

MENDIP EDGE FEDERATION

MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY GOVERNING BODY MEETING

Held on Monday 8 July at Fairlands Middle School

PRESENT:

Mike Brownbill, Roger Burdock (left 19.15) Rachel Evans, Kate Golding, Lisa Hill, Richard Holmes, Mike Jory, Sarah Lorimer, Stefan McHale, Diane Sleeman, Adrian Warman, Maggie Wookey

APOLOGIES RECEIVED AND ACCEPTED: Lucy Frampton, Tim Hawkings, Sophie Richards, John Virgin

IN ATTENDANCE: Debbie Andrews (Clerk)

BY INVITATION: Jo Dodd, Keith Perry, Chief Operating Officer, WLT (part)

MEGB18/19:63 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None.

MEGB18/19:64 FUTURE OF THE FEDERATION

Mr Warman explained that the purpose of the meeting was to make a decision as to whether or not the Federation should join the Wessex Learning Trust (WLT). The staff and community consultations have taken place and comments have been received. The consultations have gone largely as expected. The feedback and questions received had been summarised in a document compiled by Mr Warman. There have also been questions posed to the WLT which are included in the document. As part of the process, Mr Warman has spoken to almost all the Chairs of the academies in the Trust. It was also recognised that additional informal staff interactions have taken place with some governors which would be represented in discussion at this meeting.

Mr Warman summarised making the decision into five areas:-

- Benefit for children.
- Benefit for staff
- Financial position
- Uncertainty of LA position and WLT strategy
- Local governance / local school identity

Mrs Golding had contacted each of the Federation schools to ascertain how much they currently pay for the LA services and they had provided some broad brush information. It was very difficult to exactly determine LA costs as we do not know what the LA take out before the money is given to the schools.

Taking everything into account, Shipham and Draycott are paying approximately 4.5% of their budget. Cheddar is paying approximately 4.6% for SSE. It had not been possible to get a direct comparison for Fairlands but indicative figures were similar to the 4.5%. Mr McHale commented that some LA services such as insurance do not provide the same level of cover as is currently provided within the Trust. The recent cyber-attack is an example of this.. LA do not have the resources to provide the services they used to. A governor asked how would the cost of maternity leave be covered which is currently paid for the LA.

It was acknowledged that it is difficult to make like for like comparisons. LA dedicated school grant some money for statutory functions. Academies receive their money direct from the DfE. Trusts vary with the amounts they ask as a top slice. Reassurance has been received from the other Chairs that the money is available for necessary expenditure.

Mr Perry joined the meeting and Mr Warman summarised the current position regarding where the governor body were in the decision making process.

The governors then put questions to Mr Perry as follows:-

SL – WLT Scheme of Governance - 4.1 'Scope of LGB's'. If we join as a Federation, how does the structure work.

KP - the Trust already has different models including shared leadership and governance across some schools. Headships would stay the same as they

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currently are in MEF.

MB – gender balance in the governance and trustees.

KP - Claire Hudson, Diocese and NLG, doing a governance review. WLT is already aware and she has commented on the imbalance. Need to try to increase the female representation, but mindful it needs to be right skill set.

Once Claire produces her report it will be for trustees to consider.

KP gender pay gap analysis something the Trust is aware of. This is closing as more women are promoted into leadership roles.

RH – members are not supposed to be governors but they are. What is the plan for moving forward?

KP – Structure was looked at and found there were some individuals with multiple roles so potential for conflict of interest. This is being addressed and is a condition of the RSC to do so before accepting any more schools into the MAT.

RH – how independent is the Kings leisure centre?

KP – leisure centre is an independent company so its financial performance will not impact on the Trust but structure and relationship allows some mutual commercial benefits. Articles of association apply to the leisure centre.

AW – any risk.

KP – not financial, as long as it is a separate company. There is the potential for reputational risk through association with the school and Trust.

RH - trustees – disassociating the trustees and governors. How does culture set by trustees fit with our governors?

KP - open appointments – people that know the schools. Trustees very welcome to ideas. There is a vacancy - only appointed 12 out of 16 possible trustees.

MB – question around handling of big events – e.g. a major fire in a school.

KP – the Trust has a business continuity plan and insurance against fire which would not only cover rebuild but also management resource.

SL – who has the final say with recruitment – governing body?

KP - just changed. Schools very independent and talk to Mr Ball and KP about what they want to do. If there is a budget problem, they will be challenged to identify savings. The trustees have the final say just to make sure. The Trust has been using Browne Jacobson for HR support but is looking to recruit an HR Manager this year to bring it in house and who can also support with wider staffing issues.

SL – have you had to remove a governor yet?

KP – no. There was one situation where it came close around capabilities for the governing body to agree a school budget but the situation was resolved with support and open conversations.

MW – four schools. KS1 data is down – what would be the impact?

KP – look at situation. LA can remove governors if a school goes into category.

KG – good flow of information is important. How does information flow within the Trust?

KP – getting better. Headteachers meet every three weeks with Mr Ball and Mr Perry. Chairs have recently established a separate Chairs meeting. The executive team meet every three weeks and Mr Ball and Mr Perry meet every week. System called Firefly used by Kings of Wessex (Know) - governors have access. Trying to refine communication so that what is sent out is concise and meaningful.

RB – School Condition Allocation (SCA). How is it going to work?

KP - If the MEF join the WLT, the Trust would exceed the 3,000 pupil threshold and become eligible for SCA of £900,000 per annum. The money would be allocated on a priority basis. Kenneth and Edwards would undertake a survey at all schools in the Trust and prioritise the work required. SCA is used for repairs and maintenance and cannot be used retrospectively. KP – profits from leisure centre can be used for sporting. Looking at ways to get more money. In 2011 there was money available for new academies but no incentives now. Trust looking at ways of getting more money. Academies formed as not able to rely on Somerset County Council.

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AW – what is the strategy for growth?

KP - one of reasons for growth is the Trust is too small. Need to grow to protect themselves but do not aspire to replicate the nationwide MAT model. Cheddar Valley is about the education - re-align everything from pre-school all the way through and financially save money along the journey. Looking at other like minded secondary schools to join the MAT to share experience with KoW and set up clusters. Look at a trust of say 5,000/6,000 to combat other trusts. No plans to become a two tier system.

DS - scheme of delegation – what about the whole child vs business models. Evidence that whole child is important.

KP - cannot prove to you but can reassure that the Trust consider the journey is stronger and better for all with consideration of the whole child. Would be subjective feedback.

SL – it is important that the government is lobbied regarding the dire financial situation. We need Mr Ball to write to James Heapey regarding the financial situation that schools and the education of children face.

KP - absolutely right. Complete disconnect between schools / academies / government. We need to work together. The Trust is seeking a meeting with the RSC to discuss funding. Would look to change the way funding is organised; schools have to look at October funding for pupils now.

MB – is the Trust interested in a university being involved with research.

KP – really good idea. Looking to be a training arm and training school. NQT's able to learn together as a group, lots of sharing of ideas.

AW – does maternity pay come out of the top slice?

KP - maternity pay and absence is not covered so would come out of the school staffing budget.

AW - would there be a cap on the percentage of the top slice. How much would it be in three years time.

KP – figure is a discussion with Headteachers each year. Next year could have been 4.5% but decided to run at 5% to maintain a small buffer and recognising previous expenses. Looking at clearing debt and employing an HR person. Desire to come down to 4% in near future.

AW - would Trust be open to discussion regarding the top slice in year one being lower for the Federation? MEF should not be paying for historical Trust costs.

KP – subject to negotiation. The £25,000 per school which MEF would receive does not leave much change post-conversion. LA will be the biggest bill. May be opportunity to agree discount for four schools with Browne Jacobson.

LF via AW - how is SEND information shared within the Trust. Can information still be kept at school level?

KP – processes need to support the child and best practice. The Trust considers how they can work together as a group of schools.

MW – how is the Trust funding inclusion and SEND?

KP – a couple of schools have small reserves agreed to be spent on high needs children. Do the best for the children in a difficult situation. No big area of fat in schools, look to find little bits.

KG – how can we obtain funds if an individual school may be in deficit for a short period?

KP – loans. The Trust has an arrangement where loans can be provided from one school to another.

SM – top slice pays for a lot of services. What sorts of things stand out from arrangements with the LA?

KP - tree management, contract monitoring, Care First, supply cover. Schools like to do things in their own way with providing supply cover.

SM – what are the plans for school improvement.

KP – using towers of learning, Educator, data alignment, working with the first schools on MFL. Blink visits – literacy, numeracy, science and humanities.

KG / MW – sharing of subscriptions / licenses, e.g. Twinkle, the Key,

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Educator

KP – the Trust is often able to find small savings through shared licensing or negotiating discounts. These small savings all matter and make a difference.

SM – Trust showed 5% debt before. Has this been cleared?

KP - will be by the end of next year. Recognised the initial set up costs for certain central resources in the Trust.

KG – do the loans and debt simply prop up budget rather than project forward.

KP – it allows schools to re-shape their budgets. Debt can be right for the short term and avoid the need to make knee jerk reactions, e.g. not losing good staff in thin years when we might need them the following year. Plan three years to get back on track.

DS – potential difference in salaries between roles and staff on different levels between MEF and Trust - how would the Trust approach this?

KP – looking at commonality for support staff which will identify responsibilities of roles and determine pay on those responsibilities. Schools already in the Trust have all come from Somerset LA so likely to be similar pay levels.

AW – TUPE will ensure conditions are maintained by new employer for two years as normal practice.

MB - governors should have a finance committee and standards committee. We have a foundation committee

KP – Trust must have finance, HR and school improvement committees. Governors recognised MEF would need to retain a foundation committee for admissions at Draycott.

RH – is broadband included in top slice.

KP - not in top slice. Allows flexibility for schools regarding providers in different areas. MJ said that Shipham gets free broadband as part of a village sign-up deal with Truespeed.

RH - if we join, the WLT would be 30% bigger. What are your plans and thoughts from increased scale.

KP – estimated additional revenue of £80,000 to the Trust could be spent on additional central resource such as an educational psychologist and releasing additional time for Mr Ball to spend on MEF schools.

MW – If we join we would use a different financial management package.

KP - that is included in the top slice. The Trust uses one system (PS Financials). Finance Officers across the schools would receive training.

Mr Perry left the meeting – 20.00.

A short break was held and the meeting resumed at 20.15.

Following Mr Perry’s departure, governors held a discussion on whether they had enough information to make a decision. Governors acknowledged that Mr Perry had answered the questions very well from a financial point of view, but had not provided clear evidence of the benefits to children. Governors also recognised the potential threat to the caring nature of the Federation. If the MEF are to proceed it will be necessary to emphasise the importance of our continued desire to focus on children, teaching and caring culture. It was acknowledged that there will be changes to certain admin tasks and governors need to be aware and support those colleagues involved. A governor commented that the school reserves are reducing year on year and that the Federation needs to do something to protect itself. Governors recognised that the availability and effectiveness of LA services are decreasing. Over time if the Federation joins the Trust, it will have a chance to influence things and governors recognised it may be beneficial, if possible, to find a measure and monitor satisfaction in the school communities (staff and parents).

Mr Warman suggested a vote by the governing body to continue the process of joining the WLT having considered feedback from our own consultation, input from Mr Perry at this meeting and recognising there are matters which need to be investigated and further satisfied (particularly top slice contribution, a place on the Board of Directors, meaningful training for key support functions). A vote took place and the motion was carried to proceed

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on this basis.

It was agreed that the outcome of this meeting would be shared with the staff in the Federation in the next few days and that information would be shared with the wider school communities when there was more definite information and timetable.

MEGB18/19:65 AOB

Governors agreed to Mr Perrett and Mrs Dodd being the agreed signatories for Draycott and Rodney Stoke and Shipham respectively.

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