

## **BEST Trustees' Meeting**

11 July 2023, 9:30am – 12:30pm

BEST House Conference Room

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

**Meeting Chair:** Ilona Bond

**Guests:** CBC Cllr David Shelvey (DS)

**Governance Professional:** Yvonne Humphries

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

**Approval of previous minutes:** Trustees' meeting minutes 16 May 2023 – approved and signed electronically

### **Introduction**

IB thanked trustees for their hard work and support during this academic year. There is a hard road ahead following CBC's recent announcement to pause the Shefford/Stotfold 2Tier plans, however, trustees as always, will remain focused on doing what's right for the children they serve.

### **Matters Arising**

**Pre-read:** Individual Safeguarding Audits and BEST-wide Safeguarding Audit Summary report distributed prior to the meeting – see reports for more information.

**GDPR:** No ICO reportable incidents since the last trustees' meeting.

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

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

CS provided trustees with a summary:

- No 'Reds' identified
- Improvements seen across the trust, best set of audits received to date
- No concerns identified
- A few minor areas identified at a school with a new DSL – to be expected – support provided

Trustees discussed and praised the audits, confirming the reports to be useful in providing triangulation with the other safeguarding support and processes already in place.

**Action:** CS, behalf of the Board of Trustees, to send an email of thanks to BEST DSLs.

### **Performance Committee Meeting Update**

**Pre-read:** Performance Committee meeting minutes (13 June 2023) distributed prior to the meeting.

- Full review undertaken, with a deeper dive into schools due an Ofsted Inspection. LVA's ungraded inspection resulted in maintaining their 'Good' rating but areas of improvement were identified and lessons were learnt; these learnings have been shared with GHA.
- Attendance/absenteeism discussed – these are in line with the national average; AW to provide actual pupil numbers in future to enable further context.
- 2Tier is having an effect on recruitment/retention – schools are working hard to minimise the disruption.
- Student mobility is impacting some BEST schools, particularly ETA and LVA. ETA is currently reviewing whether pupil numbers can be capped, as delays in 2Tier will leave insufficient classrooms for the current PAN.
- KS2 results due later this week. SWA have a challenging KS4 and as such, expect a dip in KS4 data.
- SIA summary reports shared with Chairs of LGBs. The reports provide good feedback on cross school networking and the BEST SI Team.

### **Finance & Audit Committee Meeting Update**

**Pre-read:** Finance and Audit Committee meeting minutes (13 June 2023) distributed prior to the meeting.

8 out of 10 schools have forecasted a deficit budget equating to a £864,000 deficit, with a projected surplus thereafter. There are sufficient reserves to cover the deficit and whilst the budgets are reflective of schools nationally, the amount is too high and unsustainable. GMA's Principal joined the meeting to provide information on specific issues affecting their budget; KR, AW are working closely with the school to help reduce their deficit. The committee identified the following as areas of improvement needed:

Increase pupil numbers; staff/pupil ratios; appropriate staffing levels for pupils with statements.

- The Charity and Nurseries have produced budgets with a small surplus.
- Internal Scrutiny provided a few areas of guidance/recommendation; one of which is a term of reference for the Finance and Audit Committee - there is now a Terms of Reference in place for the committee.
- School Budgets will be included as a target for identified Principals in 2023/24.
- Strategies to increase pupil numbers will get harder as the cluster transition to 2Tier – the marketing approach at LSA has had little traction, although ETA have succeeded in attracting approx. 50 pupils from the Biggleswade cluster.
- Trustees discussed some of the additional areas of financial concern regarding 2Tier e.g. 11 additional secondary teachers appointed at RBA.
- FAC Members on delegated authority from the Board of Trustees approved the budgets – return submitted.

### **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.

### **Risk Register**

**Pre-read:** Risk Register distributed for review prior to the meeting – see document for more details.

The Risk Register was looked after by the previous CFO – going forward, CS as COO will be the document owner. The Risk Register will continue to come to trustees on a termly basis, with recommendations provided by the appropriate Central Executive member.

**Decision:** Trustees and Central Executive reviewed and discussed the register – no changes required.

### **Central Services Stakeholder Surveys 2023**

**Pre-read:** GMA Ofsted Inspection Report distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail.

Finance received a lower number of responses than previous years, this is likely owing to personnel changes.

CS confirmed external HR and ICT providers receive the feedback in regards to their particular departments.

Trustees commended the SI Team on their ‘spectacular’ stakeholder reports.

**Action/Decision:** Next year will be the 4<sup>th</sup> year of collating stakeholder views centrally – next summer trends/comparisons will be provided to trustees.

### **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 Safeguarding Policy Template (reflects KCSIE’23 changes).

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Child-on-Child Abuse Policy (no changes except link and date updates).

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Cyber Security Policy (CS confirmed the policy reflects the recommendations from the internal scrutiny report). **Action:** CS to share the Cyber Security report with trustees.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Data Protection (GDPR) Policy for a further 12 months pending new legislation.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Managing Allegations of Abuse Against Staff (One additional sentence included as per KCSIE 2023).

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Pay Policy following union consultation and updated comments.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the Staff Code of Conduct following union consultation and updated comments subject to the following amend: **Action:** Remove the first reference of ‘appropriate’ from section 4.4.

**For information:** ECT Policy approved by Trustees in May 2023 was approved by unions without objection.

**For information:** In May 2023 Trustees approved a 12 months extension to the Redundancy Policy – no union objections received.

**For information:** Intentions to amend the LVA PAN to 45 within the Admission Arrangements Sept’25 have been paused pending recent 2Tier updates.

### **Wellbeing Trustee**

**Pre-read:** TES Article: Headteachers are leaving schools... distributed prior to the meeting – see article for detail

Trustees discussed the article and how this may relate to BEST. Last year BEST completed successful Wellbeing Audit in which BEST were praised for leading the way. However, despite good results, happy pupils and an autonomy model that works well for Principals, the uncertainty of 2Tier is beginning to take its toll on BEST Leaders, which in turn may cascade to staff.

Trustees discussed the matter at length and unanimously agreed for the need to understand what is making them unhappy and then address the root cause. Trustees are committed to the fight and doing everything they can to support the schools.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved the appointment of a Wellbeing Trustee – PW appointed Wellbeing Lead.

**Action:** PW and AL will attend the Wellbeing Lead meetings going forward – AW to forward invites onto PW and AL.

### **BEST Governance Handbook (BGHB) 2023 – Edition 8**

**Pre-read:** BGHB 2023-24 for sign-off and Document outlining the amendments made distributed prior to the meeting  
Mission: 'to grow the BEST in everyone'

Vision Statement: 1. Growth: 10 schools. 2. Standards: Ofsted Good or Better. 3. Financial Stability.

All of which have been achieved.

**Decision:** BGHB 2023/24 reviewed by trustees and unanimously approved subject to the following amends.

**Action:** NB and 'SCITT' to be removed from Page 22.

### **Schools for the Future (2Tier)**

Feasibility and Viability surveys were completed by Easter 2023, with no action taken on the lead up to the May elections, at which Conservatives lost their majority seats. Independents have formed an administration. Following which the SftF plans have been paused pending an internal review of the project; CBC have committed to sharing the outcome by October half-term (2023).

Trustees and Central Executive shared their dismay at CBC failing to share data despite headlining 'catastrophic over supply' issues; BEST have challenged CBC on the accuracy of their data since 2016.

BEST Central feel CBC have failed to understand BEST are a major stakeholder in the project and need to be conferred with and ultimately sign off on their plans. Trustees will not make any decisions that they feel is not in the best interest of the children they serve. Trustees were clear that BEST will not partake in any political games.

#### *Cllr David Shelvey Joined the meeting*

- DS advised he is no longer a CBC Executive and can therefore support BEST in achieving 2Tier, advising this was a top priority and that there is frustration this has not been achieved.
- DS said feasibility results are unknown to him but did state it may not have been financially viable to convert some schools; which schools is unknown. Furthermore, an increase in building costs has pushed project costs in excess of £300 million. However, DS feels within the four-year budget/plans there were sufficient funds to complete Cranfield, Biggleswade and Shefford/Stotfold subject to some changes.
- DS said the Biggleswade cluster needed to go ahead to avoid losing a £14 million Government grant.
- Trustees asked DS whether their party would've needed to pause the programme. DS advised yes but not the Shefford/Stotfold cluster, as it is one-third completed and to pause creates a mess. The Arlesey housing development will commence once the new road is completed – growth would've come from this.
- DS believes the drive should be around improving standards. He confirmed his party had not yet signed contracts as they were awaiting feasibility/viability reports.
- Trustees asked whether these concerns should have been addressed by Conservatives three months ago. This aside, there was a unanimous agreement that the decision to pause a partially completed cluster is disruptive and unacceptable, especially as funds for the Shefford/Stotfold Cluster have been budgeted.
- BEST have worked with CBC through six years of re-calibration and paused programmes. During this time fractions have been caused but behind every decision made by BEST is the commitment to do best by the pupils, families and staff that we serve and to improve standards by aligning with the national curriculum.

**Conclusion:** Shefford/Stotfold are the only cluster suffering owing to a partial transition. CBC need to work with BEST and the cluster with openness and transparency to find a swift resolution – we need to finish what has been started.

#### *Cllr David Shelvey left the meeting*

### **Election of new Chair and Vice Chair of Trustees**

Election process completed. No new nominations. YH received unanimous nominations in favour of keeping the Chair and Vice Chair 'as is'; IB and PW accepted.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously elected IB as Chair and PW as Vice Chair of the BEST Board of Trustees for 2023/24.

**Decision:** Trustees unanimously approved no changes to the Chairs of the Standing Committees of the Board:

**Finance** = DM. **Performance** = CM. **Capital & Estates** = TS. **Subsidiaries** = AL. **2Tier Lead** = JT.

**AOB**

**Decision:** This week Trustees will create and submit a letter to CBC following their decision to pause the programme.

**Action:** YH to share draft letter with trustees for comment/input.

**Next Meeting:** 10:00am on Tuesday 19 September 2023 at BEST House

*J. Bond*

Minutes approved and electronically signed 19/09/2023