



# ACES Trustees Meeting Minutes

May 2, 2023 at 5:30 PM BST

## Attendance

### Present:

Members: Andrew Goulding, Raj Joshi, Dave McMillan, Chris Meddle, Brian Message, James Nicholson, Rebecca Ryan, Gary Weston, Debbie Warner (Clerk)

#### 1. Apologies and declaration of interests

There were no apologies.

#### 2. Minutes of last meeting

Minutes of meeting of 01/02/2023 were deemed to be an accurate account of proceedings and were approved by Trustees.

#### ACTION POINTS FROM THE MEETING WERE DISCUSSED:

- CLOSURE OF GT GIDDING SCHOOL WILL NOT RESULT IN EXTRA STUDENTS FOR ACES - CEO/SME
- PROPOSAL TO INSTALL HEATING PUMPS AT HBK THESE ARE CONSIDERED TO BE TOO EXPENSIVE - JN

#### 3. Merger discussion

CEO explained that the merger has been delayed. A survey carried out by HEART Academies on ACES buildings is of concern. Survey report suggests they may need to spend in the region of £7m in the first 2 years on school buildings. The CEO felt there was some inaccuracies. Both Trusts are intending to submit CIF bids and this is only available prior to a merger. It is therefore sensible to put off the date. CEO thought it could indicate a cooling off by HEART.

Ian Oliver will submit a report which will be discussed at the next shadow meeting to try and tackle issues with buildings in the Trust. The Chair thought the delay may also provide an opportunity to iron out any issues. ACES has decided not to appoint external experts to assess buildings in HEART. The Finance Director thought that there is the potential for an earlier merger once the CIF bids have been submitted. The Finance Director has a meeting with HEART in the next couple of days and agenda items for the shadow board can be drawn up.

Trustees thought it was reasonable that a new name is part of the conditions of the merger. The CEO thought the initial intention was to be a MAT with more than one secondary school. The Chair of the HR Committee felt that HR issues are not insurmountable.

#### Questioning/challenge:

- What indicates progress with HEART Academies; and what is the benchmark?
- The CEO informed Trustees of what he considered progress in the merger negotiations
- A Trustee asked the CEO if he would axe the merger on basis that a new name is not considered.
- The CEO said he would take guidance from Trustees.

#### 4. CEO's report

Trustees received the report prior to the meeting and the CEO invited questions and comments from the report. The CEO advised Trustees of the availability of a new HR dashboard and reporting of information can be available on request.

*R Joshi joined the meeting at this point.*

CONFIDENTIAL: The CEO advised that GCA have had a successful Ofsted inspection, with a good outcome - waiting for report.

There will be an increase in pupil numbers for GBA. Support for St Anne's is going well with an SLA agreement being drawn up for September.

#### **ACTION: A TRUSTEE REQUESTED THAT ABSENCE INFORMATION BE INCLUDED IN THE DASHBOARD**

A Trustee asked if there is an issue with TA sickness at the primary schools, particularly at Cromwell Academy. Sickness is now being monitored more proactively. The CEO advised that R Bakker will be leaving GCA at the end of the academic year. Emma Smith has been appointed as co-head and will now be employed full time for ACES.

#### **Questioning/challenge:**

- A Trustee acknowledged that the primary schools are increasing in numbers and the secondary school (HBK) is full; where will these pupils go? The CEO said information from the Local Authority is that it is a temporary bulge but there are plans to increase the forms of entry at St Peter's to accommodate increased numbers of pupils. HBK PAN has already been increased. There is also a proposal for a new secondary school at Alconbury.
- A Trustee referred to a number of audits at the primary schools; how did these go? The CEO advised Trustees that these are carried out by SME and ASD and they went well with minor adjustments to be made at the schools.
- A Trustee referred to attendance and persistence absence at the schools and noted that Cromwell Academy had lower than national attendance figures. The CEO is aware of this issue and the school continues to work with parents. Discussion on whether a family worker would improve the situation; GCA already have one but no other schools do not.
- A Trustee enquired about the affect absence has on outcomes. The CEO advised Trustees that forensic monitoring at the secondary school leads to intervention with individuals and the leader for attainment is satisfied that the outcomes for the current Year 11 cohort will be satisfactory. There is also a lot of scrutiny in the primary schools.
- A Trustee noted that the report from SME on the primary schools was very thorough and that the data for HBK is included in the CEO's report with a considerable amount of intervention taking place.

#### 5. Finance Committee verbal update (DRM/JN)

The Finance Director provided a brief finance report:

£200,000 in surplus against budget which is due mainly to additional funding from the DfE. There has been some cost savings in schools where vacancies remain open or are not being replaced. Trading accounts are doing well; HBK Leisure significantly above forecast with swimming pool providing a good source of income. The Central Team is £30,000 down due to internet costs from the Local Authority but this will not be the case going forward as this has now been purchased by the Trust. Full year forecast is currently £340,000 but should be in surplus c. £80,000. Additional capital funding of £128,000 has been received for energy efficiency projects.

The Finance Director advised Trustees that the budget next year is based on the proposed merger being successful bringing the top slice of 6.5% in line with HEART giving an in year deficit of £70,000 in the central team. The Finance Director's recommendation to Trustees is top slice is left at 6.5% with additional run on costs for CEO's salary.

The CEO said he felt uncomfortable over increased cost of the toilet refurbishment at HBK. The Finance Director recommended that the refurbishment is phased which will take into consideration HBK's surplus in 2024-25 rather than to deplete Trust reserves and CIF bids need to be taken into consideration. **Agreement from Trustees was received.**

The Finance Director advised Trustees that the current catering arrangements will be extended for a further 12 months in the absence of a formal agreement with HEART.  
The Chair of the Finance Committee is keen to avoid significant accumulative deficit in the central team.

6. Cyber security

The CEO referred to the document that had been circulated to Trustees. It was decided that this should be discussed in more detail at the Standards & Innovation Committee and invite the Trust's IT Manager.

7. AI – how can it help our teachers, how do we navigate student use?

To be discussed at Standards & Innovation Committee.

8. HR Committee verbal update (RR)

RR advised that the last HR Committee meeting was focused on the merger. Policies have been shelved due to proposed merger and there is a need to understand HEART's concern regarding harmonisation of policies. Discussion has taken place with the Finance Director on HR going forward now that S Spira has left the Trust. Sickness, absence and other staffing issues to be put on future agenda.

9. Standard & Innovation Committee verbal update (CM)

CM informed Trustees that that they received SEND and primary updates as main items. Detailed reports detailing how strategies are being implemented in the schools. No areas of significant concern. Secondary data is included in the CEO's report as data was not available at the time of the last meeting.