

## **BEST Trustees' Meeting**

26<sup>th</sup> January 2021, 10:00 -12:30pm

Virtual meeting via Google Meet

**Attendees:** Chair - Ilona Bond (IB), Vice Chair – Paul Walker (PW), Alan Lee (AL), David Shelvey (DS), David Morgan (DM), Tony Sanderson (TS), Claire Mycock (CM), Jerry Tonge (JT), Craig Smith (CS), Alison Wilshaw (AW) and Nafia Baust (NB).

**Guests (CBC):** Sarah Ferguson (SF) and Sue Harrison (SH)

**Clerk:** Yvonne Humphryes

**Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest:** DS Declared that he is the Chair of the Overview and Children services scrutiny committee for Central Bedfordshire Council.

### **BEST & CBC All-through School Discussion**

IB thanked CBC for joining the meeting and explained the trustees' concerns following feedback from CS meetings with CBC, as there appears to be a shift from what CBC had originally offered.

**CBC:** CBC are not saying that different decisions have been made and applaud BEST for researching and wanting the best but advised that consideration needs to be given to how that is done with a limited resource envelope. SF is keen to understand the differences between a same site and split site model, notwithstanding the educational benefits and then look at how to produce the best all-through model.

**BEST:** In June 2020, BEST conducted a Consultation based on an all-through school on one site. However, there have been recent CBC discussions for two site options and requests to commence Feasibility Studies at RBA

**CBC:** CBC are clear of BEST's specification, ambition and requirements and that now needs refining i.e. a school hall large enough for the whole school. Need to understand what that looks like.

**BEST:** There is an emerging concern that CBCs plans for the all through school on the SWA site will include a very basic model primary school (working to a minimum BB103 specification), CBC were asked what mandate was given to the feasibility recently undertaken for the all-through school.

**CBC:** confirmed that the mandate was based on BB103 model. Desire versus cost needs to be explored. In hindsight, CBC should have worked with BEST to create the mandate.

**BEST:** The big picture needs to be understood by CBC before we begin discussing the refinement. BEST have relentlessly spoken of one site, the cost of not having pupils from reception to year 4 and the SWA PFI; BEST even shared their vision with an example - 'Hillyfield' school – a BB103 model was never going to achieve the expectations of BEST. BEST asked for an RBA Feasibility study last year and yet this was denied, advising it was not necessary, as the site is not required for the all-through school. There are huge issues that need to be remedying before we look at refinement.

**CBC:** Value the line of questioning and suggested that as an academy, BEST could do a self-build if preferred.

**BEST:** The frustrations around lack of commitment and understanding of the challenges facing the cluster from CBC, in relation to pupil place planning, the problem of fallow years and HR costs were discussed. In essence, revenue-funding issues needed to be considered alongside capital issues

**CBC:** Responded by advising that there is now an established and more efficient team in place and lessons have been learned. CBC advised that they "just want to be creative and explore every option".

BEST: Asked what has happened to the money that was available last year that has resulted in CBC scaling back this year?

CBC: The funding has not changed. The first year of the project has seen feasibility costs much higher than anticipated and therefore, adjustments need to be made across the whole cluster. The Shefford/Stotfold cluster is the first cluster to go but there several clusters to follow and they need to ensure there are enough funds to deliver the whole programme.

BEST: BEST pupils represent over 70% of cluster one – how much is available for cluster one?

CBC: Unable to share information about individual schools as it is commercially sensitive information.

BEST: Langford Academy who are due to become a Primary school in 2021 have had their agreed plans dramatically changed at the last minute but no other schools within the Henlow feeder school pyramid appear to be affected.

CBC: SF was unable to comment on what had been or gone prior to her joining the project, as she did not have the information to hand.

BEST: CBC were questioned around the disproportionate funds made available to Henlow Academy and the fact that they have now been allowed to keep Year 5; this has had a significant effect on the number of applications received at Etonbury Academy – down by 103 applications.

CBC: Advised that Henlow Academy are not without challenge as they have reduced their numbers and have an over representation of pupils with EHCPs. SH said that CBC are being equitable.

BEST: asked for transparency in regards to funding available for the cluster in order to gauge how far the BEST ambition is from the reality based on the funding available.

CBC: The resource envelope for the Shefford/Stotfold Cluster is being finalised and will go to the CBC Executive for sign off in the spring. Following which, CBC committed to sharing details of the funding available, but only for the all-through school/BEST schools.

BEST: Questioned if the resource envelope “has not changed” CBC must know how much it is.

CBC: Information is not available but will be shared in due course.

BEST: There are 22 schools within the cluster, 15 of which are lower schools looking to become a primary, the changes to these will have minimal impact. BEST have 8 schools in the cluster making up over 70% of the pupil population – the impact of change to BEST is significant on so many levels. SWA reduce PAN by 190 per year, RBA reduce PAN by 90 per year and the numbers on roll at both ETA and PBA will reduce from 1260 to 750 in the medium term. Over a period of four years, this equates to a revenue cost of at least £10,000,000. BEST have previously shared details/document of the fallow years with CBC officers. It is felt that CBC have not understood or planned for the complexity in relation to the middle /upper schools compared with lower schools. Henlow Academy plans are already established; this leaves SWA/RBA/ETA/PBA facing very challenging transition issues, including: revenue funding and pupil numbers, but the CBC planning has not allowed for this.

Some serious questions were asked of CBC - Is there enough funding to support the complexity of the programme? Was due diligence completed at the start of the programme prior to CBC making their commitment to BEST?

If the concerns of the trustees cannot be appeased, BEST may need to consider remaining 3-tier, this is not a threat but a reality.

CBC: It is a rolling programme and the Consultation does not always fit with the financial review, as such, the programme is amended based on the financial planning. SF concluded that a very clear plan is needed with a clear expectation of what BEST and CBC each need to do – United in an ambition to deliver what is spoken about. What does it look like? Can it be done on a split site?

BEST: Expressed concerned that they as trustees may have supported a structure that CBC can no longer deliver. During the consultation process, CBC had no conversations with BEST about any requests for BEST to financially support the programme; trustees are now being requested to support something that was not consulted upon; sign off may not have been approved as they have been made aware. The aim has been to provide an All-through school based on the principle of the benefits. Trustees are now very concerned and fear BEST will end up with a resource that will not deliver the education offer promised and will be a significant reduction in the current level of RBA facilities, so may cause considerable concern in the community

Without full disclosure of the budget, trustees feel they are working in the dark as unable to know how close/far aspirations are to reality. In addition to this, PFI and the quality of the pupil experience has not been touched upon. Given the HR work, risk assessment and consultations that need to take place, the timeline will be a struggle – without full disclosure there is little chance.

The latest feasibility report was inadequate for a number of reasons: Disjointed Primary/Secondary blocks (on PFI Land), no changing rooms and, an insufficiently sized hall that needs to accommodate lunches and indoor PE, to name just a few.

BEST: Do CBC believe the project will be complete by September 2023?

CBC: Subject to budget approval and, agreeing and signing off on the design by June 2021, CBC believe that cluster one can be completed on time – subject to no delays with land acquisition.

BEST: Is the budget based on your own funding, as there have been no conversations with BEST in regards to the RBA site?

CBC: For the purposes of transparency, a mature conversation needs to be had to understand the full picture, so that we can establish how we get from where we are, to where we need to be.

CBC: SH concluded that it has been a challenging and difficult discussion but that she appreciates the discussion and the frustrations. CBC do need to be open and honest and once confident that the figures are correct, they will be confidentially shared with BEST. AL and CS have been working closely with CBC on the project, for which CBC are grateful. BEST have a vision and this has not filtered through to the design team; consideration needs to be given, as to whether the right people are around the table.

SH asked that BEST work more collaboratively with Henlow. BEST advised that this comment is not relevant to the meeting.

*SH left the meeting.*

BEST: have a legal responsibility as trustees and can only “bear with” for a certain amount of time.

CBC: Feasibility work will begin on the single site; the results will be available early April and asked that no decisions be made until this time. **Action:** SF to share the report/costings once available.

Trustees asked CBC that they base the feasibility report on what BEST want in order to reduce time/expense and resource and then provide a report that offers a Gold/Silver and Bronze option, factoring in buy and sell evaluations. Trustees do not want to be two months down the line and be no closer to a vision – options must be available. SF agreed.

**Action:** AL, CS & SF to discuss full aspirational vision to dictate the RBA feasibility mandate.

IB apologised that the meeting had been difficult but concluded that the children have to be key.

*SF left the meeting.*

Trustees discussed the outcome of the meeting and agreed next steps.

**Action:** IB and AL on behalf of the Board of Trustees' to write a letter to SH, SF and CBC Members to discuss concerns and reiterate the five pledges that BEST consulted on.

**Approval of Minutes:** Trustees' minutes (7.12.2020) approved subject to a minor amendment.

**Approval of Minutes:** AGM minutes (7.12.2020) approved and signed electronically.

**Approval of Minutes:** Extra-ordinary Trustees' minutes (4.1.2021) approved and signed electronically.

### **Monthly Cash Flow and Management Accounts**

The cash flow and management accounts for BEST are received on a monthly basis by IB, PW, DS, DM, JT and AL 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.

### **COVID Update**

#### **Health & Safety**

CS confirmed that in line with Governments requirements, risk assessments were completed and Principals' worked over the Christmas break to ensure their schools were COVID ready to open in the New Year; CS applauded the schools hard work and commitment.

#### **Provision**

- Attendance = Vulnerable and key worker pupil attendance average at 12%. (GMA 27% and CMA 26%).
- Remote Learning: High levels of engagement and positive praise received from the school communities.
- Two tiers: A curriculum group has been established and are currently looking at the lower school intake of years 5 and 6.
- CPD: AW is delivering an NPQSL programme this afternoon, high BEST uptake.
- All-through School: AW is reviewing possible leadership structures and costings as well as working with the SWA Principal to review the educational vision.
- School Re-openings: All BEST Schools are ready to re-open once government restrictions are lifted.
- Staff wellbeing: Staff are providing five lessons, teaching in schools, preparing for re-opening and dealing with their own pandemic anxieties.

TS has been impressed with the teachers and commended all their hard work.

#### **Finance**

- BEST have received a COVID Catch up Grant of over £356,880.
- BEST Schools have not met the criteria to claim the funding available to cover staff COVID absences
- Catering staff at RBA have been furloughed
- Four schools require financial support from the central team owing to staff absences; NB commended her team for working so hard to support the schools on top of their usual jobs during the pandemic.

### **BEST Strategic Plan Review**

Pre-read document: 'BEST Strategic Plan Review' distributed prior to the meeting. See report for more details.

2016-20 period was a one of creating greater clarity across BEST, agreeing on our Mission statement, developing the Vision and enrolling the community into a series of operating principles

2020-24 period is one of deepening connection. We began the year focusing on what unites and we continue to work on those areas in which we collaborate to support and compete to improve Our School Improvement Adviser has conducted a review at all the schools and nurseries, the reports will be ready soon and shared with trustees at the next Performance Committee Meeting. The review included support in Ofsted readiness and preparations.

Nationally, the Early Years sector has been adversely effected by the pandemic.

An external national safeguarding mark has been considered. However, this is not being pursued at this moment in time owing to time pressures and costs.

AL provided trustees with a strategic overview on the trust's growth. The focus for the next four years will be to achieve and maintain high education standards through the two-tier transition.

### **Policies for Approval**

Admissions Arrangements 2022

**Decision:** Consultation feedback reviewed. Trustees unanimously approved the Admission Policy 2022.

Managing Allegations of Abuse against staff

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the 'Managing Allegations of Abuse against Staff Policy' and the use of the CBC Risk Assessment Template

Redundancy Policy

**Decision:** Annual review – no changes made. Trustees unanimously approved the Redundancy Policy.

Whistleblowing Policy

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Whistleblowing Policy.

NQT Policy

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the NQT Policy. **Action:** Policy title to be added to the policy.

Trustees have approved all of the above policies for distribution and use across the Trust.

### **Matters Arising**

- GDPR – 0 Reportable Incidents – Regular trust-wide meetings held
- Safeguarding - 0 Reportable Incidents – Regular trust-wide meetings held
- Health & Safety - 0 Reportable Incidents – Regular trust-wide meetings held

### **AOB**

The Pendleton Centre will be closed for 7 out of 12 months resulting in an estimated loss of £130,000. BEST underwrite any losses of the Pendleton Centre. This item will be added to the next Finance and Audit Committee agenda.

**CONFIDENTIAL ITEM** (CS, AW, NB left the meeting)

### **BEST Executive Appraisal Summary**

Pre-read document: 'BEST Senior Leaders' Appraisal Summary Document 2019-20' distributed prior to the meeting.

Educational outcomes and financial stability has never been as strong as it is at present. AL believes this is largely attributed to the established Principal team. All Principals have been replaced since 2016 and the group are experienced and stable.

Some rationale behind some of the pay awards were discussed and the rigor of the process explained to trustees. AL thanked all who have been involved in the process.

Trustees were supportive of the decisions made and satisfied with the rigour of the process.

AL confirmed that one member of the Executive Team wished to remain on the support staff cycle as opposed to the academic cycle.

**Next meeting:** 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021 @ 10:00am

*J. Bond*

Approved and electronically signed 16/3/2021