

DRAFT MINUTES
GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST
MAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Monday 18th March 2024 (5.00 p.m.)

Present: A Bennett OBE (CEO) J Power
I Jaffar – **zoom** J Midgley
K Inwood J Nellis (Vice Chair)

In attendance: N Oliver (Governance professional)
J Firth (COO), A Rawson (CFO)
Director of School Improvement, D Worthington

The meeting was chaired by J Nellis, Vice Chair, in the absence of the Chair, C Midgley

1. Apologies – C Midgley (Chair of Trustees); James Fryer (resignation email 15.2.24).
2. Declaration of Interests
J Midgley (Chair of Finance and Premises) reiterated a family relationship to C Midgley (Chair of Trustees) and A Midgley (Director of Governance).
3. Opening remarks and governance update
DfE has replaced The Governance Handbook (first published 2015) with a new Academy Trust Governance Guide. The Clerk had circulated an NGA briefing note on 9th March, confirming that there are no new expectations of Trustees. The Competency Framework & Structure and Roles Descriptors have also been withdrawn.

MAT Board noted that there are now three current Trustee vacancies, with two further Trustee Terms of Office also expiring in July 2024 (I Jaffar and J Power). Governors for Schools have been commissioned to identify two replacement Trustees initially, with skill sets in the areas of Estates, IT, Legal. A short list to interview is anticipated soon. In view of the vacancies, the Clerk confirmed that quorum for Trust Board remains at 3.

Trustees agreed that the good practice roles of Safeguarding Trustee (formerly A Birt) and HSE Trustee (J Fryer) should be filled as soon as replacements are in post. In the meantime, in response to the Chair of Standards Committee, J Midgley agreed to provide a link between MAT Board and the Colne Valley HS Interim LGB - given safeguarding concerns expressed at Standards Committee (Item 7.1; GHAT's main risk area is CVHS).

Trustees noted that Trello (free since 2019) will not be able to add new users from April 8th and will be read-only from May 20th (GHAT's next meeting date), except via upgrade to a paid plan. The Director of Governance has been trialling document management with Microsoft Teams, which will be prioritised for the next meeting. Asana and Monday.com were also suggested, but also have limitations (free plan).
4. Minutes of 18th December 2023
5. Matters Arising
The draft minutes were agreed. Proposed, J Nellis. Seconded, J Power / J Midgley.
An overview of leadership performance management had been circulated by the CEO, as requested, 21.12.23. The CEO (A Bennett) added that DfE will be publishing information about leadership pay in academy trusts, which may impact on GHAT.

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6. Correspondence, including ESFA

Correspondence links and actions had been circulated in advance, with the exception of late news confirming sponsorship funding (£65k) for Nields JI&N, in addition to the convertor grant.

Trustees noted the increasing number of FOI requests. The COO (J Firth) aims to answer all requests in a proactive and timely manner, where information is available. With the increasing number of GHAT schools, Trustees discussed the handling of complaints, requests and comms more generally, with increasing recognition of the need for Deputy COO & CFO roles. The CEO noted that the Chair of Trustees had endorsed the proposal for additional capacity in these areas. This was fully supported by the Vice Chair.

7.1 MAT reporting – CEO (A Bennett)

The CEO provided a verbal summary of the March 2024 (updated – red) CEO report. Trustees were reminded that the report is now cross-referenced against the DfE Trust Quality Descriptions and is designed to enable quality assurance conversation, support and challenge within six domain areas (CEO Content Framework), as follows:

Leadership and Organisational Development	- Transfer status of new academies
	- New Horizon Planning underway
Quality of Education	- Director of School Improvement report
	- Data predictions and curriculum review outcomes
	- Nields update
	- Preparation for growth
	- Primary data positioning
	- CVHS IEB
Strategic Governance	- Director of Governance report
	- LGB updates and networking
Finance and Operations	- CFO Report
Workforce and Talent Development	- COO Workforce Report
Public Benefit and Civic Duty	- RS update and SCITT feedback

The CEO added that the new reporting formats will be further streamlined to provide data relevant only to limiting factors, outliers, or areas of risk.

Academy Dashboards (**Item 7.2**) - updated as of March 2024, were received; Trustees also noted a request from Standards Committee for attendance data to be included.

The CEO reassured Trustees that there were no concerns to escalate in reportable areas. Risks were noted and discussed as follows.

- CVHS: concerns and vulnerability around safeguarding. Interim LGB (IEB) in place, with a direct focus on safeguarding and communications. This had also been discussed in depth at Standards Committee earlier in the evening: concerns noted, but more information about the pace of change requested – via an interim Standards Committee meeting between the next IEB and MAT Board meetings.
- Capacity for conversions, particularly Nields – joining 1st April 2024: A Midgley in place, but see positive news re. sponsorship funding (Item 6. Correspondence).
- COO & CFO resourcing as the Trust grows: see Item 6. Correspondence. Plan in place.

The Director of School Improvement (D Worthington) Report had been discussed fully at Standards, but DW re-highlighted the significant risk at CVHS and reassured Trustees

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that there was a clear plan (will take time) for accountability, systems and processes. The Vice Chair suggested that everyone should be made fully aware - to instil urgency.

Trustees were concerned around reputational risk and crisis communications surrounding the possible situations discussed above (CVHS and leadership pay) and that it might be prudent to have a crisis plan in hand (the CEO welcomed the offer of a template).

In further discussion, a Trustee questioned whether the multiple updates to the Academy Dashboards were indicative of the Trust growing too fast and at risk of not being successful. The CEO responded that, in contrary, primary areas are all on an upward trend and need continued drive for capacity ("care and share"); whereas the existing secondaries do require stabilisation prior to further growth - unless Ofsted 'good' or 'outstanding' opportunities arise. The CEO and Director of SI have also been visiting other Trusts to better understand the wider academy landscape and to better frame GHAT's growth strategy.

The COO Workforce Report highlighted an aspiration (culture) to be the Trust of choice; in the short term to address recruitment and retention concerns, especially at secondary in particular subjects. There is also the opportunity to fill with the Trust's own SCITT students, through targeted recruitment. Data to be re-phrased to better reflect the Trust's position: Staff Attendance (rather than 'Absence') 95.7%.

The Director of Governance report had been reviewed at Standards Committee. Networking groups had been well received, but feedback on attendance had been requested – as all Trust academies should be encouraged to take up the opportunity to learn and improve in all areas. MAT Board responses to LGB points to note were agreed.

Trustees celebrated confidential SCITT feedback and received a very positive Research School update, in particular noting a successful grant application to the SHINE Trust (funds and supports teachers, schools and charity partners who have innovative solutions to educational challenges) for 'Fixing Fluency' (£25k); J Power commented that the Research School should consider IP protection for the project materials.

7.3 Finance and Operations

Management Accounts for Period 6 (February 2024) were received and considered by the Trust Board, to ensure compliance and oversight of the Trust's financial position in accordance with the Academy Trust Handbook.

	Current report as at 29.2.24	Previously reported to Trust Board as at October 23	Variance
Brought forward	£ 4,138,168	£ 4,138,168	0
Total Trust income	£30,843,565	£30,125,427	+ £718,137
Total Trust exp	£30,924,097	£30,340,829	+ £583,258
In-year	- £80,522 deficit	- £215,042 deficit	+ £134,879
End of year forecast	£ 4,057,646	£ 3,922,766	+ £134,879

An accompanying CFO (A Rawson) summary report was received and noted, providing context, variance comments, pupil number updates and budget planning assumptions.

Income variance includes a £548k Medical Needs entity for 8 months from January 2024. Trustees were reminded that this is a 3 year contract funded by Kirklees MC (provision

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for up to 45 children not in education as a result of a medical need; separate bases at CH and CVHS).

The Trust has a collective end of year forecast of £4,057,646, which is 13.2% reserves as a % of income - a healthy position (20% or above would trigger a question from ESFA).

The CFO has been investigating GAG pooling approaches. As part of this, alternative budgeting software will be required (demonstrations currently taking place). The CEO reminded Trustees that this would provide the Trust's schools with needs-based funding, rather than funding based on pupil numbers.

The finalised School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool Checklist (CFO Doc 2) was shared with the Board - submitted ahead of deadline. The draft submission was reviewed by the Chair of Trustees and Core MAT team and comments incorporated.

7.4 Trust policies, updates and approvals

Trustees received an updated summary of Financial approvals required. All items were approved as documented: PFI Kirklees capital costs (CH & CVHS); Exam Fees; Arbor MIS, revised 24-25 cost; continuation of current HR SLA with CMBC; Greetland roof, strengthening works – tender analysis attached for a total gross project cost = £87,713.80 (N.B. the school to fund top layer replacement from its own reserves provision).

The CFO added that further information re Staff Absence Insurance will be shared later.

An updated Scheme of Delegation was discussed and approved. This responded to changes in ESFA guidance and terminology, together with adjusted financial levels relevant to secondary schools joining the Trust.

On the recommendation of the Chair of Standards, MAT Board ratified the following policies discussed and approved at Standards Committee earlier in the evening.

- Anti-Fraud and Corruption (minor changes)
- Data Protection Policy (minor changes)
- Full Time Employees Holiday – New Proposal
- Records Management & Retention Policy (minor changes)
- Social Media Policy – New Policy

8 AOB – None

9 Standing Item - MAT Board decisions & Next Steps

Minutes of previous meetings 18.12.23 – **approved**

Trust Management Accounts 2023-24 – **received, discussed and approved**

Financial Approvals (including Greetland Academy roof tender) – **agreed**

Updated Scheme of Delegation – **approved**

Policies approved, as follows – **Anti-Fraud and Corruption; Data Protection; Full Time Employees Holiday; Records Management & Retention; Social Media Policy**

10 Future Meetings (Riverside Mills)

tbc*

20th May 2024

15th July 2024

Interim Standards Committee re CVHS

Combined Standards & Finance (co-chaired) / MAT Board

F&P Committee / MAT Board

***9th May, 3pm (agreed outside the meeting)**

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