



**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BD) OF THE RURAL CHURCH
SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST (RCSAT) HELD REMOTELY ON 29th NOVEMBER 2021**
(Commenced 4pm)

Directors in Attendance:

P Bostock	(PB)	Chair of Board of Directors
N Badger	(NB)	Executive Headteacher
A Denton	(AD)	
A James	(AJ)	
S Loughlin	(SL)	

Also in Attendance:

B Brockbank	(BB)	Chair St Oswald's LGC, left at 5pm
M Gate	(MG)	Chair Warmingham LGC
L Davies	(LD)	Chair Bunbury LGC, 4.50pm– 5.20pm
J Knight	(JK)	Afford Bond
H Cummings	(Clerk)	

PART ONE

1. APOLOGIES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS (AOB) ITEMS

All Directors were present, but apologies were received from J Jones, RCSAT Business Manager.

There were two items of additional business to be considered:

- Termly SIP meetings.
- Absence Policy & Procedure.

2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The following conflict of interest was declared in relation to the business to be discussed at the meeting:

- S Loughlin is related to the School Improvement Partner/ External Adviser

General declarations of interest were recorded in full on GovernorHub and the clerk confirmed that all Directors' declarations had been updated since September 2021.

3. ELECTION OF TRUST BOARD CHAIR

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

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4. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIR

AD was elected as Vice Chair of the Trust Board for a term of one year.

5. PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Mr J Knight, representing Afford Bond, presented the accounts for the period ending 31st August 2021. The accounts had been available on GovernorHub for Directors to review in advance of the meeting. JK confirmed that the auditors had been given full access to all relevant information and noted the following:

- Income from Capital Grants had increased significantly in 2020/21, due to the successful CIF (Condition Improvement Fund) bid for the roof at Bunbury.
- There had been a small increase in general funding. £26K of which was Covid Catch-up funding.
- Income from other trading activities had fallen due to the impact of Covid-19.
- An actuarial revaluation meant that the pension liability had increased significantly. However, Directors understood that this was a theoretical liability which was unlikely to materialise, as the pension scheme was underwritten by the government.

Question: Is this in line with other academies?

Response: Yes, the revaluation is affecting all Academy trusts.

- The accounts showed a large increase in expenditure on agency staff, which Directors recognised as the cost of long-term supply to cover staff absence at Warmingham.
- The balance of unrestricted funds looked very good at £516,795.
- Payments totalling £24K from Central Services meant that the balance was low and future expenditure would need to be re-charged to schools. Directors questioned what the payment had been and JK agreed to investigate.

ACTION: JK to ascertain detail of £24K payment and email PB.

Overall, JK concluded that the accounts showed that spending was well controlled, sufficient reserves were available and the balance sheet looked very positive.

Directors had reviewed the accounts in detail, questioning where necessary, and were happy to approve the accounts for 2020/21.

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

The quorum of Directors present **agreed** that they recommend to the Members of the Trust the appointment of Afford Bond as auditors for the next financial year.

JK left the meeting after this item.

6. GOVERNORS CODE OF PRACTICE

Directors approved the Code of Practice for governors across the trust, following its review by each of the Local Governing Committees (LGCs).

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

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7. MEMBERSHIP

There were no changes to the membership of the Trust Board to note.

Directors reviewed the completed skills audit forms available on GH, and approved the following appointments to the LGCs:

Co-Opted governors

- Bunbury – Vanessa Greenbury
- Warmingham - Margaret Blease-Bourne and Helan Isherwood

Parent governors

- St Oswald's – Nicola Davies and Charlie Ashworth.

All terms of office would be from 29/11/21 to 28/11/25.

Directors noted that SL and AJ had been appointed to the Warmingham LGC as an interim measure while additional governors were sought. There were now sufficient governors, so SL and AJ would step down with effect from 29/11/21, but MG noted that they would be very welcome to attend future meetings as observers.

ACTION: Clerk to update membership records in LGC folders on GH.

ACTION: PB to send welcome email.

There were no vacancies on the Trust Board to note, and no terms of office due to expire before the next Directors' meeting.

Directors confirmed that The RCSAT Business Manager would update GIAS and arrange for all the necessary checks to be completed.

8. LOCAL GOVERNING COMMITTEES AND NOMINATED GOVERNORS

The first meetings of the LGCs were felt to have gone well, and no concerns had been raised with regard to the Scheme of Delegation or the Terms of Reference.

Director Responsibilities

It was agreed that AJ would continue as Director with responsibility for SEND, and SL would continue as Director with responsibility for Safeguarding. It was noted that while Local Governors would be appointed to these roles for their schools, there were still a number of vacancies, so the Director oversight remained crucial.

Committee Terms of Reference

The ToR had not been available for review, but were subsequently uploaded to GH for approval. The following Terms of Reference were approved on GovernorHub:

- Local Governing Committees
- Pay Committee
- Exclusions Committee
- Staff Grievance Committee
- Appeals Committee

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9. EXECUTIVE HEADTEACHER'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PANEL

Item carried forward to spring term Directors' meeting.

ACTION: Clerk to add to spring term agenda

10. PART ONE MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The part one minutes of the following meetings were **agreed** as an accurate record:

- Board of Directors' meeting 7/7/21
- HR & Finance meeting 30/9/21
- Board of Directors' meeting 15/10/21

All actions from the meetings above had been completed.

11. CHAIR'S POWER TO ACT

PB reported that he had authorised the schools to return to the use of class bubbles and staggered drop-off and pick-up times, should the EHT and school Principals believe it prudent.

Directors noted that this was contrary to advice from the DfE, but was supported by guidance from Cheshire East and Public Health England.

Directors **approved** the Chair's Power to Act for one year.

12. PART ONE REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES AND REPORTS FROM GOVERNORS WITH SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITIES***LD joined the meeting for this item***

Directors had reviewed the minutes from each of the LGC meetings, and the Chairs highlighted the following areas:

Warmingham

The LGC had discussed concerns over the Year 3/4 classroom; the excessive heat in summer, the oppressive atmosphere and high levels of Carbon Dioxide. KA had met with JJ and the site manager (RH) the previous week and agreed a short-term plan:

- High level window to be repaired to allow it to open
- Sink to be moved to cloakroom
- Interactive whiteboard to be moved to effectively "turn" the room 90 degrees.
- Room to be painted and carpet tiles replaced.

Directors approved the improvements to be carried out by the maintenance team, but agreed that this did not address the main issue of airflow.

It was suggested that Lancaster Maloney be asked to take a look, but agreed that this could take some time and more urgent action was needed in light of the potential impact of high Carbon Dioxide levels.

Directors agreed that JJ and RH should work with a ventilation company to look at possible solutions.

ACTION: JJ/RH to contact ventilation company to look at solutions for year 3/4 classroom.

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Bunbury

The LGC had discussed the excessive time taken for Cheshire East to process EHCP applications, and it was agreed that a letter would be sent from the Trust Board.

ACTION: NB to draft letter for PB.

The LGC had agreed that there should be a 'deep dive' into a curriculum area at each LGC meeting, and the Chair commended the Senior Leadership team on the way they had dealt with curriculum changes.

LD asked Directors to approve the plans for a new car park at Bunbury, so that work could start as soon as possible. Directors noted that they supported the plans, but planning permission would be needed and this would be addressed after the proposed classroom build at St Oswald's.

St Oswald's

In the absence of the LGC Chair, AD summarised the main issues discussed noting the concerns over the number of SEND children who could be accommodated without impacting the quality of education across the school.

- SEND children, and those working at 'Greater Depth' were observed to have made less progress than others, on average. The committee had examined the reason for this.
- Writing had seen the greatest negative impact from the partial school closures and the move to remote learning.
- With a young and relatively inexperienced team, St Oswald's had seen a decline in the quality of teaching. NB and AG were monitoring the situation carefully and working to develop staff.

Safeguarding and SEND

Directors with responsibility for SEND and Safeguarding had visited the school and would submit written reports to Directors.

ACTION: AJ and SL to submit reports for review on GovernorHub.

LD left the meeting after this item

13. FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE

Directors confirmed the following:

- a) The 2021 Budget forecast return, 3 year (BFR3Y) was approved in the summer term and submitted on 15th July 2021.
- b) The Land and Buildings Collection tool had been submitted on 20th October 2021.
- c) JK of Afford Bond would ensure submission of the following by 31st December 2021:
 - 2020/21 audited financial statements.
 - Auditor's management letter
 - Internal scrutiny annual summary report
 - Accounts submission coversheet
 - Governance Statement
- d) The Trust Business Manager would ensure that the 2020-21 audited financial statements were published on the school website by 31st January 2022.

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Approvals:

- a) There were no annual contracts requiring approval.
- b) Directors **approved** the RCSAT Scheme of Delegation, including the Scheme of Financial Delegation.

To review:

- a) Monthly Management Accounts had been reviewed on GovernorHub. As Finance Director, AD had met with the Trust Business Manager to discuss ways in which the reports to Governors and Directors could be simplified and any areas of concern more easily highlighted. AD planned to meet with JJ on a monthly basis to monitor the trust's financial position.
- b) Changes to the Academy Trust Handbook had been detailed in the Director's report circulated earlier in the term.
- c) School Fund balances:

Bunbury	-	£62,817
St Oswald's	-	£47,701
Warmingham-		£32,435

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

Directors commented on the volume of information uploaded to GovernorHub for the meeting, and particularly in relation to SEND. It was agreed that the individual school reports should go to the LGCs in future, with an overarching report from the Trust SENDCo coming to Directors. However, Directors agreed that during the transition phase, it was better to have too much information than too little.

The EHT suggested that it may help with the transition to LGCs for each of the Chairs to attend the triangulation meetings with the 3 school Principals held once a term. The meetings looked at data across the three schools to ensure consistency, and would be useful in developing the Chairs' detailed understanding of the schools. Directors agreed.

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

- The Curriculum had been re-launched in September. The children were enjoying it and staff were inspired. As the end of term approached, staff were reviewing what was working well and what could be improved.
- RE had been a big focus, with the introduction of 'Understanding Christianity' in 2 of the schools.
- Staff and pupil mental health and wellbeing continued to be the top priority for the schools. NB thanked Directors for attending the INSET day after half term, noting that it sent a clear message to staff around the importance placed on their wellbeing.
- The schools were working on industry links and projects aimed at promoting STEM subjects to girls and encouraging writing among boys.
- The schools had adopted Educator for data tracking in March 2019 but were not finding it an effective tool. Added to this, SLT wished to reduce the number of different applications staff had to use, to reduce their workload. As a result, the schools were looking at using the data tracking module in SIMS. The module was free to use and staff were already familiar with SIMS.
- All three schools had been greatly impacted by Covid since half term, with 2 having to implement their outbreak management plans. In addition to problems around staff absence and finding appropriate cover, The school Principals had also had to manage

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communication with Public Health England and with parents. NB also noted that planned interventions had had to be cancelled when cover was urgently required.

Question: Will all of the end-of-term events now be online?

Response: As Bunbury is still in the middle of the outbreak, we have made the decision to move everything online. St Oswald's and Warmingham had their wave of infections earlier, so they are monitoring the situation carefully but no decision has been made yet.

15. SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021/22

The individual School Development Plans had all been reviewed and agreed at the respective LGC meetings earlier in the term. Directors had reviewed updated versions on GovernorHub, showing rag-rated progress against objectives.

Question: Does the order of the objectives indicate a priority or weighting?

Response: No, all objectives are of equal importance.

Directors **approved** the School Development Plans.

16. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PARTNER/EXTERNAL ADVISER

The School Improvement Partner had visited as part of the EHT's performance management and his report would be reviewed under Part 2 of the meeting.

17. DIRECTOR'S REPORT AUTUMN 2021

The Director's Report had been circulated on GovernorHub earlier in the term and items addressed as appropriate. The Clerk advised that the highest priority was the OfSTED Sexual Abuse Review, and a number of Directors had attended the Cheshire East training on the subject.

18. GOVERNOR TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

The Training Link governor reported that in addition to the training mentioned in item 17 above, governors had also signed up for the Induction training modules and data training. A number of Governors had also attended the recent Attachment Training at St Oswald's and the Principal had circulated a recording of the session.

The Trust had purchased the Cheshire East Governor Training package, and as new governors were appointed, they were directed towards the induction training offered. New governors were also advised how to access the NGA.

The clerk noted that the CE training programme for the spring term would be uploaded to GH as soon as it was available.

19. SCHOOL POLICIES

The following policies had been reviewed on GovernorHub and were **approved** by Directors:

Estates:

RCSAT-P-009-01 Health & Safety Policy
RCSAT-PR-009-01 Health & Safety Procedure
RCSAT-P-019 Accessibility policy
RCSAT-PR-009-02 Medical Needs Procedure

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Achievement

RCSAT-P-021 EYFS Policy

RCSAT-P-036 Induction of Early Career Teachers

Pastoral

RCSAT-P-035 Supporting Pupils with Health Needs Policy

RCSAT-P-011-01 Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy

Finance & HR

RCSAT-P-001 Capability of Staff Policy

RCSAT-P-008-01 Protection of Biometric Information Policy

RCSAT-P-PR-007 Teachers' Pay Policy & Procedure

RCSAT-P-031-01 Pensions Discretions Policy

RCSAT-P-010 Admissions Policy 2021-24

20. PLANNED RESIDENTIAL VISITS

There were no residential trips planned requiring Directors' approval.

21. CONFIRM TERM DATES AND HOLIDAYS FOR 2022/23

Term dates for 2022/23 and 2023/24 had been approved at the Director's meeting on 16th November 2020.

Directors noted that the additional day's holiday for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee would be taken on Friday 27th May 2022.

22. MEETINGS

The date of the next Board of Directors' meeting was confirmed as 8th March 2022 at 4pm.

23. ANY OTHER BUSINESSTermly SIP meetings

Directors discussed the need for Local Governors, and Chairs in particular, to be able to challenge data effectively, drive school improvement, and be able to discuss knowledgeably with OfSTED should that be necessary. Following on from the discussion around the triangulation meetings mentioned under item 14 above, it was suggested that the School Improvement Partner also be invited to the meetings to challenge the data presented.

It was agreed that in the absence of summative data, due to Covid, such external challenge would give the Principals and Chairs greater confidence in defending their data should they be challenged.

ACTION: NB to invite the SIP and LGC Chairs to the next scheduled triangulation meeting.

Absence Policy and Procedure

The EHT explained that under the current policy, staff with an ill child were able to take half a day's paid leave in order to arrange suitable childcare. However, the Covid situation had made this unworkable, with children having to isolate, and parents unable to find childcare. In response, the EHT had authorised all necessary absence, but this in turn was causing disquiet as some staff had needed to take quite a lot of time off while others had not. Similarly, some roles within school could be done from home, while others could not, so there would be a disparity if time taken

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beyond the half-day was unpaid. The EHT recognised that there needed to be some limit to the amount of time allowed, and sought Directors advice on what that should be.

Directors acknowledged that it was extremely difficult to ensure fairness to all, and there was no ideal solution. They requested a copy of the existing policy to review.

ACTION: NB to circulate a copy of the Absence Policy.

The part one meeting closed.

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