

BEST AGM Meeting

7th December 2021, 11:00am-12:15pm

Location: Virtual Meeting via Google Meet

Attendees: Ilona Bond (IB), Ian Morfett (IM), Peter Little (PL), Martin Petts (MP), Paul Walker (PW), Alan Lee (AL), Claire Mycock (CM), David Morgan (DM), Jerry Tonge (JT), Craig Smith (CS), Nafia Baust (NB) & Alison Wilshaw (AW)

Apologies: Tony Sanderson

Chair: Ilona Bond

Quorum: All four Members present – IB, IM, PL and MP

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphryes

Declarations of Interest: None

Previous Minutes

Pre-read: BEST Members' Meeting Minutes 28/09/21 distributed prior to the meeting.

Previous minutes checked.

Decision: Members unanimously approved the Members' Meeting Minutes dated 28/09/21 – electronic signatures to be applied.

Presentation of BEST Financial Accounts

In February 2021 David Shelvey resigned as a BEST member and Trustee owing to a conflict between his positions with both BEST and CBC. DM replaced DS as Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee. DM presented the accounts to meeting attendees.

Nurseries – Key Issues

- Directors stood down – Current Directors = AL, IB and PW
- The nurseries deficit has reduced – however, the liabilities are still greater than the assets
- Going concern requirement has been supported with a letter of support from the Charity
- Auditors are satisfied the financial weakness of the nurseries is being addressed through management strategy including staff changes, removing refunds for cancellation fees and fee increases
- A positive that the nurseries have improved from last year – less deficit and some debt repaid

Comments: In a year when many nurseries have closed, BEST nurseries have done well to halve their deficit.

Nurseries are now led by AW, BEST Director of Education, who has brought greater alignment between nurseries.

Nurseries have waiting lists; however, this is hindered by staffing retention issues.

Charity – Key issues

- Directors stood down – BEST Trustees' are now all trustees of the Charity also
- New auditors have been used this year – accounts seen through a new set of eyes/perspective
- New Auditors (Bishop Fleming) have confirmed BEST are not listed with land registry as the legal owners of Derwent School. Armed with this information, FAC approved the removal of Derwent School from the accounts. The accounts have been re-stated to shown a drop from £5.56 million in 2020 to £2.318 million in 2021 (see page 23 from the accounts).

Comment: Advice has been sought – Charity Commission do not need to be advised

- Loans from the Charity to the nurseries are starting to be repaid.

Comments: Members were advised that the asset relating to Derwent school never belonged to BEST. The transaction pre-dates the MAT and further research shows that the process of transfer was never completed.

Bedfordshire Schools Trust (BEST) – Key Issues

- The opinion and advice of the new auditors is that in line with other MATs, BEST should include land within their accounts. Trustees approved this recommendation, thus resulting in a prior year adjustment of £21.82 million

- As new schools, both PBA and CMA have now been included within the accounts, thus showing an increase within the accounts of £24.67 million
- The prior year adjustment of £21.82 million and the inclusion of the two new schools shows a significant increase from the accounts signed off last year (2020) – see page 54 of the accounts for more details.

Overview

- The auditors are satisfied that the accounts for all three entities are clean
- The accounts for all three entities comply with Accounting standards
- Accounts are now in line with sector standard
- Buildings to depreciate over 50 years and Land to depreciate over 125 years i.e. term of the lease

Comments: NB was commended for the strength of the accounts and the hard work that goes into supporting Principals to achieve a surplus balance.

Scrutiny Reports

- 'Juniper' provided an internal review/audit – graded 'Good'.
- Any few minor considerations are being addressed. The reports have been made available on Governor Hub.

Member Question: Do you feel the Covid Grant funds have been well spent by schools?

Answer:

- Several interventions and initiatives have been put in place across the trust to help bridge learning gaps
- Some schools have used the funds to access the national tutoring scheme – 25% of the national tutoring costs need to be covered by the schools
- Only one of the ten BEST schools have been able to access financial support for cover staff – as only schools with minimal or no reserves can access the funds
- Outcomes/Data looks positive. Our internal and external reviews show gaps in KS1 data – BEST's SI team are working with this schools to help address this.

Comment: Focus on Staff/Pupil wellbeing is being encouraged, as high absences continue to challenge school staff stress levels.

Decision: Members unanimously agreed that they are happy with the 2020/21 end of year accounts.

AOB

2Tier Update

Members were advised that 2Tier is currently the biggest challenge for BEST.

Despite BEST having written to CBC on five separate occasions to raise concern over their Shefford/Stotfold cluster plans for the Schools for the Future Programme, CBC ploughed ahead with a phased approach meaning that part of the cluster, including LVA have now transitioned to Primary. However, the five pledges made to BEST have now been withdrawn following a 'recalibration' review of the programme and there is now no plan in place for SWA and RBA.

This has come as a great disappointment, given the length of time it took for BEST and CBC to agree the plans. Furthermore, much time has been spent reviewing teaching/learning, curriculum, transitional and pastoral support. CBC have proposed no alternative plans for Robert Bloomfield Academy, arguably CBC's most successful middle school and BEST need to ensure the future of the school is not compromised. There is much distress amongst the RBA community i.e. staff, pupils and parents who currently have no clear plans.

AGM attendees discussed possible next steps, which may include notify the DfE.

Action: YH to share copies of the BEST Open Letter and CBC's Executive response with Members.

Decision: Given the size of the challenge, Members would like to be kept apprised of 2Tier developments and see sight of communications between BEST and CBC going forward.

J. Bond

Approved and electronically signed 25/01/2022