



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BoD) OF THE RURAL CHURCH  
SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST (RCSAT) HELD AT WARMINGHAM VILLAGE HALL  
ON 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023  
(Commenced 4pm)**

**Directors in Attendance:**

P Bostock	(PB)	Chair of Board of Directors
N Badger	(NB)	Executive Headteacher
S Loughlin	(SL)	(left at 5.20pm)
B Holdcroft	(BH)	
P North	(PN)	

**Also in Attendance:**

M Gate	(MG)	Chair Warmingham LGC
V Greenbury	(VG)	Chair Bunbury LGC
J Jones	(JJ)	Trust Business Manager, arrived at 6pm
H Cummings	(Clerk)	

**PART ONE**

The meeting opened with a prayer.

**1. APOLOGIES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB) ITEMS**

Apologies were received and accepted from A Denton and B Brockbank.

There were no additional items of part 1 business to consider.

**2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business to be discussed at the meeting.

General declarations of interest were recorded in full on GovernorHub.

**ACTION: Clerk to send instructions to new Directors and Governors on how to complete Declarations and confirmations.**

**3. MEMBERSHIP**

- a) Directors noted the appointment of BH, TH and PN by Members at the AGM held on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023. PB welcomed PN and BH to the meeting.

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Chair.....Date.....

- b) Directors approved the appointment of the following governors to the Local Governing Committees (LGCs), for a term of 4 years:
- Sarah Bellew – St Oswald’s Parent Governor
  - Cara Dillon – Warmingham Co-opted Governor

**ACTION: JJ to set up RCSAT email addresses for new governors.**

**ACTION: Clerk to add to GH and arrange completion of housekeeping tasks.**

**ACTION: Clerk to update LGC membership lists.**

- c) There were no current vacancies on the trust board.
- d) There were no terms of office due to expire before the next meeting.
- e) DBS and Section 128 checks would be carried out by the trust for all new governors and Directors.
- f) JJ would update GIAS as necessary.

**ACTION: JJ to instigate checks and update GIAS.**

*NB. The following items match those on the agenda, but numbering does not align as numbers 4 & 5 were missed from the agenda.*

#### **4. PART ONE MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The part one minutes of the previous meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022 were **agreed** as a true record, signed by the Chair and retained by the trust.

##### Matters arising

All actions had been completed.

#### **5. CHAIR’S POWER TO ACT**

No actions had been taken on behalf of the Trust Board since the previous meeting.

#### **6. PART ONE REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES AND REPORTS FROM GOVERNORS WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

Directors had reviewed the minutes from each of the LGC meetings, and the committee Chairs added the following comments:

##### **Bunbury**

VG reported that the committee had received an excellent presentation from 3 members of staff, looking at basic skills.

##### **St Oswald’s**

The main items discussed would be covered elsewhere on the agenda.

##### **Warmingham**

MG highlighted three key areas of discussion as follows:

- Presentation on the recent SIAMS inspection. The report was excellent, and the judgement was only limited to ‘Good’ by the restriction of being an Ofsted RI school. The inspection identified two areas for development:
  - Developing courageous advocacy.

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Chair.....Date.....

- The vocabulary of spirituality.
- Safeguarding concerns in respect of car parking and a number of recent ‘near misses’.
- Strategies and support for schools to achieve ‘Greater Depth’ in Key Stage 2 writing. It was agreed that this was very challenging, given the need to evidence greater depth across the curriculum, and it remained a focus for the trust. It was noted however, that the RCSAT Connected Curriculum provided a good vehicle through which to develop greater depth.

PB thanked MG for his support for the school in implementing the new rules around parking to address the safeguarding concerns.

- b) Governors and Directors had met on 9<sup>th</sup> February, with Steve Lancaster of Lancaster Maloney, to review the plans for the St Oswald’s CIF bid. As part of the discussions, it had been agreed that St Oswald’s would re-introduce 2-Year-Olds into the Nursery. Directors formally **approved** the proposal, noting that it was not dependent on the success of the CIF bid.
- c) There were no Director link monitoring reports to receive, but reports from the SENCo and Pastoral Leader had been shared with each of the LGCs.

## 7. **FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE**

Directors confirmed the following:

- a) The 2021/22 audited financial statements had been published on the school website by the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023.
- b) The auditor’s management letter had been submitted by the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022.
- c) The 2021/22 accounts return had been submitted by the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022.
- d) The Admissions arrangements and Appeals timetable for 2023 had been published on the school website by 28<sup>th</sup> February and a copy would be sent to the LA before the end of term. A Director noted that the Schools Admissions Code had been amended to emphasise the need for schools to take account of their legal duty towards children of military personnel.

**ACTION: NB to review Admissions Policy to ensure it complies with the Admissions Code.**

### **Approvals:**

- a) Directors formally **approved** the **SRMSAT** (Schools Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool) which had been approved on GovernorHub prior to submission by 15<sup>th</sup> March.
- b) Directors **approved** the **1-day additional paid leave** for support staff, negotiated as part of the NJC pay settlement.
- c) Directors **approved** the **removal of Scale Point 1** from the Support Staff pay scale, in line with the Cheshire East policy.
- d) Directors **approved** an **increase in the monthly credit card expenditure** allowed for each school. The limit had been £500 per school per month, but an increase in online purchasing meant that this was no longer sufficient. Directors agreed to increase the limit for each school to £1,500.

**Question:** Who can authorise purchases?

**Response:** The school Principals authorise purchases from their budgets within their approval limits, but the cards are held by JJ and LD, the finance officer, who then place the orders

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Chair.....Date.....

- e) Directors **approved** the recommended increase in the Employer MAT contribution rate to the Cheshire Pension Fund for support staff, from 19% to 21%. The recommendation followed the 3 yearly revaluation of the Pension Fund.
- f) Directors reviewed and approved the **budget** forecasts for each school which had also been presented to each of the LGCs.

Directors heard that the trust had been contacted by the DfE in October 2022, as the budget forecast showed a significant deficit in the longer term. JJ had conducted a full budget review and the School Resource Management Adviser was scheduled to visit on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023. Savings already identified had reduced the predicted deficit to approx. £35K at the end of year 3, but the role of the SRMA was to help the trust and recommend areas for further potential savings.

Directors noted that there were several uncertainties in the budget, including:

- Additional funding from Government promised in the budget statement.
- 2 year-olds at St Oswald's and additional pupil numbers would bring additional income.
- £190K was earmarked for building work, but it was still unclear whether this would go ahead.
- Energy cost forecasts have reduced and been revised to reflect current market forecasts provided by the energy supplier.
- Ongoing, unresolved pay discussions between unions and the government.

**Question:** What percentage of total income is a deficit of £35K?

Response: Approximately 1.5%.

**To review:**

- a) **External Audit tender** – Directors heard that the following 3 firms had been asked to tender:

- Afford Bond
- Lyon Griffiths
- Dains

However, only Afford Bond, the current auditor, had responded by the deadline given. It was agreed that this should be presented to members, who could request additional quotes if they felt it was necessary.

**ACTION: Clerk to contact Members regarding the appointment of the Auditor for 2022/23.**

- b) **Monthly Management Accounts** up to and including February 2023 had been circulated on GovernorHub for Directors to review.
- c) Directors reviewed the **Contracts Register** and the **Risk Management Register**.
- d) **Benchmarking** – Directors reviewed the information from View My Financial Insights, noting the areas highlighted for each school:
- Bunbury & Warmingham – Catering costs. Investigation revealed that income had been mis-coded, and the schools' costs were actually in line with other Cheshire East schools.
  - St Oswald's – Premises costs. This was due to the funds set aside for one off premises work and did not represent ongoing expenditure.

OFFICIAL

Chair.....Date.....

## 8. INTERNAL AUDIT

Since the governance re-structure in September 2021, the Audit and Risk function had been carried out by PB and AD, but the Audit and Risk committee had never met. It was agreed that this arrangement should be formalised, with the A&R committee meeting in the first half of each term to scrutinise the accounts and related financial matters.

AD, BH and PB were agreed as member of the committee, and the first meeting would be held at Bunbury school on 18<sup>th</sup> May – time to be confirmed. The meeting would be clerked internally.

**ACTION: PB to amend terms of reference to allow for 3 members, and bring to the meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> May for agreement.**

*SL left the meeting at 5.20pm*

## 9. PART ONE EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER’S REPORT AND MATTERS ARISING

The EHT’s report had been circulated on GH in advance of the meeting and NB highlighted the following areas:

### Admissions

Bunbury had 36 1<sup>st</sup> choice applications for places in September 23. 30 children would be offered places based upon the admissions criteria, but this would mean that some children within the catchment area would not be offered a place.

**Question:** Does church attendance form part of the criteria?

Response: Yes.

### School Hours

The Education White Paper published in March 2022 had laid down the expectation that all schools would deliver a school week of 32.5 hours by September 2023. However, as the Schools’ Bill had not been pursued by government, there was some uncertainty as to whether this was still a requirement. In a recent meeting with unions, NB had been told that it was not.

BH clarified that whilst it remained ‘guidance’, the length of the school day would be a factor in Ofsted’s judgement as to whether a school delivered a ‘broad and balanced curriculum’. It was noted that a school whose day was 20 minutes under the recommended minimum, would lose 2 weeks of school time over the course of a year.

Directors agreed to continue with plans to adjust the timings of the school day to achieve the 32.5 hours per week. The preference was to add time to the end of the school day, as this was where staff felt it would be most useful in allowing more time for the connected curriculum. However, there were potential problems at St Oswald’s where parking was a real issue, and it was agreed that there should be parental consultation across the trust to ensure that all views were heard before timings were agreed.

**ACTION: NB to initiate parent consultation around timings of the school day.**

### MAT Expansion

NB had had positive discussions with the Head Teacher at Bridgemere CE Primary School, and a further meeting was provisionally planned for 24<sup>th</sup> April, where Directors would meet with Bridgemere governors and staff to discuss further.

OFFICIAL

Chair.....Date.....

**10. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS 2022/23**

Updated School Development Plans had been reviewed at the LGC meetings and were available to Directors on GovernorHub.

**11. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER/EXTERNAL ADVISER**

The following SIP visits were scheduled for the summer term:

Warmingham	-	16 <sup>th</sup> May
St Oswald's	-	14 <sup>th</sup> June

**12. STRATEGIC GOVERNANCE**

Directors approved the appointment of the Cheshire East Clerking Service for Board of Directors' and LGC meetings in 2023/24.

The clerk noted that the trust currently had a bespoke package, which had been agreed when the trust operated a different governance structure. CE had agreed to continue this for a further year, but after that, particularly if the trust expanded, they would need to move to the more standard MAT package.

**13. DIRECTOR'S REPORT SPRING 2023**

The Director's Report had been circulated on GovernorHub earlier in the term and items raised at LGC meetings as appropriate.

**14. GOVERNOR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT**

The Executive Headteacher's report had noted that a Governor Training day would be held in the summer term, and the clerk recommended Induction training for new governors.

**ACTION: SL and MJ to contact new governors/Directors about necessary training.**

**15. SCHOOL POLICIES**

Directors had reviewed the following policies uploaded to GovernorHub for Spring 2023:

- RCSAT-P-037 Separated parents Policy
- RCSAT-P-003-01 Behaviour in School Policy
- RCSAT-P-003-02 Exclusions Policy
- RCSAT-P-004 Relationships Education Policy
- RCSAT-P-005 Special Educational Needs and Disability Policy
- RCSAT-P-008 Data Protection Policy
- RCSAT-P-012-01 Complaints Policy

All policies were **approved** with no amendments.

**ACTION: PB to re-format 2 procedure documents.**

**16. PLANNED RESIDENTIAL VISITS**

Residential visits for 2022/23 had been reviewed and approved at the relevant LGC meetings. SL would review all risk assessments on Evolve, as usual, and sign off as appropriate.

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Chair.....Date.....

**17. HOLIDAY/TERM DATES FOR 2023/24**

Term dates for 2023/24 had been approved at the previous meeting. NB was now looking at dates for 2024/25, but it seemed likely that there would be similar difficulties in terms of differences between Cheshire East and Cheshire West.

**18. MEETINGS**

The date of the next Board of Directors' meeting was agreed as Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> July at 4pm, at **Bunbury School**.

**19. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other Part one business to discuss.

*MG and VG left and the meeting moved to Part 2.*

Meeting closed at 6.45pm.

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