

THE SPRING PARTNERSHIP TRUST
Final adopted minutes of a meeting of the Trustees
held at The Warren at 7pm on Wednesday 6th December 2023

Present:

Mr A Blount
Mrs B Brookman, remotely, from minute 5
Mr J Cliff, Chair
Mr M Ellis, remotely, until minute 6.4
Mr B James
Mr D Terry

In attendance:

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

1. Apologies for absence

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Mr Barlow.
- 1.2 No apologies for absence had been received from Mrs Sandigurskaia.

2. Declaration of pecuniary interests

- 2.2 None.

3. Trustee administration

- 3.1 Trustees noted the membership of the Board and the remaining terms of office.
- 3.2 Mr James was appointed to the CEO Performance Management Committee.
- 3.3 The membership of Local Advisory Councils was noted. Trustees approved the renewal of Mr Hawes as Chair of the Local Advisory Council at EWPS.
- 3.4 It was confirmed that all DBS checks were up to date.
- 3.5 There had been no changes to Trustees' contact details.
- 3.6 Trustees' details were up to date on the website and Get Information About Schools.
- 3.7 The Trustee and Local Academy Council Codes of Conduct were approved.

4. Trust Business

- 4.1 Further to the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Trust and STEP Academy, Trustees thanked the executive team for their briefing paper, setting out detailed information on STEP Academy.
- 4.2 The Chair had had a positive exchange of emails with Ben March, Chief Finance and Operations Officer at STEP Academy. The Chair was happy with the due diligence paperwork provided by TSPT.
- 4.3. As part of STEP's due diligence and review of TSPT estate, the TSPT premises teams had conducted site walks with STEP's Director of Operations and a surveyor. Both had

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been impressed with the staff, the sites, and with the estate management programme in place.

- 4.4 The Chair reported that STEP had a good school improvement model and that headteachers worked closely with one another. The Acting Joint CEO (GS) had met the STEP CEO and had seen strengths in the STEP model. Senior leaders had the capacity to make a difference through deployment of staff and personal development. STEP had acknowledged the strengths of the Trust, such as experienced staff and subject leadership.
- 4.5 Following the respective Trust Board meetings of both trusts in December 2023, more detailed conversations would be held between the trusts. It would be important to senior leaders to meet and to gain an understanding of each other's schools.
- 4.6 Headteachers were supportive of the merger and acknowledged that it was in the best interests of pupils.
- 4.7 Assurances had been received from STEP Academy that the acquisition of TSPT was a strong fit from which both trusts would benefit, noting the strength of the IT provision, collaborative working and experienced and talented staff at TSPT.
- 4.8 The Committee asked whether the executive team had a sense of any issues as a result of the due diligence carried out to date, and was informed that at this point there were no significant concerns. It was emphasised that TSPT joining STEP would strengthen the pupil offer rather than this being an area of risk.
- 4.9 The next steps for both trusts would be to conduct more detailed research and to learn more about how each trust operated in areas such as education, finance and operations. Senior leaders would meet their counterparts. The Executive Team would have opportunities to visit STEP schools and gain a feel for their character. The Chair would continue to liaise with the executive to ensure that they were comfortable with next steps.
- 4.10 This minute was deemed to be confidential, see confidential minute 1.

5. Minutes of previous meeting

- 5.1 The minutes and confidential minutes of the meeting of 14th September 2023 were approved by Trustees and signed by the Chair.
- 5.2 There were no questions from trustees on the matters arising report; all actions had been completed or covered in the meeting papers.

6. Executive report

- 6.1.1 Trustees were referred to the updated Consolidated Strategic Plan 2023/24. There were no questions from trustees on progress against the plan since the meeting in September 2023.
- 6.1.2. Trustees were referred to the monthly management accounts to October 2023. Due to the current level of reserves, it had been agreed that variance analysis would be incorporated in the monthly management accounts to enable closer monitoring of the financial position.

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- 6.1.3. The Executive team thanked Mr Cliff, Mr James, Mr Ellis and Mr Terry for attending the annual Trust Conference. The Conference had been very successful, was well received by staff and positive feedback had been received on the sessions.
- 6.1.4 An external safeguarding audit had been conducted at all schools. There had been progress on most red and amber issues identified in the audit in the previous year. Leadership was effective and further improvements had been made to the already strong single central registers. The Trust was supporting schools to address a small number of issues identified during the audit.
- 6.1.5 Thought would be given to how to maximise the impact of the role of the Safeguarding trustee.
- 6.1.6 Trustees were referred to the commentary in the Executive Report on low pupil numbers at EWPS, and were informed that a meeting with the borough had been requested to discuss reducing the school to one form of entry. The Local Authority had invested in EWPS's expansion to a 2FE school and are very reluctant to agree to reducing the school's PAN. Trustees agreed that reduction of PAN would be reconsidered next year (for the 2026/27 intake), and an item on funding at EWPS would be added to the agenda of the next FARCO meeting. **KC to action.** Trustees asked whether the mixed classes at EWPS may be a concern for prospective parents, and were informed that the numbers of parents attending the open morning had been encouraging but that it seemed that prospective parents were concerned about this in KS2. In the event of PAN being reduced to 1FE, the trust would approach the borough on the possibility of creating alternative provision on the EWPS site.
- 6.1.7 The Trust was continuing to develop filtering and monitoring standards as set out in the 2023 KCSIE. Conversations were held with pupils on expectations relating to the use of ICT, and consideration would be given **CS/GS to action.**
- 6.4 Approval of annual accounts to 31st August 2023 and review of audit findings report**
- 6.4.1 Trustees were referred to the draft annual accounts for the year ended 31st August 2023 and the audit findings report. The Trust's accountants had attended the FARCO meeting and the accounts had been reviewed in detail.
- 6.4.2 The Trust's financial position had been affected by an issue relating to a historic CIF project at EWPS. The Trust was awaiting a response on the matter from the DfE, which may result in a reduction of £176k in the deficit.
- 6.4.3 Finance was very tight and was being closely monitored. Headteachers were having to make difficult decisions about any spending which had not been budgeted. A discussion followed on the challenging circumstances facing LPS, where all members of the leadership team were in classes due to staff shortage related to recruitment and sickness issues. MPS was in crisis mode due to the lack of staffing for high numbers of pupils with high levels of need. Following negotiations with the borough, a third temporary Tree House provision had been agreed. The Trust was awaiting the timelines of the expansion of the existing provision which would be communicated early in the Spring term.
- 6.4.4. The Trust was balancing staff wellbeing and the risk of staff burnout with minimising costs. Reserves had been depleted, however there were revenue reserves of £210K as well as

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capital reserves of £245k. An item on budget forecasting/reserves would be added to the agenda of the next FARCO meeting, with a view to determining savings could be made.
KC to action.

6.5 Recommendation of appointment/reappointment of auditor

- 6.5.1 Further to a recommendation from FARCO, Trustees agreed to recommend that Members approve the reappointment of UHY as auditors for 2023-24, subject to the outcome of the growth resolution.
- 6.5.2 Trustees noted the requirement for audit partners to be rotated every 10 years, and, should the Trust not become part of STEP Academy, requested that consideration be given to moving to a different Audit Partner within UHY.

6.6. CIF project recommendations

- 6.6.1 Trustees were referred to the paper on the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) bids, setting out the proposed applications, the value of the projects and the contribution from the Trust in line with priorities and proposed contractors. The COO reported that the majority of bids were re-bids for projects which had narrowly missed the threshold in 2022/23, and had since been strengthened. Trustees approved the CIF bids, the outcomes of which would be known in May/June 2024.

6.7 Contract approvals and/or spend requests over £20,000:

- 6.7.1. None.

7. Policies

- 7.1 None.

8. Trust Committee Business

8.1 HR Committee, 11th October 2023

- 8.1.1 There were no questions from Trustees on the minutes of the HR Committee meeting on 11th October 2023.

8.2 FARCO meeting, 5th October 2023 and 22nd November 2023

- 8.2.1 There were no questions from Trustees on the minutes of the FARCO meetings on 5th October 2023 and 22nd November 2023.

9. AOB and date of next meeting

- 9.1 The next meeting would be held on Thursday 9th February 2024 at 7pm at The Warren.

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9.3 The meeting closed at 8 pm.

Signed:Date:.....
John Cliff, Chair of Trustees