



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BoD) OF THE RURAL CHURCH
SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST (RCSAT) HELD AT
BUNBURY ALDERSEY CE PRIMARY SCHOOL
ON 22nd NOVEMBER 2023
(Commenced 4pm)**

Directors in Attendance:

P Bostock	(PB)	Chair of Board of Directors
N Badger	(NB)	Executive Headteacher (Joined remotely)
A Denton	(SD)	
B Holdcroft	(BH)	
P North	(PN)	

Also in Attendance:

B Brockbank	(BB)	Chair St Oswald's LGC
M Gate	(MG)	Chair Warmingham LGC
V Greenbury	(VG)	Chair Bunbury LGC
J Griffith	(JG)	Observer
J Jones	(JJ)	Trust Business Manager
J Knight	(JK)	Afford Bond
H Cummings	(Clerk)	

PART ONE

The meeting opened with a prayer.

1. APOLOGIES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB) ITEMS

There were no apologies for absence. The Chair welcomed Jo Griffith to the meeting.

The following items of additional business were agreed:

- a. Use of RCSAT name
- b. Prevent training
- c. Home School Agreement
- d. St Oswald's CIF bid

2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflicts of interest were declared in relation to the business of the meeting. General declarations of interest were recorded in full on GovernorHub.

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3. ELECTION OF TRUST BOARD CHAIR & VICE CHAIR

PB was elected as Chair of the Trust Board for a further term of one year.

AD was elected as Vice Chair of the Trust Board until the end of his term of office on 3/2/24.

ACTION: Clerk to add election of Vice Chair to spring term BoD agenda.

4. PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Mr J Knight, representing Afford Bond, presented the accounts for the period ending 31st August 2023. The accounts had been available on GovernorHub for Directors to review in advance of the meeting. JK noted the following key points from page 16 of the accounts:

Income

- Funding for educational operations had increased from the previous year, due largely to the higher rate of funding and additional grants.
- Other trading activities has recovered post-Covid, leading to an increase in income of approximately £51K.
- Overall, income had increased by approximately £275K.

Expenditure

- Spending on Educational operations had increased by approx. £150K. Staffing numbers had not changed significantly, so this was due to inflations and increased pay settlements.

Overall, Directors noted an in-year deficit of approximately £68.5K in unrestricted funds, taking the cumulative carry-forward to £398,198. JK assured Directors that the trust remained in a sound financial position, better than many other schools, but they needed to be aware that reserves were reducing.

Looking at the individual schools (P31), Directors noted that Bunbury had seen the largest decrease in fund balance. This was due to the expenditure on the quiet area, and also to the charging structure which would be discussed under item 11 below.

Question: Was any grant funding reclaimed due to underspending?

Response: We are currently completing the necessary returns, but all funds were spent, so we do not expect any to be reclaimed.

JK confirmed that all statutory and regulatory testing had been completed and Afford Bond were happy to sign off the accounts.

Directors **approved** the accounts for 2022/23. Directors **agreed** that they recommend to the Members of the Trust the appointment of Afford Bond as auditors for the next financial year.

ACTION: JK to arrange for electronic signing of the accounts, after which he would submit a paper copy to Companies House.

5. PART ONE MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The part one minutes of the previous meeting on 3rd July 2023 were **agreed** as a true record, signed by the Chair and retained by the trust.

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Matters arising

The action log from the previous meeting was reviewed and the following matters noted:

- VG to share presentation from Safeguarding training. **Action c/f.**
- BH had drafted information regarding school transport which would appear in the next newsletter.

It was noted that there were significant problems with Cheshire East School Transport, so it may prove difficult for parents, but it was still important to provide the relevant information.

6. MEMBERSHIP

- a) Directors noted the resignation of Sheila Loughlin from the Board of Directors, as of 31/8/23. An event had been held to thank SL for her service to the Trust.
- b) LGC membership:
- Caroline Dutton had left employment at St Oswald's and had therefore resigned her position as a staff governor.
 - Directors approved the appointment of Jo McDonald to the Bunbury LGC.
- c) The Chair welcomed Jo Griffith to the meeting and confirmed that Directors had agreed to her appointment as a Director, subject to the approval of Members.

ACTION: PB to email members for approval, and any decision would then be ratified at the AGM in February.

- d) The following term of office was due to expire before the next meeting:
- Andrew Denton – 3/2/24. AD confirmed his intention to step down at this point but would look at ways to support St Oswald's at a more local level.

7. GOVERNORS CODE OF CONDUCT

Directors approved the Code of Conduct for 2023.

ACTION: Clerk to upload Code of Conduct to GH and ask all governors to confirm their acceptance.

8. LOCAL GOVERNING COMMITTEES AND NOMINATED GOVERNORS

- a) Directors confirmed the appointment of the Chairs for the three Local Governing Committees as follows:
- Bunbury – Vanessa Greenbury
 - St Oswald's – Brenda Brockbank
 - Warmingham – Malcolm Gate
- b) Directors agreed that the SEND and Safeguarding monitoring functions could be carried out most effectively at a local level. LGC link governors would therefore be asked to report to the Board of Directors as necessary, but link Directors were not appointed.
- c) The Terms of Reference for the LGCs had been reviewed by each LGC and were approved by Directors with no amendments.

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- d) The terms of reference for the following committees had been circulated on GovernorHub and were approved with no amendments:
- EHT Performance Management committee
 - Exclusions committee
 - Staff grievance committee
 - Disciplinary committee
 - Appeals committee

Membership of the EHT's Performance Management committee, would be the chairs of each of the LGCs along with the Chair of the BoD.

The Admissions committee would consist of NB, PB and the Chair of the LGC for the school being considered.

Membership of all other committees would be agreed as necessary, according to the needs and constraints of the panel.

9. CHAIR'S POWER TO ACT

No actions had been taken on behalf of the Trust Board since the previous meeting. Directors approved the Chair's Power to act until the autumn term meeting 2024.

10. 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:

Warmingham

MG noted that the meeting had taken place just days after the Ofsted Inspection and governors had been very pleased with the outcome. The meeting had looked at the introduction of Pathways to Write and also at the successful completion of work on the Den.

St Oswald's

BB reported that governors had received a curriculum presentation on maths, writing, spelling and reading, before discussing the redevelopment of the front of the school and the potential building project. Governors had also heard that LM had attended a Parish Council meeting, as part of efforts to build stronger links with the local community. BB planned to focus on governor training over the coming year, to address some of the issues raised at the governor training day in October.

Bunbury

Governors had received a presentation from the Pastoral Manager, looking at the development of her role over the previous year and the value to pupils, parents and staff. VG reported that Jo McDonald had been welcomed to the committee, which had congratulated staff on the achievement of the Gold Rights Respecting Schools award. Governors had reviewed the SDP and agreed to hold a workshop at the beginning of next term to look at governor links, effective monitoring and governor training.

MG wished to add his congratulations to Bunbury on their achievement of the Gold Rights Respecting Schools award, noting that such values were increasingly important in the current world climate.

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Recommendations requiring the approval of the Board of Directors1) School Uniform

The cost of school uniform had been raised by parents during the Ofsted inspection at Warmingham. It was therefore proposed that the blazer be made non-compulsory, and the jumper with the school logo be replaced by a plain jumper.

Directors recognised the pressure on parents due to the cost-of-living crisis, and recent legislation that required schools to keep 'branded' items to a minimum. It was therefore **agreed that the uniform of all of the schools should be reviewed** to include 'non-branded' items to give parents greater choice. NB noted that it was more important that children were in school, and uniform should not be a barrier to attendance.

ACTION: NB to amend uniform policy for review by governors.

2) Published Admission Number (PAN) at Warmingham

Directors considered a proposal to increase the PAN at Warmingham from 11 to 12. It was suggested that this would improve the financial position of the school, raising the pupil teacher ratio which the SRMA report had identified as being low. There was concern over space, but it was believed that an extra pupil could be accommodated in each year. The LGC Chair supported the proposal, but noted that any appeals for places would need to be robustly defended if they would take class numbers above the PAN.

Directors approved the proposal.

3) Redevelopment of the front of school area at St Oswald's

It had been hoped to include this work within the proposed building project, but it had now become urgent that the oak tree in front of the school be removed, and there was no immediate prospect of the larger project. Directors were therefore asked to approve expenditure up to £26.5K to proceed with the plans drawn up to redevelop the area. The funds would come from the money set aside for the larger project.

Directors approved the expenditure up to £26.5K, subject to consideration of 3 quotes for the work.

4) Funding of Pond project at Bunbury

The proposed project was to be funded by the PTA, but an opportunity to save money by proceeding sooner than planned, meant that the PTA would be unable to raise the full amount in time. Directors were therefore asked to authorise expenditure up to £12K from the school budget, which would then be repaid by the PTA before the end of the school year.

Expenditure approved

11. FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE (Item taken at the end of Part 1 after arrival of JJ)

Directors confirmed the following:

- a) The 2023 Budget forecast return, 3 year (BFR3Y) was approved in the summer term and submitted by the deadline of 26th July 2023.
- b) The Land and Buildings Collection tool had been completed and submitted by the deadline of 8th November 2023.

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- c) JK of Afford Bond would ensure submission of the following by 31st December 2023:
- 2022/23 audited financial statements.
 - Auditor's management letter
 - Internal scrutiny annual summary report
 - Accounts submission coversheet
 - Governance Statement

ACTION: AD to prepare the Internal Scrutiny annual summary report.

- d) The Trust Business Manager would ensure that the 2022/23 audited financial statements were published on the school website by 31st January 2024.

Approvals:

- a) There were no annual contracts requiring approval.
- b) Directors **approved** the RCSAT Scheme of Delegation (version 18) which had been reviewed by the LGCs.
- c) Directors **approved** the Scheme of Delegation. No amendments were made to any of the limits within the scheme. It was noted that the current Finance Assistant would retire at the end of the school year, and Morven Jones would take over some of the finance tasks. **Directors therefore approved the addition of Morven Jones as a signatory on the trust bank account.**
- d) Directors reviewed the internal charging system for the EHT's time across the 3 schools. Currently, costs were apportioned according to pupil numbers, in the same way as other central support services. However, the cost of the SENDCo and Pastoral Manager, who also worked across the trust, was apportioned according to the number of days per week spent at each school, and this was felt to be a fairer system. Directors reviewed the potential impact on each school's budget, noting the support of the school Principals for the change. **Directors approved the change to the charging system.**
- e) Directors reviewed the price charged for school meals, in light of a price rise from the provider, Cheshire East. The schools currently charged £2.25, but this was not sustainable given that the cost to the schools would increase to £2.59. **Directors approved a proposal to increase the price to £2.75**, which would also cover administration costs.

To review:

- a) Monthly Management Accounts up to and including October 2023 had been circulated on GovernorHub for Directors to review.
- b) There were no major changes to the Academies Handbook for Directors to note.
- c) School Fund balances were noted as follows:
- Bunbury - £60,175
 - St Oswald's - £46,469
 - Warmingham - £31,310

12. PART ONE EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER'S REPORT AND MATTERS ARISING

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

- All three schools within the trust were now rated as Good by Ofsted. It was hoped that this would help in encouraging other schools to join the trust.

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- Staff wellbeing remained a very high priority, particularly in light of a number of pupils with complex needs at St Oswald's (see part 2). However, the letter regarding parental behaviour, sent at the end of the summer term, appeared to have had an impact.
- All schools faced challenging financial situations, with Bunbury now operating a policy of essential purchases only.
- Recent events had highlighted the need for specialist legal support for the trust and three companies had been recommended.

ACTION: JJ to seek quotes from 3 companies offering specialist legal support for schools and Academy Trusts.

13. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANS 2023/24

Directors had reviewed the School Development Plans for each school which had been agreed by the LGCs earlier in the term. All SDPs were **approved**.

Question: The SDPs all make reference to assessment of foundation subjects. How is this done within the connected curriculum?

Response: Although foundation subjects are taught through the connected curriculum, they are still clearly identified. We therefore use subject assessment grids and have a rolling programme of subjects to be assessed.

14. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER/EXTERNAL ADVISER

Directors approved the appointment of Brian Padgett as the School Improvement Partner for the trust for 2023/24.

BP had recently contributed to the performance management of the EHT, the report from which is referenced in the part 2 minutes of this meeting

15. DIRECTOR'S REPORT AUTUMN 2023

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

16. GOVERNOR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

BH was appointed as the training link Director for the trust.

Directors were reminded to keep their training records on GovernorHub up to date. It was noted that relevant training completed elsewhere could be added to the training log.

A board self-review would be discussed at the next meeting in March 2024.

ACTION: Clerk to add board self-review to the agenda for March 2024.

17. SCHOOL POLICIES

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

- RCSAT-P-001 Capability of Staff including appraisal Policy
- RCSAT-P-008-01 Protection of Biometric Information Policy
- RCSAT-P-009-01 H & S Policy and Procedure
- RCSAT-P-010 Admissions Policy 21-24

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- RCSAT-P-011-01 Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedure
- RCSAT-P-021 EYFS Policy
- RCSAT-P-036 Induction of Early Career Teachers
- RCSAT-P-PR-007 Teachers Pay Policy 2022-23
- RCSAT-PR-009-02 Medical Needs Procedure
- RCSAT -PR-009-08 First Aid in Schools Procedure

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

18. PLANNED RESIDENTIAL VISITS

It was agreed that the Safeguarding governors on each of the LGCs would be responsible for reviewing risk assessments.

There were no residential visits requiring approval at this meeting.

19. HOLIDAY/TERM DATES FOR 2024/25

Directors approved the terms dates for 2024/25, and were pleased to note that Cheshire East and Cheshire West were aligned.

20. MEETINGS

The date of the next Board of Directors’ meeting was agreed as Wednesday 20th March at 4pm, Bunbury school.

It had been suggested previously that it would be useful to have a clear protocol setting out the circumstances in which additional meeting could be convened at short notice. BH agreed to draft a document for Directors to consider at the March meeting.

ACTION: BH to draft meeting protocol.

21. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

RCSAT name

Directors agreed that while nothing would change officially, the trust should now be referred to as RCS.

Prevent training

NB noted that while the trust currently required governors to complete Prevent training every year, the guidance suggested that every 2 years was sufficient. Directors **approved** the proposal to make it a requirement every 2 years.

Home School Agreement (HSA)

It was suggested, in light of recent events at Bunbury, that the HSA should explicitly set out the faith-based nature of the 3 schools. Directors discussed, but agreed that it was already included in the Admissions Policy, and was sufficiently referenced in the HSA.

St Oswald’s CIF bid (Condition Improvement Fund)

Directors discussed the future of the building project at STO given the rejection of the CIF bid and the dwindling reserve of money to fund any such project. It was noted that a change of government could lead to greater capital investment in schools, but this was not guaranteed, and could be some way off.

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The LGC had agreed that there was little point in re-submitting the CIF bid, and recommended consideration of different options using the remaining money available. However, PB had discussed with Steve Lancaster (of Lancaster Maloney) and suggested that there was nothing to lose by re-submitting the bid, provided that planning continued to allow work to start immediately should the bid be unsuccessful. It was proposed that the trust could take out a loan, to be repaid using income from the STO Nursery, to fund the project itself, should the bid fail.

Concern was expressed about going against the wishes of the LGC, and difficulties in contacting Steve Lancaster. It was also noted that the CIF bid would need to be amended as the funds available for the school's contribution had decreased.

After consideration, it was agreed that an amended CIF bid would be resubmitted, and plans would simultaneously be drawn up for what could be done if the bid failed.

ACTION: BB to report back to STO LGC.

BB, MG and VG left, and the meeting moved to Part 2.

Meeting closed at 7pm.

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