

BEST Trustees' Meeting

19 September 2023, 10:30am – 12:30pm

Etonbury Sixth Form

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

Meeting Chair: Ilona Bond

Apologies: Tony Sanderson (TS)

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphryes

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Approval of previous minutes: Trustees' meeting minutes 11 July 2023 – approved and signed electronically.

Introduction

IB welcomed trustees back to another academic year. PW has completed two terms of office and has agreed to stay on for one further year; this extension has been approved by BEST Members. This year, board succession planning will be looked at with one new trustee being appointed by the end of this academic year – ideally a community governor and diverse enrichment.

Matters Arising

Pre-read: Termly H&S Report distributed prior to the meeting – see reports for more information.

GDPR: No ICO reportable incidents since the last trustees' meeting. There were a couple of near-misses, one of which included ICO guidance regarding a request received the last day of term (no ICT contract over the summer to retrieve the data) – LVA staff went over and above and outside their contractual responsibility.

Safeguarding: No reportable safeguarding incidents since the last trustees' meeting.

Health & Safety: No Riddor reportable incidents since the last trustees' meeting.

Report taken as read and CS invited questions. CS provided trustees with an overview on a long-term outstanding claim and the implications on insurance renewals. No further questions.

Monthly Cash Flow and Management Accounts

Finance and Audit Committee members i.e. DM, AL, IB, PW and JT receive the cashflow reports on behalf of the board of trustees, all of whom confirmed they are happy with the accounts and are satisfied the Trust is financially sound and confirmed the accounts are in line with forecasting.

Auditors are currently reviewing end of year accounts – KR has discussed with the auditors the need for an improvement in service this time round.

Subsidiaries Executive Committee Meeting Update

Pre-read: Subsidiaries' Executive Committee meeting minutes (11 September 2023) distributed prior to the meeting.

- Quality of the provision is getting better but more children needed – full time places are easier logistically
- Overall deficit is the same amount as the Shefford nursery service charge – service charge in line with sector
- Government changes mean staff/Pupil ratio is better but it does create more under-funded free places; voluntary top up fees may need introducing – this is being considered
- Trustees questioned the marketing strategy – AW confirmed will be working with the BEST Comms Manager on targeted flyers etc. Open mornings have proven successful too.

Capital & Estates Committee Meeting Update

Pre-read: Capital & Estates Committee meeting minutes (11 September 2023) and Capital & Estates Scheme of Capital Delegation 2023-26 distributed prior to the meeting – see documents for more details.

- No BEST schools have RAAC
- Committee members reviewed the extensive list and photos of summer works completed across BEST
- Updated Scheme of Capital Delegation agreed by the committee and shared with trustees for information.

Having spent the first four years ensuring all BEST schools are warm, safe and dry as per the condition surveys, we were able to look at betterment projects such as the Wellbeing gardens at each of the schools, Etonbury (ETA) Sixth form and Lawnside (LSA) Reception, all of which have been well received. Now looking to redraft the plan to look at joint projects with BEST schools for incentivisation.

Owing to Stevenage Leisure's (SL) loss of business they have now merged with Inspire All – this is who BEST/Pendleton Centre will now contract with. The contractual terms are improved with BEST no longer being wholly responsible for any financial losses. However, the arrangement BEST have with CBC is poor i.e. CBC are the landlord with no responsibility. CBC have a seat on the management board. CS is seeking advice to try and negotiate a better deal for BEST with CBC.

Trustees attended the Official Opening of the Etonbury Sixth Form and expressed delight with the finished provision.

BEST School Staff Pay Award Update (Teachers and Support)

Awaiting parliamentary approval to the STRB recommendations next month. Recommendations put forward will have a relatively minimal impact on the budgets overall (Teachers = 6.5% and Support Staff = £1925). Trustees were asked if they are happy to approve the pay awards to align nationally. If agreed and upon parliamentary approval, BEST hope to pay the award in November, back dated to 1 April 2023 for Support Staff and 1 September 2023 for Teaching Staff.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Teacher and Support Staff pay awards in line with the parliamentary nationally approved rates to be announced next month (possibly later for support staff).

BEST Strategic Objectives and Action Plans (SO & AP)

Pre-read: BEST SO & AP 2022/23 (Review) and BEST SO & AP 2023/24 distributed prior to the meeting.

AL provided a 2022/23 summary of successes:

- Launch of ETA Sixth Form
- PBA have welcomed an additional year group
- Wellbeing agenda/gardens across all BEST Schools; continue ensure doing the right thing by staff
- Six Ofsted Inspections across BEST, of which four were schools securing an Ofsted rated Good; LSA achieved their first Good where previous Local Authority (LA) interventions had failed
- Exceptional KS4 Results from ETA – highest in the LA

Deficit budgets have been submitted by 8 out of 10 BEST Schools (nationally 41% of secondary and 49% of Primary schools have submitted deficit budgets) – BEST schools have the added complexity of 2Tier and creating staffing/curriculum in readiness for the transition; appropriate targets will be identified in Executive Appraisals. BEST have sufficient reserves but deficit budgets are unsustainable. CMA morale is high despite being in limbo awaiting CBC decision re: a new build; BEST Board letter is being sent to CBC for a commitment either way.

SEND across many BEST schools is high, this in turn is further impacting funding/resourcing as there is 12 hour funding deficit per pupil.

2023/24 Focuses:

- Support with the success of ETA Sixth Form and helping the school with managing four key stages
- Help LSA get ready for their transition to Primary in September 2024
- Support PBA as they prepare for their first GCSE cohort
- Potentially 9 Ofsted Inspections due this year

Summary of BEST Examination Results 2023

Pre-read: BEST Examination Results Summary document distributed prior to the meeting – see document for detail AW provided trustees with an overview of the 2023 Exam data – the results of which will be discussed in more detail at the Performance Committee meeting in November.

- EYFS at CMA, GHA and LSA were above national average
- Phonics at SCA, LSA and LVA were above national average – GHA data is skewed by small class sizes i.e. <15
- Absenteeism at LSA has greatly improved
- All schools with the exception of LVA are above the national average for 2022 in KS1 reading
- Writing is a priority across BEST Lower/Primary schools this year to improve the standard going forward
- BEST schools are receiving their highest level of SEN pupils, especially GMA – this creates a strain on both finances and outcomes
- RBA KS2 results are not as strong as previous years but with the new head and leadership there is a real focus and determination to succeed and raise standards
- KS4 results across both SWA and ETA are very good with both schools comfortably above LA average – ETA rank top in the LA

- Overall results were solid with improvements required at LVA – new staff have been appointed and work is being undertaken to understand why pupils at LVA Pupils in Year 6 dropped from 32 down to 16, losing many of their higher achievers, thus affecting their KS2 results. KS2 preparations are now starting in year 5
- Writing at SCA moderated, the results of which are highly contested as were the results moderated at PBA the previous year. It is believed the work is not being reviewed/marked on merit
Action: Trustees have asked AW to write a letter to CBC on their behalf addressing the concerns raised.
- All BEST Schools have commended the support received from the BEST SI Team, especially the Director of Maths who was named as having provided tremendous support.

Internal Scrutiny

Pre-read: (Final) Cyber Security Report distributed prior to the meeting – see document for detail.

Secure Schools conducted an internal scrutiny on BEST's cyber security in Summer 2022, the time taken to receive the final report was too long, this has been fed back and it is unlikely BEST will use their service again.

The results of the report have been shared with our IT providers, who are confident we are in a good place and up to date.

Policies

Pre-read: Proposed policies as listed below were distributed to trustees prior to the meeting – see policies for details.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the NEW Attendance Policy for trust-wide distribution

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Grievance Policy for trust-wide distribution following union consultation

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved Admission Arrangements Sept'25 for consultation (ETA PAN Reduction).

2Tier Update

Shefford/Stotfold Cluster have been placed on hold whilst growth figures are re-calculated. AL and CS have met with Councillor Whitaker to voice their concerns and CS continues to meet Gareth Cheale from CBC on a monthly basis. The headlines from CBC's latest PPT are concerning, as their data suggests needing to lose 2FE at Primary and 5FE at Secondary from the cluster plans agreed earlier this year. Figures do not appear to include the 100 pupils attending SWA from out of catchment each year or the pending housing development in Arlesey. CBC are hosting an online meeting this Thursday and a Face to Face meeting on 11 October, following which, BEST will need to start making decisions around what is best for the children they serve.

AOB

BEST Governance Conference is taking place 9:00am on Saturday 14 October at BEST House.

Next Meeting: 9:30am on Tuesday 12 December 2023 at BEST House

J. Bowd

Minutes approved and electronically signed on 12 December 2023