

MENDIP EDGE FEDERATION

MINUTES OF GOVERNING BODY MEETING

Held on Tuesday 17 March 2020 at 6pm, at Cheddar First School

PRESENT:

Kate Golding, Richard Holmes, Sarah Lorimer, Stefan McHale, Diane Sleeman, Adrian Warman, Maggie Wookey, John Virgin, Will Ewens (in the room)

Mike Brownbill, Lucy Frampton, Tim Hawkings, Lisa Hill, (via telephone loud speaker due to self-isolation, as a result of the coronavirus pandemic)

APOLOGIES RECEIVED: Roger Burdock **IN ATTENDANCE** Debbie Andrews (Clerk)

The Chair confirmed those present on the phone could hear clearly and be heard in the room. Good etiquette for teleconferencing was agreed.

MEGB19/20:30 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

None.

MEGB19/20:31 AGREEMENT AND SIGNING OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 14 NOVEMBER

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January were agreed and signed by Mr Warman.

MEGB19/20:32 MATTERS ARISING

In view of the lengthiness of the agenda items, no matters arising were discussed. Governors noted all were in hand.

MEGB19/20:33 REPORTS

Headteacher Reports – it was agreed that the headteachers would respond to the questions posed by Mr Warman, Mrs Sleeman and Mrs Golding by email.

Hds

The headteachers shared with the governors the situation in their schools with the coronavirus pandemic. They were concerned that it would become increasingly difficult to remain open with the numbers of pupils and staff declining. All assemblies, external visitors and sporting fixtures have been cancelled to try and alleviate the risk to pupils and staff.

Some schools had already closed or partially closed. The schools were already putting plans in place for children to learn at home should they close and plans in place for vulnerable learners.

Residentials

Residentials are due to take place to Osmington Bay (Fairlands), London (Fairlands), Germany (Fairlands) and Whitemead (first schools) during this academic year. In view of the escalation of the situation, it is highly likely that they will be postponed but the cost / insurance implications of cancelling are not clear. The venues position is that they are still open to receive the visit even if the schools may be closed. The headteachers all have reservations about the pupils travelling. WLT have put a halt on their trips. There seems to be no guidance from the DfE on UK trips.

Mr McHale will check with WLT whether, if we join them, their insurance will cover our trips.

SM

A governor commented it is not safe at the moment so taking advice would be good. Another governor commented that there may also be families that do not want their children to go. May be families could claim on their own insurance.

Governors agreed to give authority to Mr Warman, Mr Holmes or Mrs Sleeman to approve and sign the visit risk assessments based on the situation and public health advice at the time it is known whether the trips can proceed.

Cheddar Staffing – Mrs Wookey advised the governors that Jayne Phelps, Finance and Operations Manager had tendered her resignation with effect from 19 April. However, she had agreed to stay until the end of May.

Mrs Wookey then shared with governors that she was resigning with effect from 31 August. Mr Warman commented that Mrs Wookey would be a massive loss and thanked her for everything she had done for Cheddar First

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School and the Federation. It was agreed that how Mrs Wookey is succeeded needs to be considered as the role had changed considerably in recent years. A working group will be set up comprised of Mr Warman, Mr Ewens, Mr Brownbill, Mr McHale, Mr Holmes, Mrs Sleeman, and Mrs Golding. Mr Warman will lead the working group. Mrs Wookey will share the news with her staff and decide when to advise the parents.

MW

Governor Appointments

Mr Warman made mention that we are short of governors and had a few ideas from recent Diocese training of how to approach recruitment.

Finance Committee – as per the meeting held on 3 March.

Foundation Committee – the committee met on 12 March. They looked at the recent SIAMS inspection and agreed to draw up an action plan. The committee agreed not to exceed the PAN of 18 at Draycott and Rodney Stoke First School

AW

Governor support – Mrs Andrews advised that there are emails being sent by SSE Governor Services directly to governors on a regular basis.

Governor visits – Mr Warman has visited Cheddar looking at English and commented on the new library area. Mrs Lorimer has also spent some time looking at English in Fairlands.

Safeguarding – Mrs Sleeman made visits to Cheddar on 5 February and Fairlands on 16 March to review safeguarding. The DSL's met recently to go through their safeguarding audits for completion by 31 March. It was useful for the safeguarding leads to share their experiences. All schools are busy with specific child protection cases. It is hard for them to meet the needs of many cases due to not being able to get hold of the right agencies. Mrs Sleeman thanked them all for what they did

Standards – further date to be arranged.

MEGB19/20:34 FUTURE OF THE FEDERATION

DA

The governors proceeded to discuss the proposal to join the Wessex Learning Trust (the "Academy Trust")

Mr Warman had circulated a paper to all governors with the agenda.

Governors discussed and reflected why the Mendip Edge Federation had decided to embark on looking at joining the Wessex Learning Trust. Mr McHale gave his opinion that it was the right way to go and Mr Ewens added that for small schools there were a lot of benefits for teaching and learning resources and SEND. Mrs Wookey commented that there was professional development for teachers and that it would be good to re-unite the Cheddar Valley schools for the pupils journey from First School through to Secondary. A governor asked about exclusions. Mr McHale replied that he had met the WLT inclusion officer and that there would be plans in place to help the pupils in Years 7/8 at Fairlands at risk of exclusion to work with the inclusion team at the Kings Academy.

Conversion

It was noted that Cheddar First School, Draycott & Rodney Stoke CofE VA First School, Fairlands Middle School, Shipham CofE VC First School (the "Schools") had considered to convert to academies under the Academies Act 2010 and join the Wessex Learning Trust (the "Conversions"), the target date for conversion agreed by the Regional Schools Commissioner being 1 April 2020.

It was noted that it would be necessary for the Academy Trust to enter into a supplemental funding agreement for each of the Schools with the Secretary of State relating to the running of the school as an academy, (the "Supplemental Funding Agreements").

It was noted that on the Conversions the following property arrangements would be put in place:-

- the Academy Trust would be granted 125 year leases of the sites at both Cheddar First School and Fairlands Middle School by Somerset County Council (the "LA");
- the Academy Trust would enter into a church supplemental agreement with the Diocesan Board of Finance of the Diocese of Bath and Wells (the "DBF") in respect of the footprint of the building

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at Shipham CofE VC First School and a lease in respect of the playing field land at the site with the LA;

- the Academy Trust would also enter into a Church Supplemental Agreement with the DBF in respect of the footprint of the building at Draycott & Rodney Stoke and was discussing a lease with the DBF in respect of the remainder of the site.

In order to effect the Conversions, it was also necessary for the Governing Body of the Schools and/or LA to transfer the Schools' assets, contracts and employees to the Academy Trust. Accordingly, it was proposed that all contracts and assets used in the running of the schools be transferred to the Academy Trust (in return for the Academy Trust agreeing to assume all liabilities and obligations) under a commercial transfer agreement to the Academy Trust the Governing Body of the Schools and the LA (the "Commercial Transfer Agreements"), drafts of which had been reviewed by the Headteachers, the Chair and a governor with legal experience.

Consultation

The Chair set out the outcome of three consultation periods which had been run across all of the Schools with staff (25 April 2019 to 24 May 2019), with parents / carers / community (17 May 2019 to 22 June 2019) and formal TUPE consultation with staff (commencing 3 February 2020 and remaining open to the time of conversion) (the "Consultation Exercise").

The Consultation Exercise involved distributing letters to all stakeholders describing the proposal, a document of answers to frequently asked questions, an invitation to attend a meeting regarding the proposal and an explanation of how to respond. Consultees were all staff employed in the Schools at the time, parents / carers of children in the Schools at the time, parents / carers of children in the associated pre-schools at the time, parish councils, Trustees of the Cheddar schoolhouse, trade unions and certain nominated individuals selected by the Governing Body because of their specific interest. Thirty members of staff attended the initial staff consultation meeting, eighteen people attended the parent / carer / community consultation meetings and fifty seven members of staff attended the TUPE consultation meetings. The main themes raised by consultees were as follows:

- Maintaining the individual characters of the Schools;
- Providing benefits for pupils;
- Growth plans for the Academy Trust;
- Teachers pay and conditions – particularly pay review process;
- Teacher continuity of service on leaving the LA;
- Mobility of teachers between schools in the Academy Trust.

Topics arising from the informal consultation periods had been considered at previous meetings and matters arising fed into the discussion about proceeding and questions to the WLT. Mr Warman advised that he had been at all the TUPE consultation meetings and felt that questions arising from staff had been responded to satisfactorily by WLT. Other governors who had been present at one or more of these TUPE consultation meetings agreed.

A governor suggested it would be useful, if we proceed with joining WLT, to establish a means to monitor for any change in character of the schools which had been a key concern from both staff and communities.

Impact Assessments.

Equality

The Governing Body acknowledged their legal obligation to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it - this includes having due regard to the need to:

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- remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of those who do not share it;
- encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low; and,
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it - this includes having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice; and
- promote understanding with regard to the relevant protected characteristics of age; disability; gender reassignment: pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex and sexual orientation.

The Governing Body considered the likely impact of the proposed Conversions on equality issues in general, and the matters which they were required to have due regard to, in particular, and concluded that the proposed academy conversion was unlikely to have any equality impacts.

Special Educational Needs

The Governing Body noted that academies are bound by the same SEN obligations as a maintained LA school. If an academy is named in a pupil's SEN statement, then the academy must admit the child. The LA will be obliged to fund the pupil as it would if they attended a LA maintained school. In the light of the SEN position, the Governing Body considered whether the proposed conversion to academy status would have any impact on the provision of SEN at the School, and concluded that it would not.

Admissions

The Governing Body noted that the Academy Trust will be its own admissions authority, and as such will set its own admission arrangements including its PAN and will need to run its own admissions appeal panels. It will be bound by the Admissions Code and the Admissions Appeals Code. Currently, the Schools do not act as their own admissions authority and, accordingly, conversion to academy status will confer additional freedoms and responsibility on the Governing Body of the new Academy Trust.

Exclusions

The Governing Body noted that the position in relation to exclusions was no different as between a LA maintained school and an academy. Accordingly, the Governing Body concluded that the proposed conversion to Academy status would have no impact in this regard.

Financial Position

The financial position was set out by the Chair. The Academy Trust has fixed a 5% top slice for the 2020/21 academic (and financial) year which is higher than it had been when the Governing Body first considered the options. At 5% it is calculated that all of the Schools would be worse off immediately upon joining than under LA management. The Academy Trust has informed us that they do not intend for the top slice to exceed 5% in future and anticipate that it may be reduced.

Mr McHale made governors aware that upon reviewing his general annual grant statement that he was £45,000 short when building in cost comparison. He had held meetings with Mr Perry and then Mr Ball to see if any additional savings could be made. Although small savings could be found with headteacher performance management and school improvement, the shortfall is still £40,000. Mr McHale then made governors aware of an email he had received from Mr Ball following the trustees meeting providing an assurance to assist with Fairlands' specific circumstances.

Mr Ewens commented that, although he was down by £1,000 in each of his schools, the additional aspects we now understand to be included will approximately balance this out.

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Mrs Wookey made governors aware that, although she was £5,000/£6,000 down, finance support etc, reduced the gap.

There will be capital expenditure upon joining the trust and the schools will still have DFCEG money. Mr Warman has spoken to other Chairs in the trust and they have been very positive about how money is allocated. The Local Authority will still honour outstanding works should we join the WLT.

Having regard to the financial information which had been provided and subject to continued clarity on Fairlands' specific situation, the Governing Body concluded that conversion to academy status would be in the best interests of the pupils who attend the schools.

Conversion and Academy Documentation and Formal Proposal to Convert to Academy Status

The Governors RESOLVED that having considered the outcome of the Consultation Exercise, the impact of the Conversion on equality, special needs, admissions and exclusions policies; and the financial implications of the Conversion it was in the best interests of the Schools to convert to academy status in accordance with the Academies Act 2010.

The Governors noted that the Academy Trust would be required to enter into, the Supplemental Funding Agreements, the property arrangements and the Commercial Transfer Agreements (the "Conversion Documents") and RESOLVED that it was in the best interests of the Schools to approve the terms of the CTAs and any one of the Chair or Vice Chairs were authorised (where relevant) to execute the CTAs on behalf of the Governing Body and the Headteachers. Chair and Vice Chairs were authorised to approve any further amendments deemed necessary on behalf of the Governing Body.

Mrs Sleeman gave a vote of thanks to Mr Warman and the headteachers for all their hard work with the process.

It was agreed that the decision would be communicated to staff on 18 March with a communication to parents before Easter.

The meeting closed at 20.30 pm

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