

BEST Trustees' Meeting

7th December 2021, 10:00-11:00am

Location: Virtual Meeting via Google Meet

Attendees: Ilona Bond (IB), Paul Walker (PW), Alan Lee (AL), Claire Mycock (CM), David Morgan (DM), Jerry Tonge (JT), Craig Smith (CS), Nafia Baust (NB) and Alison Wilshaw (AW)

Apologies: Tony Sanderson

Chair: Ilona Bond

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphries

Declarations of Interest: None

Previous Minutes

Pre-read: [Previous Minutes](#) distributed prior to the meeting. Previous minutes checked.

Decision: Previous Minutes unanimously approved – electronic signatures to be applied.

Approved minutes include:

- Trustees' Meeting Minutes 21/09/21
- Trustees' Extraordinary Minutes 03/11/21
- Trustees' Extraordinary Minutes 16/11/21

Finance and Audit Committee (FAC) Update

Pre-read: FAC Minutes dated 16/11/21 circulated prior to the meeting – see minutes for more details.

- Three sets of accounts reviewed: Nurseries, Charity and MAT. Main issues identified were around Land, the ownership of Derwent School and whether it should be included in the Charity fixed asset register.
- Risk Register: Two issues were flagged:
 1. 2Tier risk to pupil numbers - this is a 'red' risk
 2. Staff and Pupil Wellbeing, to remain a 'red' risk whilst Covid is still prevalent
- Scrutiny Reports: 'Juniper' provided an internal review/audit – graded 'Good'. Any recommendations for improvement are being reviewed and implemented.

Action: In line with 3.16 of the Academies Handbook 2021 – YH to distribute a copy of Juniper's report to all Trustees. Copies of the review will be saved on Governor Hub too.

Monthly Cash Flow and Management Accounts

The cash flow and management accounts are received on a monthly basis by DM, IB, PW, JT and AL (FAC members) on behalf of the Board of Trustees, all of whom confirmed that they are happy with the accounts and are satisfied that the trust is financially sound.

Pension/Discretions Statement

BEST is required to have a Pensions Discretion Policy listing any discretions outside the statutory entitlement. FAC members approved the policy but more guidance was required in regards to the 'adjudicator' – NB shared her findings with trustees.

Decisions: Trustees unanimously agreed the role of CEO as the nominated 'adjudicator'.

Approval of BEST Financial Accounts

Nurseries – Key Issues

- Directors stood down – Current Directors = AL, IB and PW
- Nurseries are now being overseen/having more involvement from the Central Executive Team
- 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
- AL advised that standardisation and alignment across the nurseries, overseen and supported by AW, Director of Education, has seen an improvement in provision and the financials.

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.

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 fixed assets in the 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

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the 2020 to 2021 end of year accounts for sign-off.

Performance Committee Update

Pre-read: Performance Committee Minutes dated 23/11/21 circulated prior to the meeting – see minutes for details.

- Valuable meeting focusing on three areas: Celebration, Challenges and Covid related learning gaps – rich and open conversations with Principals
- Outcome standards maintained in spite of the pandemic
- Younger age groups appear to have been most effected – particularly socially and emotionally
- The level of Staff/Pupil absences is currently challenging consistent learning
- Principals were reflective and evidenced increased cross trust working
- CM thanked AW for the quality of the supporting data she provided in advance of the meeting
- Minimal comments were made regarding 2Tier.

Policies

Pre-read: 'Draft' Peer on Peer Abuse Policy distributed prior to the meeting.

Trustees discussed the new **Peer on Peer Abuse Policy**.

Decision: Trustees present unanimously approved the policy subject to an amendment to the running order of the policy i.e. Bespoke BEST section first followed by the DfE guidance.

Action: YH to notify BEST Compliance Officer (LL) of the required changes and approval of the policy

Decision: Trustees present unanimously approved AW adapting the Peer on Peer Abuse policy for nursery use

Action: AW to liaise with LL to adapt and formalise the Peer on Peer Abuse policy for BEST nursery staff

Pre-read: Union Consultation Responses, BEST Managing Allegations of Abuse Policy and BEST Recruitment Policy distributed prior to the meeting. View documents for more detail.

For information only:

Following trustee approval (subject to union consultation) of the following policies on 21/09/21:

- BEST Managing Allegations of Abuse Policy
- BEST Recruitment Policy

IB and AL approved the minor amendments requested by unions via email on 09/11/21. IB appraised trustees of the amendments and subsequent decision made. Trustees confirmed that they are happy with the amendments that have been made.

2Tier Update

Pre-read: 2Tier update Document (Dec'21) distributed prior to the meeting. See document for more details.

CS provided trustee with an overview of the 2Tier activity that has taken place since their last meeting on 16 November 2021.

- JT (as nominated Trustee Lead on the programme), AL and CS have been reviewing various models proposed by the schools, whilst being sensitive to staff anxieties and ensuring that the schools do not fragment
- BEST Trustees wrote to CBC Executive Members on 6 December 2021 to ask if they'd re-consider honouring the five pledges CBC made to BEST and to help explore alternative models for BEST that would not compromise the future of one of CBC's most successfully and over-subscribed middle schools – Robert Bloomfield Academy
- Trustees discussed possible next steps – decisions will be made upon receipt of CBC's response.

Next Meeting: Tuesday 25th January 2022 @ 10:00am

J. Bond

Approved and electronically signed 25/01/2022