

## **BEST Trustees' Meeting**

12 December 2023, 9:30am – 11:00am

BEST House, Conference Room

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

**Meeting Chair:** Ilona Bond

**Governance Professional:** Yvonne Humphries

**Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest:** None

### **Approval of previous minutes:**

- Trustees' meeting minutes 19/09/23 - previous actions checked - approved and signed electronically.
- Trustees' Extraordinary meeting minutes 22/11/23 – approved and signed electronically.

Previous Actions:

- AW met with Simon Cotton from CBC who advised the moderator was nationally trained.
- The Castle Newnham Condition Surveys have been booked for 4-5 January 2024.
- AW was made aware of an action appointed to her at the Performance Committee Meeting.

### **Approval of BEST Financial Accounts**

**Pre-read:** Final accounts for all three entities of BEST distributed for review prior to the meeting.

DM as Chair of the Finance and Audit Committee provided trustees with a summary of the accounts:

Key Issues for Discussion Document (KIDD) produced by Bishop Fleming (BF) reviewed by committee members, discussed and questions asked. The Accounts for all three entities are clean. The audit showed no evidence of fraud.

**Nurseries:** Revenue is OK but it is difficult to maintain profitability owing to staffing/agency costs.

Bad debts within the nurseries is an ongoing concern (£16,000 written off 2022/23) – this audit point cannot be closed down by the auditors until the trust can evidence the process is working.

**Charity:** No liabilities and revenue are up. However, BEST House receives a heavy annual depreciation charge of £50-£60,000 per year. The charity had a small end of year surplus.

The Charity have been asked to provide a letter of support for the nurseries in regard to the going concern.

**MAT:** In-year £1.8 million loss. Cash balances are £5.5 million. Projected loss for the year as at Period 2 is £1 million, against a forecast loss £862,000; staffing costs and retention is expensive.

The audit confirmed BEST compliance with Academies Trust Handbook, Charities Commission and Companies Act.

AL commended KR on the work undertaken in getting the accounts ready, especially as one staff member down.

Finance Manager interviews are taking place next week. DM was thanked for the clarity of his overview and for the work he has undertaken in helping to get the accounts ready for sign-off.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the 2022/23 year end accounts for each of the three entities of BEST.

**Action:** The Charity will be providing a letter of support.

### **Finance and Audit Committee Update**

**Pre-read:** Finance and Audit Committee minutes distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for more detail.

The Finance and Audit Committee reviewed, discussed and questioned the accounts with final tweaks and adjustments put forward. Subject to the minor adjustments the accounts were signed off for full board consideration/approval.

Solar Panel leases taken out pre-BEST are due to expire with a hefty exit fee and lack of information regarding the financial benefits of the panels. The agreement is complex and comprises of both Finance/Operation lease.

KR is working with CS and his team to try and find a suitable solution. Trustees will be updated in due course.

The Finance and Audit Committee agreed the following areas for the 2023/24 internal audit:

Financial = Procurement and Non-Financial = Safeguarding.

It was noted that some MATs do their own internal audits thus saving costs. DM advised another option may be to lessen the scope of the audit in order to reduce costs.

**Action:** Upon completion of the 2023/24 internal audits, the board will review whether the internal audit will continue to be outsourced.

### **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 agreed they are happy with the accounts and are satisfied the Trust is financially sound.

### **Performance Committee Update**

**Pre-read:** Performance Committee minutes distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for more detail.

CM as Chair of the Committee provided trustees with an overview:

Principals were asked to provide the committee with details of the positives, challenges, successes and summer attainment/progress data. CMA Principal and AW were unable to attend the meeting owing to an Ofsted Inspection. SCA Principal was unable to attend the meeting also. CM said the Principals were focused, clear and gave the committee confidence in their schools. The committee were impressed by the new leaders at ETA, RBA and GMA.

Successful Ofsted Inspection took place at CMA – the school received a ‘Good’ Ofsted rating. Outcomes are very good, with much good practice in place. However, middle leaders were not always able to provide evidence to support practice.

**Action:** YH to share CMA Ofsted report with Trustees.

### **Confidential item:**

### **Risk Register**

**Pre-read:** Risk Register – Autumn term distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more detail.

**Action:** 1.1.2 – Pandemics to be reduced from 2 x 3 = 6 → 1 x 3 = 3 and controls/evidence section to be updated.

**Action:** 1.1.6 – Climate Change: No change to the level of risk, CS is looking to devise a sharper plan on how the Green Strategy is managed.

**Action:** 3.1.2 – Recruitment section needs to include quantity.

The Risk Register has evolved over the years from mainly financial to including Capital & Estates and Education. CS proposed changing the template to separate each of the risks into their appropriate areas i.e. Financial, Capital/Estates and Education. All risks would remain within one document but categorised into the three areas, the Executive Lead for each of those areas will then be responsible for reviewing the risks and submitting recommendations to the board. The Risk Register will continue to be presented to trustees for review on a termly basis. **Decision:** Trustees approved Craig’s recommendation to reformat the Risk Register provided it remains one document and no risks are removed.

**Action:** CS to create a proposed risk register template to present to trustees for consideration at their next meeting.

### **Policies**

**Pre-read:** All policies, templates and findings shared with trustees prior to the meeting – see documents for details.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved, following Union Consultation, the Grievance Policy for BEST-wide use.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the BEST Complaints Policy (Trust level only).

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Schools Complaints Policy Template (mandatory).

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Online Safety Policy template for BEST-wide use but asked for consideration as to whether the use of the word ‘advised’ within the network security section is sufficient.

**Action:** CS will look into this and will amend if deemed necessary/appropriate to do so.

### **Personnel Update**

CM has resigned from the BEST Board of Trustees with effect from 31 December 2023.

**Decision:** Trustees, in their capacity as members of the Bedfordshire East Schools Trust Board Members, supported and approved CM becoming a BEST Member with effect from 1 January 2024, in line with article 12 of the BEST Articles of Association. CM accepted.

Trustees thanked CM for her support over the past six years and wished her well.

Nafia Baust (NB) (former BEST CFO) has been appointed (co-opted) as a trustee to the BEST Board of Trustees with effect from 5 January 2024.

TS will become Chair of the Performance Committee in place of CM.

NB will become Chair of the Capital and Estates Committee in place of TS.

Following completion of his second term of office, PW has agreed to remain a Trustee until December 2024. At which time, trustees will look to appoint a new trustee from an educational background.

### **AOB**

**Decision:** On the recommendation of the Finance and Audit Committee, trustees unanimously approved recommending to BEST Members using BF to complete the external audit for one further year.

**Next meeting:** 10:00am on 30 January 2024 at BEST House (re-scheduled from 23 January).

*J. Bowd*

Minutes approved and electronically signed 30 January 2024.