

The Spring Partnership Trust
Final adopted minutes of the AGM and meeting of the Members of Spring Partnership Trust
held remotely on Monday 5th February 2024 at 6:45 pm

Present:

Mr J Cliff, Chair
Mrs J Nelson
Ms R Punter
Mr S Bhalla
Mr M Ellis, Trustee

In attendance:

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

1. Apologies for absence, constitution of the meeting

- 1.1 Apologies for absence had been received from Mr Stealey. The meeting was quorate.

2. Pecuniary Interests and Register of Persons with Significant Control

- 2.1 No pecuniary interests were declared.

3. Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

- 3.1 The minutes of the Members' meeting of 6th September 2023, which had previously been approved by email, were ratified as an accurate record of the meeting and signed by the Chair.

4. Review of Trust Board composition and governance

- 4.1 The Chair was comfortable with the composition of the Board. A good level and mix of expertise was in place in the areas of education, finance and HR. Following the resignation of Mrs Cartwright, Mr James had been appointed as Chair of the HR Committee. Ms Barenbrug had resigned from the Finance and Audit Committee, and the position was being managed internally, given the stage of development of the growth strategy.
- 4.2 A similar story applied to local governance, where there had been some resignations and difficulty recruiting new Local Advisory Committee members. Councillor Colin Hitchens had been recruited to the Local Advisory Committee at Leasons Primary School, which provided a useful link to the Local Authority.

5. CEO Report including major strategic developments

- 5.1 The Acting CEOs invited questions on the CEO report. This minute was deemed to be confidential.
- 5.2 This minute was deemed to be confidential.
- 5.3 This minute was deemed to be confidential.
- 5.4 This minute was deemed to be confidential.
- 5.5 Members asked about the financial due diligence conducted by the Trust and were informed that STEP Academy accounts had been reviewed, reflecting a healthy financial position.

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- 5.6 Members reflected on the financial position of the Trust with the significant decrease of reserves in support for vulnerable pupils and the impact on schools.
- 5.7 This minute was deemed to be confidential.
- 5.8 The Acting Joint CEO and COO structure was working extremely well, however there were significant challenges associated with very high numbers of pupils with significant needs at two Trust schools, and the Local Authority was not meeting its statutory obligations in relation to Special Educational Needs, which put pressure on schools. There had been no response from the Director of Education to the most recent email from the Acting Joint CEOs, and the Trust had recently taken external advice on how to ensure that the Local Authority complied with statutory regulations. The Trust had a duty to its staff, some of whom were facing abuse due to inappropriate placement of pupils with high levels of need.
- 5.9 The Trust was acutely aware of the impact of inappropriately-placed pupils on staff wellbeing and a proactive approach was in place with regard to engagement with the Local Authority. A meeting had been arranged for the Chair and Acting Joint CEOs to discuss the current challenges with the Regional Director's office.

6. Annual accounts to year-ended 31st August 2023

- 6.1. The Acting Joint CEO (CS) reported that the annual accounts reflected the impact of SEND issues on schools. The Trust had been committed to the 2022-23 budget approved by trustees, however it had become evident that schools needed more support. All possible support had been put in place, including the use of fixed-term contracts and agency workers. As a result, reserves had been substantially depleted, and a sustainable staffing structure had been put in place for the current academic year. Headteachers were supportive of the provision. Redeploying support staff to meet current levels of needs had been adopted, which would mitigate the risk of further deficit forecasts.
- 6.2 This minute was deemed to be confidential.
- 6.3 The attention of Members was drawn to the Audit Findings Report, which detailed a red risk relating to a historic CIF bid, due to errors on the part of staff who had since left the Trust. The Trust was working with the ESFA to resolve the matter. A productive meeting on the matter had been held with the Trust's auditors. Members asked about the implications of the error, and were informed that it was possible that the Trust may be allowed to submit a scope change request, however if this was not agreed by the ESFA, the funds would need to be repaid. Conversations were on-going, and in the event of the Trust being required to repay the funds, a payment plan would be set up.

7. Approve reappointment of the auditor

- 7.1 Members were asked to consider the reappointment of UHY Hacker Young as auditors. It was noted that the auditors had been in place for 10 years, and Members were informed that safeguards were in place, for example, having work checked by a more senior member of staff and changing partners, to ensure independence. The reappointment was approved.

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8. AOB and date of next meeting

8.1 This minute was deemed to be confidential.

8.2 The next meeting would be held on Monday 8th July 2024 at 6:45 pm at The Warren.

8.3 The meeting closed at 7:20 pm.

Signed: Date:

John Cliff, Chair, Board of Trustees, The Spring Partnership Trust