

Annual General Meeting

Minutes: 19 July 2021

T34/21

Conducted online using MS Teams due to the pandemic

Present:

Members:

The Ven Douglas Dettmer
Paul Reisbach

Gillian Golder Peter Bethel

Directors:

Cheryl Mathieson, Chair
Nicola Dunford
Jason Hayward-Jones
Roy Gillard

Jane Collings
Mike Fisher
Paul Waterworth

Dominic Course
Sarah Cox
Fiona Walters

Local Board Chairs:

Lynda Cooper – Newton & Teign Cat Radford - Totnes

Officers:

Matt Matthew, Trust Business Manager

Sue Howard, HR Officer as Clerk

Apologies received:

Peter Bethel, Member

Jason Hayward-Jones, Director

Fiona Walters, Director

Jo Carter. Chair of the Woodleigh Federation

Absent without apologies:

Mike Fisher, Director

Corinna Tigg, Chair of the Raleigh Federation

Welcome: On behalf of the Board, the Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions by each attendee were made. The Chair explained that the YMCA Exeter was in the process of being appointed as a new Member and welcomed their representative, Mr Paul Reisbach, to the meeting.

Declaration of Business Interests: The CEO and Dominic Course are registered as Trustees of South Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust and Director of Dacors Ltd. The CEO is a Trustee of the Bearnas Educational Foundation. Roy Gillard is director of Labyrinth Accountancy Ltd. Jane Collings is Governor Support for Babcock and works for Schools Mediation Service for Devon County Council. Gillian Golder member of Alumnis Multi Academy Trust and ACE Multi Academy Trust. Mike Fisher is a Director of Bailey Partnership LLP, Amethyst Property Ltd and Adorn Development Ltd.

1. **Minutes of last Annual General Meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2020 were approved as an accurate record.

2. **External Audit Service**

The Board of Trustees recommends that Bishop Fleming LLP be appointed to carry out the External Audit for 2020-21, the results of which must be with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) by 31 December 2021 and subsequently with Companies House. All Members and Trustees agreed.

Approved**3. Report of the Chair of the Board of Trustees for 2020-21**

Prior to the meeting, the Chair had provided a report for the Academic Year 2020-21. During the meeting, the Chair highlighted and summarised a few areas.

Growth has been slow due to the pandemic, but new schools taken on last year have been embedded well into the Trust. The Trust has been in a successful management partnership with Morchard Bishop C of E Primary School over the last year and approval for them to convert to an Academy and join the Link on 1st October 2021 has been received.

Over the last month since the Government announcement for all schools to become part of a Multi Academy Trust, the Trust had received some enquiries from schools looking to join a MAT. The Trust are aware that there are many small and single stand-alone schools that have found it difficult during the pandemic, and these may be looking at MATs to join for support and security. This may present future growth opportunities for the Trust, but it is important to note that the Trust will only consider schools with the best fit with our vision and values.

Members of the Executive Improvement Team (EIT) have all settled into their roles and have worked well supporting the CEO across the Trust in identifying areas in our schools where greater focus may be required. More recently they have been working with our schools to get them ready for any Ofsted inspections that may be due.

Pupil numbers and ways to increase these are always a challenge. Some schools have benefitted this year from people moving out of cities to more rural areas but the schools and the Trust continue to monitor numbers and identify the different marketing activities to sustain or increase these numbers that work best for each school.

The Chair extended the Board's thanks to all staff, parents, pupils, Members, Trustees, Governors and the EIT for their hard work and dedication over the past 12 months given all the challenges thrown at them. It has been a difficult year but being part of a multi-academy trust has been hugely beneficial in addressing the challenges faced. Special thanks were also given to the CEO and Trust Business Manager who have worked tirelessly to ensure our schools have been kept safe and ready to open, often having to react at very short notice to the continually changing Government regulations.

4. Governance**4.1 Appointment of Member**

To note the appointment by EDEN and the University of St Mark and St John of the YMCA Exeter as a Corporate Foundation Member in accordance with Article 16A of the Trust's Articles of Association. This role will be represented by Paul Reisbach. It was noted that EDEN approved the appointment at its meeting on 14 July 2021 and a resolution has been sent to Archdeacon Dettmer and Dr Golder for their signatures.

Attachment: Articles of Association and Expression of Interest

4.2 Appointment of new Trustees

4.2.1 To note the Board's recommendation to appoint Ms Cheryl Mathieson, non-Foundation Trustee, for a second term from 12 July 2021 and for the Members to approve the appointment. Members approved the appointment.

Approved

- 4.2.2 According to the agreement of the Board of Directors on 7 December 2020, the Members are recommended to approve the appointment of Mr Paul Waterworth as a Foundation Director from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2025. Member approved the appointment.

Attachment: Mr Waterworth's Expression of Interest

Approved

- 4.2.3 According to the agreement of the Board of Directors on 7 December 2020, the Members are recommended to approve the appointment of Miss Sarah Cox as a Foundation Director from 1 January 2021 to 31 December 2025. Members approved the appointment.

Attachment: Miss Cox's Expression of Interest

Approved

5. **Finance**

5.1 Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2020

To note an electronic version of the audited accounts for 2020-21 were circulated to Members in January 2021. This is in accordance with the Academies' Financial Handbook. An electronic version can be found on the Link Academy Trust's website at the following link http://www.thelink.academy/web/key_information/405851. The accounts were lodged with Companies House in January 2021.

5.2 Summary of 2020-21 outcome and 2021-22 to date

To note that preparatory work will begin over the summer by Bishop Fleming for the external audit for the year ended 31 August 2021. The Annual Report and Financial Statement to year end 31 August 2021 and will be ready for the Trustees approval in December 2021. An electronic version will be provided to Members via a link in January 2022. The Department for Education submission date for the budget for 2021-22 and the financial forecasts to 2023-24 is 27 July 2021 and the Trust is on track to meet this deadline.

6. **Proposed changes to Funding Agreements**

To note that Stoke Gabriel Primary School extended the age range from 2 to 11 with effect from 20 April 2021.

To note and approve that Otterton Church of England Primary School proposes to extend the age range from 3 to 11 with effect from 1 September 2021 and Drakes Church of England Primary School proposes to extend the age range from 3 to 11 with effect from 1 September 2022.

GG asked if the Trust have early years specialism in place for these provisions. The CEO confirmed that Stoke Gabriel was an existing village provision, and all staff were TUPE'd across to the Trust. Drake's and Otterton will be Foundation Stage Unit's and initially will be supported with existing qualified teaching staff until numbers increase enough to have the need to employ additional staff just to lead the early years units. *PR asked for an estimated projection of when this may happen and any pressure this may put on staff.* The CEO stated that her expectation would be during year 2 of operating, but capacity is adequate in both schools to accommodate these arrangements.

Approved

7. **Election of Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Directors**

To note a call for Nominations for both roles was issued on 14 June 2021.

The Clerk reported that she had received three nominations for Cheryl Mathieson as Chair of the Board of Trustees and four nominations for Roy Gillard as Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees. It was recommended to all Members and Trustees that CM and RG be appointed into these roles for a further 12 months for 2021-22. All in agreement.

Approved

8. **Any other business**

Local Board representative LC thanked everyone for their work and support. She added that it is a privilege to see the Trust go from strength to strength and to be a part of it.

PW proposed that it may be helpful to explain the Trust policy around taking on future schools.

The Chair of the Trustees began by explaining the Trust is open to looking at primary schools only at this time and would not be looking for secondary schools to join. The Trust is a niche Trust for small primary schools and would concentrate on those types of schools.

Whilst geographically we will concentrate on schools within the 'A38 corridor', that is not to say that we would rule out a school further away if we consider it would be beneficial to the Trust. However, the most important consideration is that any future schools looking to join us would have to fit with our Vision and Values and not cause detriment or jeopardy to our existing schools. It was added that Due Diligence is always a vital part of this process.

The CEO continued to say that our Trust has a unique USP that sticks to community schools, church or non-church and with pupils up to 250. She highlighted the Improvement and Inclusion Hub expansion, and our Academy Heads are able to concentrate on the Teaching & Learning in their school which has really benefitted all our children and their experiential learning. Another strength is our central business structure which remains stable in supporting our schools, particularly financially at all times and the Trust schools have a positive financial position going forward. She added that the Trust is currently speaking to four schools which may be looking to join the Trust in Management Partnerships.

The Chair said that we must be mindful that with expansion of the Trust may come the need to expand the central team to support our process and schools going forward.

GG – what is the self-evaluation for the schools overdue Ofsted inspections? The CEO stated that they have been informed Ofsted will be concentrating on outstanding schools, of which Broadhempston fits this category. The new, but very experienced Executive Academy Head in place has worked so hard over the last year to ensure they are ready and sound. The CEO added that she considers and is confident our schools would all be at good rating.

DD remarked that the Diocesan Director of Education speaks very highly of the Trust and personally of the CEO. He added that EDEN are very pleased that the YMCA have agreed to become a Member and asked PR to give thanks to the YMCA. It immeasurably broadens and strengthens the Christian Foundation of the Trust.

DD continued to say he has noted all the great positives, but as we look strategically ahead, putting Ofsted to one side, what should the Members and Trustees look out for as risk or potential areas of concern for them?

CEO said the curriculum is a priority focus to ensure it is fit for purpose and to maintain and provide consistency going forward in all our schools. The Mental Health & Well-being of all staff and pupils is important and to ensure our children are enabled to learn. This being at the forefront with online learning being maintained and an IT strategy in place for the next three years. We want our pupils to leave our primary schools having the best education, with the best fun and experience.

The CEO added the flexibility and diversity of our staff supporting each other with collaboration is so important in our Trust and is what makes us successful. Vice Chair, RG, wished to pass on thanks received from Member PB to all and gave his own thanks to CM as Chair and the CEO and Trust team.

The CEO added her thanks to Members, Trustees, EIT and all the members of our Local Boards for being the eyes and ears on the ground in the schools and supporting the staff and Academy Heads. It has been an amazing year, albeit with many challenges, but our Trust is like a machine with all the cogs working together and that is so important to our success.

9. **Date of next Annual General Meeting**

18 July 2022 at 6.00 pm. To be advised whether to be held online or at Landscope School.

The Chair added her thanks to everyone for giving up their time to attend the AGM. She also extended thanks to Trustees, Members, Governors, pupils and parents for their continued support of the Trust and hoped everyone enjoyed a restful summer break.