

Chair of Governors' Forum

Meeting notes – 23rd November 2021

	<p>In attendance Bibury – Anthony Godwin Clearwater – John Coles Coaley – Carole O'Donnell Dursley – Neil Grecian Field Court Infant – Carl Curtis Hardwicke – Sarah Nicholson Lakefield – Apologies Longney – Minchinhampton – North Cerney – Piers Ormerod Primrose Hill – Katherine Clamp St John's – Apologies St James – Kelley Sutton St Matthews' – Ali Spencer St Lawrence – Susan Holmes Whiteshill – Dr Katie Blaney Winchcombe – Anna Hay</p> <p>Central Team - Rachel Howie (RH), Nicki Wadley (NW), Keren Bass (KB) Trust Board – The Venerable Hilary Dawson -Trust Board Chair</p>
1	<p>Opening prayer, introduction and apologies</p> <p>RH welcomed all present. RH thanked all for their commitment to governance and their schools and particularly to those governors who were attending to represent their Chair.</p> <p>Apologies were noted and accepted from Anthony Griffiths from St John's Church of England Primary Academy and Keith Withers from Lakefield Church of England primary School.</p> <p>HD opened the meeting in prayer.</p> <p>RH began by reminding all present that this meeting was intended as a two-way conversation and that she and the Trust Board are committed to hearing the voices from local governance which will feed into wider conversations across the Trust. RH explained that she is keen to hear different views and opinions and have robust conversations – professional conversations = robust governance.</p>
2	<p>Actions from last meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- RH proposed that the next Chairs' Forum be held in person for all with a focus on the Trust's strategic plans. All present agreed this would be a welcomed opportunity.- NW will share the active listening report with the meeting notes. RH asked that these are shared with all members of LGBs.- RH asked that anyone interested in piloting a peer-to-peer network to contact NW. NW confirmed that no-one had made contact regarding this. RH explored why people were not taking up opportunities offered in response to requests and suggestions given to the central team. RH asked if it is a Covid timing issue. Governors shared that schools still feel as if they are in survival mode and that governance still returning to its post-pandemic normal. RH confirmed this is understood but she didn't want to make assumptions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NW to share DGAT Local Governance Meeting Observations Report with forum meeting notes. Chairs to include the report as an agenda item at their next LGB meeting and reflect with governors where the LGBs own governance is reflected within the report and whether any of the recommendations can be implemented in their own governance practice. RH asked that if this has not been done for Chairs to please ensure it is at the next LGB meeting. - Chairs to share HS's presentation with all members of their LGB and implement the governor actions and considerations highlighted. RH asked that if this has not been done for Chairs to please ensure it is at the next LGB meeting.
<p>3</p>	<p>Feedback from Chairs on sharing of Active Listening report and LGB Summary report.</p> <p>RH highlighted some key actions taken since the active listening exercise had been shared. The central Buildings and Operations team has doubled in capacity. Governors asked who the first point of contact now was, RH confirmed that governors could contact Claire Morgan in the first instance. Updated contact details will be shared in the Howie Herald.</p> <p>Governors present shared examples of joining each other's LGB meetings and attending shared training to develop relationships and governance practice. This was shared as a supportive and useful exercise. NW reminded Chairs that all Chairs contact details are included in the Chairs' Handbook and that she is happy to make connections or Chairs can contact each other directly.</p> <p>Governor's shared that they are still working to rebuild governance and reconnect governors and connect new governors. It's a time of establishing and re-establishing relationships. Chairs recognised the importance of having space in meetings for less agenda-focused conversations.</p> <p>Some Chairs felt that tangible governance and being able to get into school safely to undertake monitoring was now being really missed – ideas of how to address this were shared by the group from their own schools.</p> <p>It was shared that governors had felt a lack of confidence in asking questions when members of the central team visited meetings and so governance wasn't seen at its best. It was recognised that relationships needed to be built with LGBs and NW suggested that maybe LGBs would like to invite members from the central team to visit sometimes. RH thanked governors for the richness of this conversation and the support and ideas shared amongst the group. RH committed to make space in future meetings for a 'bounce around' conversation.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Trust Board: Update on Trust Board strategic priorities.</p> <p>RH referred to the report she had provided prior to the meeting. In relation to the Trust's growth strategy, RH explained that there are two schools in the pipeline to join the Trust in the year ahead - one sponsored and one converter. There are also two secondary schools who are seeking initial conversations about what joining the Trust would mean for them. This development has led the Trust Board and Executive Leadership Team to consider what supporting secondary schools would look like for the Trust but clarified that no decisions have yet been made.</p> <p>A Chair asked RH to explain more about small schools. RH explained that a small school is designated as such if it has less than 120 pupils but across the Diocese and within the Trust we have schools with many less than this. RH explained that challenges small schools face include deficit budgets, the challenge of maintaining full time Headteacher and SLT leadership as this is not a financially viable leadership model. If the Trust is to welcome small schools into the family, which it would like to, then the Board needs to consider how this can be done to maintain the school's and Trust's sustainability. This might include clusters of schools, shared leadership, centralised services or support from larger schools.</p> <p>A governor asked RH if the Trust was considering centralised procurement. RH said yes, initially looking at current suppliers to gain best discounts for schools. Chairs asked why this wasn't being looked at more robustly and on a larger scale of centralised procurement? RH explained that there was the need for a cultural change for some schools and there was a resistance to moving towards a wholly centralised procurement system. RH shared that she understood why this was and wanted to support schools along the journey rather than forcing change. RH shared the Chairs and LGBs could be helpful in supporting</p>

	<p>Headteachers and School Business Managers to recognise the benefits and be less fearful of changes that would ultimately save the school money so resources could be diverted. RH clarified that the priority is to achieve the best value on goods and services, reducing spend and maximising income for schools.</p> <p>A Chair asked what the timescale for the planned IT strategy is. RH explained that the IT strategy is red on the Trust risk register as it is known that IT provision is ineffective and fragmented for the organisation as a whole and to varying degrees at local level. RH said it is likely that changes will start to be seen within a year. A consultant will be engaged to review the infrastructure and cost the improvements required. The consultant will consider existing IT stock, procurement and data security. A governor asked what the cost will be to schools. RH confirmed that there will be no cost to schools, the Trust will apply for TCAF funding. RH encouraged Chairs to share via NW the details of any local governors who had the expertise to contribute to the IT strategy review.</p> <p>A Chair asked if there were any plans to develop a 'DGAT brand' school website. RH shared that she didn't want DGAT to be a Tesco superstore with lots of identical Tesco Express schools that all look the same. Our schools' uniqueness and identity is important to them and the Trust but it is also important to show they are part of a wider family of schools. If schools would like to create a pilot, looking at websites and where commonalities may be appropriate, then this could be a later stage of the IT strategy – RH invited schools to contact her to discuss further.</p> <p>RH confirmed that KB continues to review finance systems – this is a necessary change and there is a cultural shift needed to recognise the importance of balancing local perceptions against wider organisational benefits. RH shared that the approach of creating pilots to test new processes was working well and being positively received. RH explained that if new schools join the Trust then we will start working with them in different ways from the start. RH committed to continuing to provide regular updates on the Trust Board's strategic planning.</p> <p>HD thanked Chairs for their insightful and helpful comments which she shared would be encouraging for the Board to hear. HD committed to feedback the conversation to Trustees at the next Trust Board meeting on 30/11.</p>
5	<p>DGAT Trust Board and LGBs – relationships and information sharing</p> <p>Information sharing processes: RH asked for ideas of how LGBs could share information on the effectiveness of local governance and important points of interest with the Trust Board. NW shared examples of how other Trusts currently do this. Chairs asked what the Trust Board wanted from this, is it interaction? feedback? RH explained that her understanding was that Trustees wanted to understand issues around local governance and how effective local governance is across the Trust. HD confirmed this. HD referred to the planned event for LGBs and the Trust Board in February 2022 and suggested this may be a useful opportunity to have this conversation between LGBs and Trustees.</p> <p>A Chair suggested that there appears to be the need for a broader connectivity strategy that could create smaller cluster groups which focus on key Trust priorities and strategy.</p> <p>Save the Date: Thursday February 17th 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm This is an event for LGBs and the Trust Board to come together. We have booked an external speaker – Leora Cruddas, CEO from the Confederation of School Trusts, the leading sector organisation for academy trusts. The event will provide the opportunity for sharing best practice and networking and any ideas for the event can be shared with NW.</p>
6	<p>Teachers' Pay Award. RH provided an update on the Teachers' Pay Award. The Audit and Finance Committee has considered the three options available and feedback from Headteachers and Chairs. The committee has determined that no action is not appropriate but has asked for some further financial information to support the committee's decision making. RH explained that a decision could not be made around support staff pay until an agreement is reached with unions nationally. A final decision will be made at the Trust Board meeting on 30/11 and any payment will be made in staff's January salaries. It was suggested that RH write to all staff to explain this. Action: RH to write to all staff to explain Teacher Pay Award and issue relating to support staff pay.</p>
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8	<p>Clerking benchmarking exercise</p> <p>NW shared the key learning from the benchmarking exercise and recommended that Chairs consider the suggested next steps with their Headteachers. Action: NW to send individual clerking information to each Chair.</p>
9	<p>Looking ahead – key dates and information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust AGM – Dec 7th following this RH will send out annual accounts and her report to the Members. Action: RH - Finance audit completed – the audit was led by KB and whilst there are some points to consider it was a successful and ‘clean’ audit. A Chair commented on how the changed accounts reporting structure had led to improved governor understanding of the school’s accounts. RH explained that the central team finance leads could be invited to LGB or Finance and Resources meetings to provide training and support for governors. - RH visits to schools – RH shared that she is visiting all schools between now and the end of term and how joyful it has been to be in schools again. - HT performance management update – RH and Helen Springett completing this term, Chairs or a LGB representative are invited to be involved. - Season of advent and Christmas – a reminder that Advent is the next season in the church calendar - Tiring term – additional challenges remain in schools despite the national narrative of a ‘post pandemic’ world - Upcoming training – Role of the SEND Governor, 1st December 6.00pm - 8.00pm on Zoom. Please ensure a representative from your LGB attends. - CofE NPQs – these are currently free so huge savings for schools. Facilitated by the Church of England, Church school staff get the usual training but within a Church school context so there are added benefits of the CofE option. Please encourage staff and leaders to consider this opportunity. There is a wide range of opportunities on offer and the links to find out more have been shared in the Herald.
10	<p>Chair of governors’ Forum 2020/21</p> <p>1 March 2022 - Zoom 26 April 2022 7 June 2022</p>
11	<p>AOB</p> <p>There was no AOB.</p>