

**THE SPRING PARTNERSHIP TRUST**  
**Final adopted minutes of a meeting of the Trustees**  
**held at The Warren at 7pm on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

**Present:**

Ms C Barenbrug  
Mr R Barlow, from minute 3  
Mr A Blount  
Ms W Cartwright (remotely)  
Mr J Cliff, Chair  
Mrs N Sandigurskaia (remotely)  
Mr R Taylor, Vice Chair  
Mr D Terry

**In attendance:**

Mrs G Sesli, Acting Joint CEO (remotely)  
Mrs C Sheehan, Acting Joint CEO  
Mrs V Bolton, COO  
Miss K Crossley, Clerk

**1. Apologies for absence**

- 1.1 No apologies for absence had been received. Mrs Brookman was absent from the meeting.
- 1.2 Trustees welcomed Mrs Sandigurskaia, who had been appointed to the Board on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2023 and would sit on the HR Committee.

**2. Declaration of pecuniary interests**

- 2.2 None.

**3. Minutes of previous meeting**

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 were approved by Trustees and signed by the Chair.

**4. Trust Business**

- 4.1 It was stated that all Trustees are required to complete annual statutory child protection and safeguarding training. A link would be circulated to trustees. **KC to action.**

**5. Executive report**

**5.1 Growth update**

- 5.1.1 This minute was deemed to be confidential, see confidential minute 10.1.

**5.1.2 SEND Challenges**

- 5.1.2.1 Trustees were referred to the commentary in the Executive Report on SEND challenges. The Acting Joint CEO (CS) outlined the challenges, including an increase in the forecast deficit driven by unbudgeted costs of £114k for the support staff pay award, piecemeal funding from government and an increase in costs for staff on fixed-term contracts and agency staffing. In some schools, pupil numbers were low, with two teachers covering classes which were not full. Over half of nursery pupils at LPS had high levels of complex

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needs and were inappropriately placed. Trustees encouraged the Trust to make a case to the borough as to why schools were not able to meet pupils' needs and to challenge inappropriate placements. **CS/GS to inform Headteachers.**

- 5.1.2.2 Trustees asked whether it was possible that a disproportionate number of pupils with high levels of need were being placed at LPS and MPS. It was noted that LPS and MPS had become increasingly popular choices of school for pupils with high levels of need in comparison with neighbouring schools, such as SMCPA. This put a strain on leadership capacity, with headteachers fire-fighting on a daily basis and unable to meet pupils' needs. The trust had raised its concerns with the Regional Schools' Commissioner as well as the Director of Education and local MPs, and would continue to follow up. It was suggested that, given the disproportionate number of pupils with high levels of needs and the safeguarding risk to pupils and staff, the matter would be revisited with the borough SEND team. **CS/GS to action.**
- 5.1.2.3 Trustees asked whether all reasonable adjustments had been put in place to support pupils with SEND, and were advised that headteachers were torn about excluding pupils as they were worried about the safety of excluded pupils at home. This needed to be balanced against not tolerating poor behaviour and fulfilling obligations to non-SEND pupils and all other stakeholders. The Board reiterated its support for the Behaviour Policy acknowledged that headteachers were making difficult judgements and encouraged them to consider the full range of sanctions laid out in the Behaviour Policy. **CS/GS to action.**
- 5.1.2.4 This minute was deemed to be confidential, see confidential minute 10.2.
- 5.1.2.5 This minute was deemed to be confidential, see confidential minute 10.3.
- 5.1.2.6 It was suggested that consideration be given to challenging the inappropriate placement of pupils on the basis of diagnosis in cases where all possible avenues had been explored, including evidence that all appropriate support had been put in place. It was reported that the Headteacher at LPS had made such cases for 4 pupils, but the cases had not yet been reviewed by the borough. Trustees suggested that legal advice could be sought to determine if it were the case that the borough had not responded to cases within timeframes set out for EHCP plans. **CS/GS to action.** Consideration would also be given to working with EHCP specialists on inappropriate placements and making the matter an issue at local elections. **GS/CS to action.** Consideration would also be given to considering options within the remit of the trust, such as whether the number of offers could be reduced and signposting families to the closest appropriate setting.
- 5.1.2.7 Trustees were informed that, during a discussion at an open morning at MPS, it had emerged that some parents believed that obtaining a place in the mainstream school was a route to accessing the Tree House specialist provision. The Local Authority had been informed of the misconception. It was suggested that families who had been unsuccessful in securing a place at MPS should be signposted to LPS, where places were available. **CS/GS to action.**
- 5.1.2.8 A further concern was small class sizes in some year groups at some schools. Consideration would be given to workable solutions at the next meetings of ACC and FARCO. **CS/GS to action.**
- 5.1.2.9 The Chair of FARCO noted that it was clear that the primary drivers of the overspend were external and that staff were working hard in challenging circumstances, however the impact on the budget needed to be managed. This minute was deemed to be

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confidential, see confidential minute 10.4. . The matter had been discussed at the recent FARCO meeting and prompt actions were required to ensure that the trust remained viable. Trustees questioned whether other MATs were in the same financial situation and suggested investigating effective strategies at other trusts. **CS/GS to action.** FARCO would revisit the balance between finance and the impact of reduced funds on the education of pupils. **RT to action.** Trustees asked whether any additional funding was expected and was advised that no information had been received to date. The annual GAG statement was expected imminently and would provide a steer on finance in 2023/24. It was noted that the deficit was linked to the cost of fixed-term contracts, which would be terminated on 31st August 2023, and the high level of supply staff being used, which was now only being used for essential cover, with immediate effect.

5.1.2.10 This minute was deemed to be confidential, see confidential minute 10.5.

5.1.2.11 This minute was deemed to be confidential, see confidential minute 10.6.

5.1.2.12 The Acting Joint CEO (CS) noted that there were unbudgeted costs for the support staff pay award of c£114k which would worsen the forecasted deficit. This minute was deemed to be confidential, see confidential minute 7. It was proposed that plans would be drawn up to significantly reduce the current and future forecasted deficit. **CS/GS to action.**

5.1.2.13 Trustees asked about the timeline of the development of the deficit and it was confirmed FARCO had been alerted to a significant overspend in the management accounts for December 2022 which had been discussed extensively at previous FARCO meetings. The majority of restricted reserves and some unrestricted reserves had been used to address the overspend. Trustees asked whether there had been any failures of control and were informed that this was not the case. The situation had materially deteriorated due to the need to recruit staff to support pupils with high levels of need.

5.1.2.14 It was agreed that an extraordinary FARCO meeting would be arranged before the next Trust Board meeting to discuss financial forecasting. **KC to action.**

5.1.2.15 Trustees asked about the impact of the current challenges on the growth strategy. It was noted that the main financial challenge was the cost of supporting SEND pupils, and that the current growth strategy would not achieve significant economies of scale in this area.

### **5.1.3 UPS Consultation**

5.1.3.1 Trustees were referred to the commentary in the executive report on the UPS consultation and were informed that the HR Committee and the Achievement and Curriculum Committee had had input into the consultation. The consultation paper would shortly be circulated to the HR Committee. **CS/GS to action.**

## **5.2 Monthly management accounts to December 2022**

5.2.1 There were no questions from trustees on the monthly management accounts to December 2022, which had been discussed at the recent FARCO meeting.

## **5.3 Consider and approve/ratify any spend requests over £20k:**

### **5.3.1 MPS pool - WC and changing room refurbishment**

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- 5.3.1.1 Trustees were referred to the spend request for the refurbishment of the changing rooms, WC areas and corridor outside the changing rooms at MPS pool. The matter had been discussed in detail at the recent FARCO meeting, with trustees challenging the executive team on the costs/benefits of the pool. It was noted that the pool was used for curriculum swimming for 3 local trust schools as well as external lettings, which generate significant income, as set out in the business case for the resource that was agreed by FARCO last year. It had been agreed that the refurbishment would be funded from Devolved Capital Funding, which needed to be spent in-year. Trustees ratified the approval of the refurbishment at a cost of c£28k.

**6. Policies**

- 6.1 No policies were currently due for review.

**7. Trust Committee Business**

**7.1 Achievement and Curriculum Committee, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

- 7.1.1 There were no questions on the minutes of the spring term meeting of the Achievement and Curriculum Committee, which had previously been circulated to trustees.

- 8.1.2 The Chair was appointed as SEND Trustee.

**8.2 FARCO, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

- 8.2.1 There were no questions on the minutes of the spring term meeting of the Finance and Resources Committee, which had previously been circulated to trustees.

**9. AOB and date of next meeting**

- 9.1 There was no other business.
- 9.2 The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> March 2023 at 7pm at The Warren.
- 9.3 The meeting closed at 9:30 pm.

Signed: .....Date:.....

John Cliff, Chair of Trustees