

Great Oak Multi Academy Trust  
**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
**Minutes of the meeting held on 25 April 2024**

<b>Directors</b>	<b>Office</b>	<b>Term</b>
Gary Benn		31/08/2025
Lilly Barker	Chair	16/11/2026
* Paul Gray	Vice-Chair	10/02/2026
Alison Meadows		11/05/2025
Wazz Mughal		03/09/2027
Sarah Mitchell	Executive Headteacher [EHT]	Ex-Officio
Kate Porch		19/09/2027
<i>In attendance:</i>		
Tom Bennett	Clerk	
* indicates absence		

	<b>Action</b>
<p><b>1/24 Apologies for absence</b>            Apologies were received from Paul Gray.</p>	
<p><b>2/24 Notification of AoB</b>            None.</p>	
<p><b>3/24 Notification of business interests</b>            Gary Benn declared he worked for Eddisons who offer building consultancy, design, and project management services to education settings.            No other director declared a potential conflict of interest on any matters to be discussed at the meeting or that they had received or given hospitality or a gift that could be perceived to compromise their impartiality when dealing with matters for the Trust</p>	
<p><b>4/24 Minutes</b>            The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p>	
<p><b>5/24 Matters Arising</b>            No matters arising from the last meeting, not otherwise covered on the agenda, were reported.</p>	
<b>MAIN BUSINESS</b>	
<p><b>6/24 Governance</b></p> <p>a) <b>Membership of the Board</b></p> <p>The Board received the report setting out the current member of the Board and an extract of the current Articles of Association relating to the membership and appointment of Directors.</p> <p>It was noted that Paul Gray had agreed to remain on the Board for a further year to ensure the Board had sufficient financial and internal audit expertise.</p> <p>Alison Meadows reported she would be standing down at the end of the current academic year.</p> <p>The Chair reported she had met an individual who had expressed an interest in becoming a director and it was <b>agreed</b> she would follow the interest up.</p>	<b>Chair</b>

**b) School Resource Management (SRM) Self-Assessment Checklist**

The meeting noted a draft 2024-25 School Resource Management (SRM) Self-Assessment Checklist had been prepared and circulated to all Directors to review and raise any comments. No comments had been raised and the form had been submitted to the ESFA by the due date.

**a) DPA LGB**

It was **agreed** to ratify the Chair's action to appoint Major Henry Crosby as a Governor on the DPA LGB.

EHT

**b) Audit Committee**

It was noted that a director vacancy remained on the Audit Committee.

It was **agreed** to appoint Wazz Mughal as a member of the committee up until a new director with finance and audit experience competencies was appointed.

EHT

**c) Clerk**

The EHT provided a verbal update on the recruitment of a new Clerk. She was contacting an individual who had expressed an interest in becoming the clerk and had highlighted the vacancy at a recent meeting of Headteachers of the local consortium of schools that the Trust's academies were members of. It was **agreed** to follow up the interest and keep the directors informed.

EHT

**7/24 Strategy/ Future Plans**

**a) The development of the MAT**

The EHT reported she and the Chair had had a meeting with Carrie Prior, Director of Education at the Chelmsford Diocese who had advised there had been a change such that church schools can now only join a multi-academy trust [MAT] where the majority of academies within it are Church of England [CoE] faith schools.

She was aware that GOMAT was looking for suitable schools to join it and being a Majority Trust would promote the Trust to church schools considering academising and joining a MAT.

The meeting noted that the current government, as an initiative to increase the number and size of MATs, are stipulating that schools must join Trusts in groups of three which does increase the potential for expansion given the time and workload this would need.

It was noted there were a number of LA maintained and voluntary aided schools that had come together and formed a federation that could be of interest under the new government rules.

**b) School Development Plans**

The meeting received and noted the progress being made by the Academies in achieving their key development priorities for 2023 – 2024.

The EHT provided an overview of the key priorities and highlighted the following:

- Both schools were focusing on raising the standards in Maths per individual school and collectively across trust through joint staff monitoring visits. Other shared development work had been carried out.
- DPA was due a Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools [SIAMs] inspection during the 2024-25 academic year. At the last inspection (in 2017), the school was graded as 'Good.' The inspection framework has since changed, and the school leaders have been working towards ensuring that the school meets the new requirements.
- DPA's progress on Priority 5 – Leadership and Management was positive following the appointment of the acting deputy headteacher.

- GCPA was also focusing on English and improving the standard for writing for years 2 and 3 that had been adversely affected when all schools were closed due to covid, and children were educated remotely.
- GCPA had recently introduced Little Wandle, a Department for Education-validated phonics programme that supported schools to teach every child to learn to read focusing on phonics and early reading skills.

c) **Risk Registers**

The meeting received and noted the changes to the MAT's and the individual Academy's Risk Registers.

The EHT reported the significant risks facing the individual schools and Trust included finance, staffing, Special Educational Needs and Disability [SEND], potential for staff morale with upcoming changes in leadership, admissions with changing birth rates each year and local residential development. There had been a higher-than-normal interest in mid-year applications to join both schools.

**8/24 Executive Head Teacher's [EHT's] Report**

The EHT provided an overview of her termly report on the operation and performance of the MAT and highlighted the following:

- **Secondary school allocations**

Secondary school allocations for Year 6 pupils leaving each Academy were released on 1 March 2024 that showed not all who had chosen SWCHS had been successful due to the lack of places. The final allocations would change following the outcome of a number of appeals made by parents and children going to other schools, particularly private schools.

- **Attendance**

The Leadership team at GCPA had been focusing on attendance levels that had been adversely affected by the very low attendance level [7-8%] of one group.

The overall schools' attendance totals included the attendance data for Reception pupils. Not all pupils in Reception class are at the statutory age regarding attendance reporting but the Trust includes all pupils to promote the importance of good attendance to all and prevent bad habits.

- **Achievement and standards**

The schools within the Trust were no longer statutorily required to administer Key Stage 1 Standard Assessment Tests [KS1 SATs] but continued to do so to measure the attainment and progress made by Year 2 pupils since joining each school at Reception – it would also assist with monitoring and target setting as the pupils move through the school.

Gary Benn highlighted the improvement in the attainment levels at DPA when compared to the previous year results and commended the Head of School and staff for these achievements.

- **Safeguarding**

A safeguarding allegation had been made at GCPA that was found to be unfounded following reviews by the DfE, the Local Authority and Diocese. They had endorsed the actions taken by the leadership team and school.

- **Staffing updates**

**GCPA – Headteacher Recruitment**

The EHT reported she would be standing down as a joint-headteacher at the school for personal reasons but would remain as the Trust's EHT.

The other joint-headteacher, Amy Sargeant, had agreed to continue as the full-time headteacher at the school. The panel felt this would be good for both the school and Trust in senior management succession planning and providing continuity. The decision had been shared with staff and parents.

- **Finance**

The EHT reported that finance was proving to be a challenging for both schools due to the following factors:

- Support staff pay – an estimated pay increase of 4.5% had been included in the budget when it was approved in July 2023. Final agreement between the Local Government Association and the unions on the 2023 pay award for local government services employees, including school support staff, was agreed on 1 November 2023. The agreed award, back dated to April 2023, raised each of the Local Authority Pay scales by £1,925, an effective increase for those staff on SCP2 of 9.5%.
- Teachers Pay – an estimated pay increase of 4.5% had been included in the budget when it was approved in July 2023 but 6.5% was agreed and awarded to teachers with effect from September 2023. The government had agreed to fund part of the increase but not all due to the DFE's method of calculating school contributions on pupil numbers.
- Electricity costs – a budget increase of 4% was applied to the previous year's electricity spend. However, the support provided by the government to protect schools from high energy bills and boost budgets for 2022-23 did not continue into 2023-24.
- Teachers' Pensions – The long-awaited outcome of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) revaluation was finally announced on 27 October 2023 which resulted with employer contributions rising by 5% (23.68% to 28.68%) with effect from April 2024. The EHT was waiting to see what proportion of this increase will be funded.
- GCPA has also been impacted by the cost of covering a high level of staff sickness costs not covered by the staff sickness insurance cover.

The year-end forecast for GCPA was now expected to be a deficit of £28k against a budgeted surplus of £19.6k. The deficit would be funded from cost savings and if required unrestricted reserves that included a contingency for temporary unexpected, unbudgeted cost increases or temporary unexpected loss of income.

The year-end forecast for DPA was now expected to break even against a budgeted surplus of £13.3k. They had received additional unbudgeted funding of £23k from Essex CC to support KS1 class sizes that had to partly offset the factors above.

The forecasts included all foreseen costs but did not include any additional income that was not certain.

Actions were being taken by both schools to identify savings on both committed and un-committed spends.

A full review of contacted services for light and heat, ICT support and staff health insurance is underway. Significant savings on the supply of electricity has already been completed.

A rigorous approach to spending and monitoring performance on a monthly basis was being carried out to ensure the forecasts remain accurate and on track.

The 2024-25 budget process would start early to identify any long-term financial trends. This would provide time for the leadership team, governors, and directors to take the necessary actions to ensure the Trust's future financial stability.

The Directors reviewed the process taken when preparing, reviewing, recommending, and approving the 2023-24 Trust Budget by the leadership team, the Local Governing Bodies of each Academy. *The Directors confirmed that all approved budgets were fully funded from operational income, or when necessary, from the Trust's reserves. At the time of agreeing the proposed pay increases for support staff in the current year's budget, the directors gave very careful consideration before approving the increase and ensuring sufficient funds were available.* It was **agreed** the major factors that had impacted on the Trust's financial position had occurred after the budget had been set and could not have been foreseen.

- **Building and Premises**

#### **GCPA KS1 Playground**

The GCPA Finance and Premises Committee agreed there was a need to improve the Key Stage 1 playground as the undulated surface, collected water and with wear and tear was not a child friendly surface. Three companies had been approached to conduct a feasibility study and based on levels of service and value for money, Eddisons had been selected to provide a feasibility report. Following the completion of the feasibility study, the project would be scoped and accurately costed and would be presented to the Board for consideration and approval.

The three companies who visited GCPA to look at the possible project were; Apex Colliers, and Eddisons

Apex could not provide the level of works required to check the sub-surface where there has been sinking issues over time.

Both Eddisons and Colliers could provide comparable services and expertise, but the lower fee structure offered by Eddisons provided the best value for money.

Colliers quote for the feasibility works was £1,000 plus VAT. If the project went ahead their fees would be 12.5%.

Eddisons: quote for the feasibility works was £1,600 + VAT. The usual fee would be 8.3%, but as a feasibility study will have been completed, a reduced rate of 7.8% for design, contract administration and principal designer services could be offered.

It was **agreed** to approve the appointment of Eddisons to complete a feasibility study [Gary Benn abstained].

#### **DPA Kitchen**

The EHT reported that during a recent inspection of the school kitchen the following key issues had been identified:

- The ventilation system was not fit for purpose;
- The oven space was inadequate and corroded;
- The steriliser was reaching the end of its effective life.

The cost to address these issues would be in the regions of £14k and was considered to be the minimum to ensure the kitchen met the required environmental and safety standards.

The alternative was a full refit that would be more efficient and effective particularly with rising pupil numbers. A refit would cost in the regions of £20k. Quotes from three company were being sought and potential grants to confirm the estimate to inform future actions.

It was noted the works for the GCPA KS1 playground and kitchen would hope to be carried out during the summer holidays, subject to the projects being approved by the Board.

The meetings received and approved the following:

- Finance Regulations.
- Leave of Absence Policy.
- Sickness Absence Management procedures.

**10/24 Finance**

a) **Management Accounts**

The meeting received and noted the managements accounts for each Academy for the 7 months to 31 March 2024. The variances between the forecasts and budgets for the year-end had been covered and discussed under the EHT's report.

b) **Capital Accounts**

Covered within the EHT's report.

## **11/24 Personnel**

- a) **Appointment of staff to confirm the operation of the recruitment, performance and dismissal policies**

Covered within the EHT's report.

- b) **The arrangements for the provision of external advice on personnel and human resource issues**

The directors noted and **agreed** to the re-appointment of Essex Legal Services [ELS] to provide employment advice and support on employment processes and legislation, resolving conflicts and offering practical employment solutions.

- c) **Update on the staff performance management reviews**

Covered within the EHT's report.

EHT

## **ROUTINE BUSINESS**

### **12/24 Chair's Action**

The Chair reported she had approved the following actions on behalf of the directors since the last meeting:

- Approved the setting up of interest-bearing bank savings accounts.
- Approved the appointment of Major Henry Crosby as a DPA governor.
- Held meetings with the DfE on safeguarding.

### **13/24 Correspondence**

The Chair reported she had received and been involved in dealing with correspondence relating to the safeguarding issue already discussed.

The EHT reported the Trust's members had held their Annual General Meeting to receive the Trust's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 August 2023, to note Audit findings report, to re-appoint Griffin Chapman as the Trust's auditors for a further year and to ratify the appointment of Kate Porch as a Director.

### **14/24 Safeguarding**

Wazz Mughal, the director responsible for safeguarding, reported he had completed the Level Three safeguarding training recommended for individuals with central role in any safeguarding situation.

He had visited DPA and met the Head of School to discuss and review the safeguarding procedures and records at the school and reported all was in order.

A meeting date had been set to meet the GCPA Governor responsible for safeguarding at GCPA.

### **15/24 Health and Safety**

Gary Benn, the director responsible for Health and Safety reported he was aware of the H&S issues raised on the use of the KS1 playground. He had yet to receive the latest H&S Report following the inspection carried out by the external H&S advisor.

A date had been agreed for Gary to visit DPA to review any H&S issues.

### **16/24 Minutes/reports of committees**

- The meeting received and noted the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the GCPA LGB held on 19 March 2024.
- The meeting received and noted the un-confirmed minutes of the meeting of the DPA LGB held on 28 March 2024

- It was **agreed** to forward the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 26 January 2024 to the clerk to circulate to all directors.

**SM/ TB**

**17/24 Any other business**

Covered elsewhere on the agenda.

**18/24 Date/time of future meetings**

Thursday 18/07/2024 at 19:45 hrs

**Approved by the Board of Directors on 18 July 2024**