets which will fall in line with the TLA Depreciation Policy going forward.</p> <p>4.1.2 Crewe UTC’s non recoverable grant of £340k is recorded as awarded and awaited.</p> <p>4.1.3 Crewe UTC spent only £24k of the £341k in-year T’ Level capital funding for specialist equipment, as the school already had much of the equipment needed. The deadline for spending was December 2022, so a question had been raised as to whether the remaining £317k would be spent. A Trust decision was made that as this was match-funded and only a possible further £20k could be spent, an accounts adjustment has been made to recognise that £300k might be clawed back.</p> <p>4.1.4 There were no regularity breaches with regard to related parties.</p> <p>4.1.5 Following the transfer in to the Trust of Crewe UTC, the Trust’s pension liability has gone from £15.4m to £4.3m, which is similar to figures seen across the education sector.</p> <p>4.1.6 The Trust’s main income movement is due to the transfer in of Crewe UTC and a reduction year-on-year can be seen. Expenditure is up due to Crewe UTC’s transfer in, as expected but the Trust’s net income over expenditure is healthy and the Trust has a healthy surplus going forward.</p> <p>4.1.7 Working capital is relatively stable and the main movement is due to the Local Government Pension(LGP) pension scheme.</p> <p>4.1.8 Restricted revenue funds have increased due to the surplus made in-year.</p> <p>4.1.9 There is no cause for concern with regard to accounting controls and no unadjusted items to be brought to management attention, the result of which is a clean adjustment schedule.</p> <p>4.1.10 There remain minor areas for improvement with regard to Trust internal financial controls, such as credit card expenditure approval, but overall control is good and is low risk.</p> <p>4.1.11 The Letter of Representation will be amended with regard to the Trust not being able to provide identification for 2 employees who have now left the Trust.</p> <p>4.1.12 A Trustee advised that the Trust needs to be mindful of capacity with regard to the ability to close down audit points.</p> <p>4.1.13 Challenge: On request by the CEO, for confirmation that the Trust is a going concern, it was confirmed that there are no concerns nor issues around the budget. Trustees thanked the COO and the finance team, the Audit and Risk (A&R) and the Finance and Staffing (F&S) Committees, for their work towards obtaining the clean audit. Following A&R and F&S Committees’ advice, the Board confirmed that it was content for the CEO and Chair to sign the accounts as presented (subject to any amendments aforementioned herein). It was confirmed that Trust Members will receive the same report for sign-off at their meeting of 14/12/2022.</p> <p>LC left the meeting at 9:52am</p> <p>4.1.14 Paper 4.2 <u>Strategic Safeguarding Update December 2022</u>, uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, was received and the priorities therein noted as recommended. It was reported that all TLA schools are safe, but safeguarding is not yet outstanding, although there is a good strategy and strong leadership to help reach that target.</p> <p>4.1.15 [ACTION: COO] In response to a Trustee’s concerns following their visit to a TLA school, the COO will consider current behavioural controls and options with regard to the risk profile of entry to and egress from school sites and the cost of implementing a universal system.</p> <p>4.2 [ACTION: AP] The Safeguarding Trustee will meet with the AQA safeguarding lead to explore good practice and [ACTION: COO] the COO will consider discussing safeguarding with the Police and Crime Commissioner as an opportunity for TLA to approach safeguarding on a pro-active basis.</p>	<p>COO</p> <p>AP</p> <p>COO</p>
5. School Improvement Matters – A report by the CEO	
<p>5.1 <u>Developing Strategic Education Performance Indicators</u> Paper 5.1 Strategic school performance indicators – 14 December 2022 uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, was received and Trustees noted the content of the paper and the current data pack; and agreed the recommendation to use a range of different performances to evaluate school and Trust performance; and subject to the COO ACTION below, agreed the deferral of further work on dashboards until merger talks are concluded.</p>	

<p>5.2 <u>School and Trust Performance Papers 5.2 Cover note – school and trust data pack -14 December 2022</u> and Paper 5.2a The Learning Alliance DATA PACK December 2022 v5 MC uploaded to GH prior to the meeting were received. Trustees noted the content of the data pack and the current performance of schools and Trust; and [ACTION: COO] A summary Dashboard of salient points will be developed to enable Trustees’ meaningful comparison of trends and/or benchmark oversight, from summer term 2023 data and showing appropriate delegation of matters.</p> <p>5.2.1 [ACTION Trustees] Trustees will offer feedback by 22/03/2023 (Next Board meeting date), on data items for inclusion in Management Information to support their retention of oversight of performance.</p> <p>5.2.2 Challenge: Trustees asked whether there are any particular concerns about TLA schools’ performance. It was reported that attendance is generally good across TLA schools and is better than the national average in the more disadvantaged communities. Behaviour and exclusions’ figures are similar or better than national averages, except in the schools in more disadvantaged areas, but figures are improving. All TLA schools are over-subscribed except the Crewe schools, although Sir William Stanier (SWS)’s Yrs7 and 8 are full; the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) is 150 and the school took in 175. The Oaks Academy (TOA) is at PAN, (which was reduced to 130), believed to be because of the improved reputation in the area and the good work of the Headteacher and new SLT.</p> <p>5.2.3 There are no concerns about the Primary schools’ data. There are localised issues, but they are historic or tied to specific Yr groups. Castle Primary School (CPS) is receiving writing support and Black Firs Primary School (BFPS) is showing improvement.</p> <p>5.2.4 Congleton High School (CHS) SLT is mindful of the P8 results, which are not as strong as expected and thought to be due to the school’s focus on the EBacc criteria. Knutsford Academy’s (KA) P8 results are strong. TOA pupils are generally half a grade behind where they should be but there is an upward trend of improvement at the school. All Trust schools, supported by their LGBs, are adopting a cultural approach to ensuring improved consistency in the gathering of data.</p> <p>5.2.5 Both SWS and BFPS had positive Ofsted visit outcomes and are considered low risk.</p> <p>5.2.6 Challenge: Trustees asked how the Trust ensures the curriculum provides pupils with the IT skills they need. Trustees were concerned that the curriculum places very little emphasis on IT and technical skills and asked whether schools could teach IT skills above and beyond those offered in the current curriculum. The CEO reported that the national curriculum content is largely out of schools’ control, but all TLA schools look to offer elements of IT teaching to help ensure pupils are ready for the future; all TLA Primary schools follow the already large, national curriculum for IT and offer clubs such as Coding Club to enhance pupils’ IT skills. Secondary schools offer Computer Science and are creative in the ways they deliver the national curriculum to enhance IT learning, as well as offering IT skills-based clubs.</p> <p>5.2.7 The Chair noted that the schools’ results were better than predicted and reported that he was disappointed with the unambitious targets, noting that part of Trustees’ and LGBs’ roles are to understand what is being taught at Trust schools and to encourage and monitor ambition and Trustees need to know that LGBs are doing this. [ACTION:CEO] The CEO will prepare a strategic discussion paper which maps the educational curriculum and skills and lines of delegated responsibility between the Board and LGBs, using IT skills as context, so that Trustees have an overview for discussion at the next meeting, which will help Trustees set performance metrics.</p> <p>5.3 <u>Additional school improvement update Papers 5.3 Additional school improvement update – SWS - Leek High – Advantage Crewe – 14 December 2022, Paper 5.3 – Annex 1 – 20221116 – Sir_William_Stanier-Community_School_139953_ Letter , Paper 5.3 - Annex 2 - Letter to Vicky Beer SWS intervention_1 December 2022 FINAL, Paper 5.3 – Annex 3 - Impact Report SWS 1 December 2022 FINAL, Paper 5.3 – Annex 4 – CEIG – update on successes Nov 2022</u>, uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, were received. The Chair thanked the CEO for brokering Advantage Crewe, which has brought about a tangible positive difference to the Trust’s Crewe schools. Challenge: Trustees asked whether Cheshire East Local Authority (the LA) were contributing towards funding. It was reported that the LA had offered £150k towards the enhanced alternative provision provided at SWS, but the Trust had not yet received funds.</p> <p>5.3.1. Challenge: Trustees asked for and received assurance that the support provided to Leek High School will not impact negatively on Trust schools. It was reported that Leek High School’s request of TLA’s support recognises TLA as a strong, successful trust and the work will also provide Trust staff with further development opportunities. Challenge: Trustees asked whether the Executive</p>	<p>COO</p> <p>Trustees</p> <p>CEO</p>
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<p>team need anything from the Board to assist with this project. The CEO reported that Trust support and backing was all that was needed at this stage and thanked Trustees for providing that. The Trusts' Crewe schools are facing some financial pressures, but the finance team are working through them and will ensure the budgets secure whatever staff are needed for those schools to progress and improve.</p>	
<p>6. Strategic Matters</p>	
<p>6.1 <u>Policy and Political Changes</u> Trustees and the Executive are aware of their role in bringing about political change and are mindful of how they might utilise their skills and positions to support positive change for Trust schools.</p> <p>6.2 <u>Growth Update Paper 6.2 Growth Update December 2022</u>, uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, was received. It was reported that there has been extensive consultation with the Regional Director's Office. Trustees confirmed that they approved of the proposed name The Learning Partnership. The Trust is already supporting The learning for Life Partnership and there are no concerns about the progressing with the merger. Trustees recognised the work of the CEO, COO and Project Support Group and thanked them for progressing the merger thus far.</p> <p>6.3 Reported under Part 2.</p> <p>6.4 Papers 6.4 Members and Trust Ambassadors and 6.4b Changes to Members, and SUP Papers 6.4 A – Future TLA Members and Ambassadors – issued and B – Members activities v1 – Nov22, uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, were received. It was reported that the current numbers of Members complied with DfE guidance and the Trust's Articles of Association. Those Members who have resigned remain committed to promoting the Trust in the communities it serves.</p>	
<p>7. Reports from Committees</p>	
<p>7.1 <u>Audit and Risk Paper 7.1 Audit Committee Report -v0.3</u> uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, was received. The Chair of the Committee reported that the Committee had completed a deep dive on the Trust Risk Register, noting SWS and Crewe UTC's downward risk trends.</p> <p>7.2 <u>Finance and Staffing</u> The Chair of the Committee reported that the Committee had undertaken substantive reviews of SWS' financial risks as well as overseeing Trust-led staff wellbeing initiatives and performance management changes. There is a well-considered programme of TLA sites' improvement and long-term investment strategies, in place.</p> <p>7.3 <u>Governance Paper 7.3 Governance Committee Report</u> uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, was received. AH has prepared an equality and diversity survey which all TLA Governors and Trustees are encouraged to complete. LGB Chairs' appraisals are underway. The Committee are confident that the Trust Executive have oversight of all strategic and operational matters.</p> <p>SD left at 10:53am and there followed a short comfort break, returning at 11:15am at item 5.3.</p>	
<p>8. Risk Register</p>	
<p>8. Paper 8. TLA – Risk Register – v2 – November 2022, uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, was received. As previously agreed by the Board, matters for which there is increasing risk will be put to the Board to monitor. Current risks being monitored are SWS and TOA financial positions. SWS are investing in staff in a controlled manner, with Executive oversight. TOA are in an Ofsted visit window and will be closely monitored to ensure risk areas do not increase. Overall, there is confidence in the Trust as a going concern.</p>	
<p>9. Feedback from LGBs to the Trust Board</p>	
<p>9. Paper 9. LGBs Matters to Share with the Trust Board – Dec22 -v2 uploaded to GH prior to the meeting, was received. It was reported that SWS and TOA LGBs meet more frequently than the other Trust LGBs and the Chair drives those meetings with purpose, providing strong support and challenge of the schools. It has been difficult to attract Parent Governors to the Crewe schools' LGBs, but the Clerk and AH are working with those schools to encourage nominations. LGBs overall are showing improvement on their monitoring of education and behaviour.</p>	
<p>10. Feedback from the Trust Board to LGBs</p>	
<p>10. [ACTION: CEO/COO] LGBs will receive notification of the clean audit outcome, merger update, equality and diversity survey outcome, and the UTC will be advised of the Board's wish to work with them to improve the UTC provision.</p>	<p>CEO/ COO</p>
<p>11. Feedback from Chairs' Forum.</p>	
<p>11. Chairs had been advised that:</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the Trust is carrying out Chairs' appraisals across LGBs, to be followed by Trust level Chairs' appraisals with a view to providing developmental opportunities. - the equality and diversity survey outcomes will be used to assess matters requiring further Trust development with regard to inclusivity and engagement of all communities served by the Trust schools. - collaboration across the Trust at all levels, is yielding positive results in the sharing of good practice and cross-schools' support. 	
12. AOB	
<p><i>Trustees asked how Castle Primary School were coping following the sad loss of Mrs Lord. It was reported that</i> the Trust will continue to provide both personal and professional support to the school and its staff, for as long as needed. HR and the finance team are visiting the school on a more frequent basis and the replacement teacher is fitting in well. The school and the Trust are working together to create a permanent memorial to Mrs Lord.</p>	
<p>Date and Time of Next Meeting: Wednesday 22nd March at 9am Meeting closed at 12:20pm</p>	