

BEST Trustees' Meeting

11th May 2021, 10:00-12:30

Virtual Meeting via Google Meet

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

Chair of Trustees: Ilona Bond

Vice-Chair of Trustees: Paul Walker

Clerk: Yvonne Humphries

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Bereavement Notification

Trustees' marked their respects for the tragic and sudden passing of a BEST Pupil; Trustees' thoughts and prayers are with the deceased's family, friends and school community at this sad time.

Approval of Minutes: Trustees' minutes (16.03.2021) 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, 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.

NB advised April's accounts would be distributed shortly. In response to JT's query, NB confirmed the £100,000 of IT equipment is still to be capitalised which will improve the Profit and Loss deficit.

BEST Values

Pre-read document: 'BEST Values' PPT distributed prior to the meeting. See presentation for more detail.

AL provided a summary of the five-year journey in regards to the BEST Values and the importance they hold. The pandemic has illustrated the need for compassion, acting as a catalyst to launching several Wellbeing training programmes and initiatives across BEST. AL is keen to endorse the message further adding a fourth BEST value:

'Have the courage to be compassionate'

Our community treats all with trust, kindness and honesty

AL explained courage is required to have the difficult conversations needed to hold people to account and that compassion is about supporting individuals to be the best that they can be. AL is currently working with AW and Principals to develop the fourth appraisal objective to include 'self-care' where appropriate to do so.

Decision: Trustees' discussed the proposal and unanimously supported the addition of the fourth Value.

Trustees' expressed support and gratitude for the Mindfulness and Self-Care initiatives in place across the Trust.

AL sought support from Trustees' to create Wellbeing areas/gardens across all the BEST Schools and Nurseries. The projects would be bespoke to each school and would look to celebrate five years of BEST by giving something back to the staff and pupils of BEST and further endorsing that BEST is great place to work. Assuming costs of up to £10,000 per setting could lead to a total cost of up to £120,000 – this will staggered over several years in line with the three to two-tier Schools for the Future Programme. Trustees' are fully support the proposal and made a suggestion to involve the community to strengthen relations and potentially reduce labour costs.

Decision: Trustees' unanimously support the Wellbeing Gardens proposal as presented by AL.

Two Tier Update (Inc. flow of pupil numbers)

Pre-read document: Two-Tier Update document distributed prior to the meeting. See document for more detail. CBC Officers previously advised Trustees that the Shefford/Stotfold Cluster plans would go to CBC's Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April and then to Executive for final sign off in June – a timeline that Trustees were told is imperative to ensure the project can be delivered by September 2023. However, plans were not ready for sign-off and a new deadline of December 2021 advised.

AL/CS were invited to a meeting with CBC – BEST were asked to express their concerns and did so accordingly. CBC suggested the Shefford/Stotfold cluster might follow a three-phased approach:

Phase 1: Henlow Academy and Henlow Academy feeder schools

Phase 2: All remaining schools within the cluster – except SWA and RBA

Phase 3: SWA/RBA all-through 0-18 Provision.

AL/CS raised objection as they feel phase 2 and 3 should complete in unison.

Until this year, on the advice of the Academy Principal, Trustees have always kept the Langford Academy (LVA) PAN at 45 despite it not being financially prudent to do so, to allow for growth from the new housing developments. However, the CBCs two-tier plans to transition from lower to primary did not allow for a school expansion forcing the PAN to reduce to 30 in order to accommodate years 5 and 6.

44 LVA applications have been received this year, thus resulting in fourteen denied applications, four of which live within catchment. These applications may be appealed and have caused the families involved much distress.

Flow of Pupil Numbers

Pre-read document: 'Flow of Pupil Numbers' distributed prior to the meeting. See worksheet for more detail. CS presented the document and talked Trustees through the trends from 2016 to date. The expansion of Henlow Academy and opening of Pix Brook Academy continues to have a detrimental effect on the number of applications received for Etonbury Academy. The opening of the new all-through school will reduce the number of places available; the Secondary PAN will fall by 190 and the Primary by 90.

The situation at LVA highlights concerns that the Schools for the Future Plans give insufficient consideration to the catchment and practicalities of where children fit in i.e. LVA catchment offered schooling in Biggleswade.

CBC continue to acknowledge that further sixth form places are required. However, feel that they are not financially responsible for their provision.

Action: IB will invite CBC Officers to attend an extra-ordinary Trustees' meeting to provide Trustees with an update.

SCA Site Development

Pre-read document: 'SCA Site Development' distributed prior to the meeting. See worksheet for more detail.

St Christophers Academy (SCA) joined BEST after they had transitioned to Primary with a PAN of 60. A 2FE Primary school requires 14 classrooms, of which SCA's currently have 11. To provide an additional three classrooms would incur costs between £550-£600,000. The BEST Transforming Education (B-Ted) Committee - members include TS, AL, CS and IB as a guest have discussed SCA's expansion requirements at length.

The flow of pupil numbers document evidences an average number of 38 applications per year: building additional classrooms is not cost effective. The B-Ted Committee propose a second hand double mobile classroom; the total costs involved in purchasing and delivering the classrooms costs are up to £100,000.

Lessons have been learned in regards to the due diligence process when new schools join BEST and assurances provided that such a situation will not arise again. Trustees deliberated and despite some unease amongst Trustees in regards to the costs and necessity, Trustees' agreed to support the B-Ted Committee proposal.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved a second hand double mobile class room with costs up to £100,000, of which, SCA will need to pay £50,000 on a five year repayment plan.

Stakeholder Views

Pre-read documents: Stakeholder Survey Reports distributed prior to meeting – see reports for more details

AL provided an overview – the surveys allow views on both internal and external stakeholders to be gathered, the responses of which are very positive:

Operations-CS

The internal support scored very highly with academy appreciation for the challenging conversations, especially in regards to Compliance. External HR and IT support did not score as favourably - CS will continue to monitor and test the market. It would not be cost effective to bring payroll in-house. When asked, CS confirmed that our current payroll provider is on an open-ended contract with a three months' notice period; the cost is £45,000 per year and includes the payroll and associated administration for all BEST academies and nurseries.

Financial Services – NB

Survey distributed to all the BEST Principals and Financial Assistants – all but one Principal completed the survey. The results were pleasing. Suggestions received, one of which has been implemented and the other is currently being considered.

School Improvement Services – AW

The results are based on several targeted audiences i.e. Principals, Middle Leaders and Course Delegates and as such, the sections have a differing number of respondents.

Results were very positive – after further scrutiny, it transpired that any responses lower than 'highly satisfied' were as a result of virtual sessions as oppose to face to face sessions; owing to the pandemic, this was unavoidable.

Next year, AW will include a Provision Map survey -the LGB chairs will be included as respondents.

School Examples 2020-21 and Calendar 2021-22 – AW

All school surveys differ – will look to create more standardisation next year. AW has discussed the surveys with Principals and the following schedule approved:

Term 1: Pupil Transition - Pupils. Term 2: Staff Wellbeing - Staff. Term 3: Quality of Education – Parents.

Matters Arising

Pre-read documents: Health and Safety Report distributed prior to meeting – see report for more details

Health & Safety: Report discussed – outcomes positive in spite of the pandemic.

GDPR: No reportable incidents and 2 near misses since the last trustees update – training provided.

Safeguarding: No reportable incidents at trust level since the last trustees' update – audits currently taking place.

AOB

Trustees approved the Safeguarding Policy updates via email since the last Trustees' meeting.

Unions were happy to approve the following policies signed off by Trustees' on 16th March 2021 (subject to Union approval). The policies below have now been implemented across the Trust:

- Equality Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Health & Safety Policy

CS advised that the Pendleton Centre shortfall was less than originally anticipated (£90,000) – the £20,000 surplus made in the previous year will partially offset the shortfall and the remainder will be payable over 2-3 years. The Centre is now open and membership has increased – any future profits will be used to offset this COVID deficit. Furthermore, Stevenage Leisure are applying for a £45,000 Covid recovery grant, which if successful will reduce the shortfall further.

BEST will be able to exit the contract with Stevenage Leisure in a couple of years when CBCs 7 year contract with Stevenage Leisure ends. Trustees thanked CS for his work on the Pendleton Centre contract.

BEST have passed phase one of the NGA Awards.

Trustees approved the proposed 2021-22 meeting schedule.

Next meeting: Tuesday 22 June 2021 @ 10:00am - BEST House, Conference Room

J. Bond

Approved and electronically signed 22/06/2021