

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Minutes of the video conference meeting held on 3 May 2022

Directors	Office	Term
Andrew Armour		31/08/2025
Gary Benn		31/08/2025
Melissa Challinor	Vice Chair	31/08/2025
* Paul Gray		10/02/2026
Alison Meadows		11/05/2025
Sarah Mitchell	Executive Headteacher [EHT]	Ex-Officio
Andrew Taylor	Chair	31/08/2025
Liam Tobin		22/07/2023
<i>In attendance:</i>		
Tom Bennett	Clerk	
* indicates absence		

The Executive Headteacher opened the meeting with a prayer

Action

14/22 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Paul Gray.

15/22 Notification of AoB

None.

16/22 Notification of business interests

Gary Benn declared that his wife worked for GOMAT, and he worked for Eddisons who provided services to GOMAT.

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.

17/22 Minutes

The meeting received and approved the non-confidential minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2022 as a true and accurate record of the meeting subject to the following amendment.

Minute 7/22(c) DPA Academy Structure

*"It was agreed to approve the request to ~~permanently~~ create an additional class to accommodate the increase in the number of pupils and monitor pupil numbers **and reduce the number of classes should pupil numbers fall.**"*

The meeting received and approved the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2022 as a true and accurate record.

18/22 Matters Arising

Minute 8/22 Trust's Pay Policy

The EHT reported the approved pay increases had been implemented.

Minute 12/22 Leadership Structure

The EHT reported the changes in the leadership structure at GCPA and the appointment of a Co-Headteacher had been communicated to all parents.

All other matters arising had been completed or were included on the agenda.

MAIN BUSINESS

19/22 Governance

a) Board's Roles and Responsibilities

The Chair reported he would provide a report following his review of the Board's roles and responsibilities and how they could be best delivered by the remaining and newly appointed directors at the start of the new academic year.

Chair

b) Board of Directors' Membership

The Chair re-iterated the importance of recruiting a director linked to DPA to maintain the balance of directors representing each academy on the Board, but he had not received details of any potential candidates.

c) Audit Committee Membership

The Chair reported that Paul Gray had agreed to continue as a member on the Audit Committee but could not continue as an independent member following his appointment as a director. The Trust needed to recruit an independent member and it was **agreed** to advise the Audit Committee Chair of any potential candidates with a financial or corporate background.

All

Liam Tobin advised he was willing to remain on the committee and take on the position of Chair at the start of the new academic year. It was **agreed** to appoint Liam Tobin as Chair of the Audit Committee for 2022-23.

LT

20/22 Strategy/ Future Plans

a) Development of the MAT

See confidential minute

b) Academy Development Plans

The EHT reported that both academies were making progress in achieving their key development priorities for 2021 – 2022.

DPA

Pupil numbers continued to grow. The biggest challenge was staffing following the departure of a teacher for Year 2-3 Class at very short notice. To minimise the disruption to the pupils in Year 2-3 Class, the Head of School had temporarily taken over responsibility for the class and was teaching the class for three days a week and using a supply teacher for the other two days.

The Academy had been successful in recruiting a teacher for the new class approved at the last Board meeting to start in September 2022.

The Saffron Trust, through the DFE offer of support, had visited the school to monitor the progress being made and had validated the Trust's assessment on the progress being made in EYFS, Phonics, the Foundation Subjects and leadership.

A key priority for 2022-23 would be to investigate the possibility of increasing the Published Admissions Number [PAN] from 23; ideally to 30 to reduce the overall teaching costs per pupil and make the academy financially stronger.

GCPA

The biggest challenge in the Spring Term had been the high levels of staff absence at both teacher and support levels due to Covid. This had provided additional challenge to staff in providing support to the pupils with Education, Health and Care plans [EHCPs]. The leadership team had provided cover for those teachers and support staff absent that had reduced the time available for them to carry out their monitoring responsibilities. Leaders covering staff absences and taking on class responsibilities were also unable to provide Subject Leads with monitoring time. The need to provide cover was also impacting on

staff morale and staff fatigue.

Staffing capacity was very limited that made it the very challenging for the leadership team to be available to support staff because due to covering teaching staff absences.

21/22 Risk Register

The EHT reported the Academies' risks registers had been reviewed by the Local Governing Bodies at each school and in depth by their Finance and Premises Committees.

Finance and an expected funding gap between what each academy received from the government and their expenditure would be a challenge in the next year. The General Annual Grant [GAG] that the academies received was based on pupil numbers and would lead to an increase at DPA. However, due to the funding lag and timing of census collection, the GAG would not reflect the total numbers of pupils on roll at DPA or GCPA.

The key risks facing the Trust was the pressure on admissions with the rising number of pupils at DPA and the potential need to move to single year classes that would be expensive in the short term and underlined the need to increase the PAN, ideally to 30.

There was also a potential impact on admissions at GCPA that was already fully subscribed for Reception 2022 with the building of new houses in Great Chesterford.

Recruiting and retaining teaching and support staff was a national problem and would need close monitoring.

The Chair asked whether the school or Local Authority initiated the process to increase the PAN.

The Executive Headteacher reported that schools started the process by consulting first with the LA to change its PAN. The LA would then review the schools' ability to accommodate up to 30 pupils per class.

The Chair asked why the Risk Register included risks where mitigating actions and plans had been put in place for some time and no further actions were being recommended.

It was **agreed** to review whether these mitigations needed to be retained on the risk registers.

EHT

Andrew Armour, the Audit Committee Chair reported the Audit Committee had reviewed the risks facing the Trust and were content with the measures that had been put in place to mitigate their likelihood and impact.

The Chair highlighted Risk 8 on the MAT register on staff wellbeing and suggested that the responsibility for monitoring this risk should be transferred from the EHT to the Headteachers of each Academy. This would improve the monitoring of staff wellbeing and provide more time for the EHT to manage the Trust and its future direction.

It was **agreed** to amend the responsibility for risk 8 on staff wellbeing.

EHT

22/22 Executive Headteacher's [EHT's] Report

The EHT presented her termly report and highlighted the following:

Admissions

The number of pupils at DPA were rising with more pupils joining the school since the start of the academic year and now stood at 128 pupils.

Attendance

Attendance at both schools was lower than the attendance levels at the same time in previous years. This was primarily due to children contracting COVID who were very keen to return to school following their period of isolation at home.

Attendance was being monitored to ensure no school fell below the 90% attendance level.

A lot of parents had requested unauthorised time off for their children to see family or go

on overdue holidays. None had been granted.

SEND

The level of children with high education and health needs, including those with Education and Health Care Plans, remained high at 11 at GCPA and 3 at DPA. A further 7 children at GCPA and 18 children at DPA were receiving additional education support and interventions.

Achievement and standards

SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) to measure children's educational achievement in Years 2 and 6 resumed this year and were due to take place in the week following the meeting. The results would be assessed against the targets set at the beginning of the year that had not been amended to reflect any adverse factors arising from COVID or new pupils joining mid-year.

Targets for 2022-23

The proposed assessment targets for 2022-23 had been set by reference to the highest level of attainment each pupil could be expected to achieve and had been reviewed by each Academy's LGB.

The Chair noted the "step-up" for some the KS2 targets was high and asked what the targets had been based on.

The EHT reported the KS2 targets for each pupil had been set on what had been achieved at KS1 and making at least expected, and for some, further progress.

It was **agreed** to approve the assessment targets for 2022-23.

The EHT highlighted the current vacancies at GCPA and problems in recruiting LSAs, MDAs and a Breakfast Club supervisor at GCPA.

The recruitment of a Co-Headteacher for GCPA had been successfully completed.

Staff absence due to Covid and other illness had been very high during Spring 2022, particularly at GCPA that had had a major impact on staff well-being. Leadership had been a challenge with increased teaching commitments and having to manage daily logistics; a large amount of time had also been spent supporting staff during these challenging times.

The Chair thanked the EHT for her very comprehensive report.

23/22 Finance

a) Management Accounts

The meeting noted the managements accounts for each Academy and the Trust for the 7 months to 31 March 2022 and the explanations provided for the variances between the forecasts and budgets for the year.

The Chair advised that management accounts were reviewed and monitored monthly by him, the EHT, the Headteachers at each Academy and the Academy governors at their respective Finance and Premises Committees.

The EHT highlighted the reasons for the overspend on premises at DPA and the underspend on staff costs at GCPA.

The Chair reported the Trust needed to keep under review the level of Trust's reserves and take account of the risk of unforeseen emergency or other unexpected needs for funds arising from:

- a fall or rise in sources of income;
- planned commitments, or designations, that cannot be met by future income alone, for example plans for a major capital project;

EHT

- the need to fund potential in-year deficits, for example where expenditure may be needed before funding is received; and
- other identified financial risks.

It was **agreed** to:

- To approve the managements accounts for each Academy and the Trust for the 7 months to 31 March 2022 and the reported variances between the forecasts and budgets for the year end.
- To review the Trust's Reserves Policy at the next meeting.

EHT

EHT

b) Requests for Revenue or Capital Expenditure that exceeds the EHT's Approval Limit

None.

c) Requests for Future Revenue or Capital Expenditure from the Academies not included in their Approved Budgets.

It was noted DPA was obtaining quotes to improve their outdoor EYFS provision, including a covered outside space, upgraded surface and new equipment.

d) Action plan on the recommendations set out in a report from the ESFA's Schools Resource Management Advisor [SRMA] following a visit in November 2021

The meeting received and noted a report from an ESFA's SRMA following a visit in November 2021 that had set out several recommendations together with a draft action plan prepared by the EHT on how the recommendations would be implemented.

The EHT reported that, as with all academies, the visit arose following the Trust's application for funding from the ESFA's Condition Improvement Fund [CIF] rather than due to the Trust's financial position.

The focus of the SRMA's visit was the Trust's governance and areas where potential cost efficiencies could be made and value for money achieved.

The SRMA had looked at DPA's financial position in detail following the Trust's agreement to approve an in-year budget deficit to allow the academy to create an additional class to accommodate the growth in pupils. The Trust had also agreed to allow the Academy to use its reserves to fund the in-year deficit due to the time-lag in receiving funding for the additional pupils through the annual GAG funding process.

Some of the areas identified for improvement by the SRMA had not taken account of certain factors such as leadership time spent on teaching and the new additional class, that if taken account of, would have led to different conclusions of the metric exercises.

The EHT had been asked to provide and had drafted an action plan on how the recommendations would be implemented. It was noted the recommendations were not statutory but best practice that the Board needed to consider and agree to implement, as necessary.

The Chair reported the Trust's governance structure including, who should be the Trust's members, was prescribed and set out by the Diocese in the Articles of Association.

The meeting discussed the SRMA's recommendations on the Business Manager's financial skills, experience and roles for the Trust and each Academy.

It was felt the Trust was not large enough yet to afford a full-time qualified Chief Financial Officer [CFO].

Melissa Challinor was unaware the Business Manager did not attend all governor Finance and Premises [F&P] Committee meetings apart from DPA's. She attended DPA's F&P Committee to support the governors in their understanding of the financial reports and their financial responsibilities.

The Business Manager always held pre-meeting briefings with the Chair of the GCPA's F&P Committee, who was a qualified accountant, to review the financial reports to be presented at each meeting.

The meeting discussed the SRMA's recommendation to use "qualified" clerks at F&P meetings.

It was **agreed**:

- To approve the EHT's Action Plan; EHT
- To review the current position and role of the Business Manager and the position and role following the expansion of the Trust and to report back to the Board by the end of the 2023 Summer Term, at the latest. EHT
- To review the costs and benefits of using "qualified" clerks at F&P meetings. EHT

e) Trust Financial Plan

The EHT reported the SRMA had also asked the Trust to prepare a Financial Plan. The ESFA's Financial Plan template was normally used by trusts and academies who were in a financial deficit position to demonstrate to the ESFA how they planned to restore their finances to a surplus position.

It was noted the Trust was not in cumulative deficit position having substantial reserves.

The draft Financial Plan focused on DPA's financial position and how the current year's in-year deficit would be funded by additional General Annual Grants in future years arising from pupil growth.

It was **agreed**:

- To allow Directors further time to review the draft and the assumptions used to prepare it and to raise any questions or comments by Friday 6th May 2022, and; All
- Subject to agreeing any recommendations raised, to **approve** the plan prior to sending to the ESFA. EHT

f) The appointment of the Trust's auditors

Andrew Armour, the Chair of the Audit Committee, reported the current auditors had been the Trust's auditors for several years and it was best practice to retender the position at least every five years to ensure value for money, and an independent and objective relationship.

Following an invitation to tender, three external audit firms including the current auditors were interviewed.

Following the interviews and after obtaining references, the committee had agreed to recommend that the Trust should appoint Griffin Chapman LLP as the new auditors on the following basis:

- They had significant experience of auditing MATs, including the Vine Trust, the main Diocese MAT in Essex, as well as Church of England schools,;
- Their quote was £5,000 per year lower than the quote from Price Bailey LLP, the current auditors;
- On the other measures Griffin Chapman scored similarly to Price Bailey,

although the committee was aware there was a potential risk and additional work following a change to new auditors.

It was **agreed** to appoint Griffin Chapman to fill the casual vacancy as the new auditors following the resignation of Price Bailey LLP as the current auditors.

EHT

24/22 Personnel

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

Included in the EHT's Report.

- b) **To receive an update on the staff performance management reviews**

Included in the EHT's Report.

ROUTINE BUSINESS

25/22 Chair's Action

No urgent action had been taken by the Chair or Vice Chair since the last meeting.

26/22 Safeguarding

No safeguarding issues were reported.

27/22 Health and Safety

Gary Benn, the Director Responsible for Health and Safety, reported the external H&S consultant and carried out an independent inspection at DPA and her report was due shortly.

He also reported he would be visiting DPA to inspect the condition and safety of the demountable building and its potential use as an additional classroom.

28/22 Correspondence

No correspondence relating to the Board had been received since the last meeting.

29/22 Minutes/reports of committees

- (a) The meeting received and noted the un-confirmed minutes of the meeting of the GCPA LGB held on 22 March 2022.
- (b) The meeting received and noted the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the DPA LGB held on 24 February 2022.
- (c) The meeting received and noted the confirmed minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on Thursday 3rd February 2022.

30/22 Any other business

None.

31/22 Date/time of future meetings

Thursday 14/07/2022 at 19:45 hrs

Approved by the Board of Directors on 15 July 2022