

THE SPRING PARTNERSHIP TRUST
Final adopted minutes of a meeting of the Trustees
held remotely via WebEx at 6 pm on Thursday 8th July 2021

Present:

Mr R Barlow, from minute 4.2.2
Mr A Blount
Mrs J Brinkley, CEO
Mr J Cliff, Chair
Miss R Punter
Mr R Taylor, Vice Chair

In attendance:

Mrs C Sheehan, CFO
Mrs V Bolton, COO
Mrs G Sesli, EHT (LPS, MPS, SMCPA)

Clerk:

Miss K Crossley

1. Apologies for absence

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Ms Barenbrug, Mrs Brookman, Ms Hawker and Mr Okafor.

2. Declaration of pecuniary interests

- 2.1 None.

3. Minutes of previous meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting of 13th May 2021 (appendix 1) were approved by the Board and would be electronically signed by the Chair. **JC/KC to action.**
- 3.2 Trustees were referred to the matters arising report (appendix 2) detailing the status of outstanding actions.
- 3.2. 4.2.1 The email correspondence on questions raised by Trustees in advance of the meeting and responses from the Executive Team would be included in the papers filed for this meeting. **KC to action**

4. Executive team reporting

4.1 Executive report

- 4.1.1 Trustees were referred to the commentary on agenda items in the Executive Report (appendix 3).

4.2 KPI heatmap

- 4.2.1 Trustees were referred to the KPI heatmap (appendix 4) and the updated educational KPIs (appendix 5). There was an apparent anomaly in the KS1 and KS2 combined data at LPS, which was thought to relate to cautious teacher assessments in writing. The detail of the data would be further investigated by the EHT and Heads and further information would be brought to the ACC meeting in September 2021, including any actions required and how they would be resourced. **JB to action.**
- 4.2.2 The CEO explained the context behind the safeguarding concern at SMCPA, which related to caution on the part of the Head of School (HoS) around staff safeguarding training. It would be clarified with the HoS that staff signing to confirm that they had read the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy constituted evidence of safeguarding training. All schools had completed the NSPCC safeguarding audit, the headlines of which would be

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shared with the auditor for the external safeguarding audit, which had been scheduled for the autumn term.

- 4.2.3 In response to a question as to the impact on the 3-5 year plan of the additional contact and non-contact time, mentoring and training set out in the new Early Career Framework (ECF), it was reported that the proportion of ECF teachers at the Trust was no higher than usual. The Trust would train its ECF teachers at the South Thames Teaching School Hub based at Pickhurst Infant Academy, rather than in-house, as had been the case in recent years. This would enable resources to be re-focussed in 2021/22, for example, by training teaching assistants to deliver some SEND interventions, release for which would be partly funded in primary schools.
- 4.2.4 Trustees asked about the anticipated impact of staff changes associated with restructuring and was advised that plans were in place for gaps to be filled more innovatively, for example, using technology. An item on this matter would be added to the agenda of the ACC meeting in September 2021. **KC to action.**
- 4.2.5 It was noted that there had been changes to guidance on peer-on-peer abuse in KCSiE 2021. Although Trust schools were generally aware of the pupils who may be involved in peer-on-peer abuse, this had been identified in the safeguarding audit as an area in which training would be beneficial. **JB to action.**
- 4.2.6 As expected due to the pandemic, the indicator for income generation per pupil head had fallen, which was disappointing given how hard the Trust had worked to increase income generation historically. It was expected that income generation would pick up over the summer, with the Trust providing holiday club places for 50 disadvantaged pupils. Trustees asked about the potential for income generation as a whole to develop into a meaningful income stream and was advised that there was definite potential. The funding received by the Trust for Hive holiday club and the Holiday and Food programmes (HAF) would raise the profile of its schools and help develop the reputation of the clubs, including support for vulnerable pupils; there was also scope for a meaningful income stream from the development of nurseries. It had been calculated that up to c£45k could be earned by running holiday clubs for 8 or 9 weeks of the year. Trustees noted that FARCO had been advised that developing new nurseries would generate c£150k/year and asked why this income stream was not being prioritised. It was explained that consideration would need to be given to buildings for nurseries, and that there was a moral imperative to provide services to families in school communities. The Board welcomed the holiday club initiatives and asked that alongside these, the development of nurseries at the two remaining schools be explored in more detail, based on the financial success of the nursery at LPS. The CEO would work with the Senior Business Development Officer to develop a plan to be brought to the FARCO meeting in October 2021, subject to capacity. **JB to action.**
- 4.2.7 Trustees asked for greater detail on the red-rated health and safety indicators. It was confirmed that the Trust had recently learned that its CIF application for work on windows at SMCPA (which had been red-rated in the KPI heatmap) had been successful and would be fully funded from CIF allocations. Plans were being drawn up for all successful CIF projects to be completed as soon as possible.

4.3 2021/22 budget

4.3.1 Trustees were referred to:

- pupil number projections from 2021/22

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- draft three-year budget forecast, 2021/22 – 2023/24
 - budget forecast narrative
 - TSPT consolidated monthly management accounts, May 2021 (appendices 6 to 9).
- 4.3.2 The CEO reported that the 3-year budget had been comprehensively discussed at the FARCO meeting on 28th June 2021, and reviewed post-meeting with the support of the Chair of FARCO. Questions were invited from Trustees.
- 4.3.3 Trustees noted that the impact of pupil numbers on income had been discussed at length in previous meetings and were concerned that capacity was forecast at 90% in 2025, and lower at some schools. It was acknowledged that pupil numbers were a clear risk to the 3-5 year plan, however the forecasts were conservative and not based on assumptions of 100% capacity. It was explained that the budget was based on the assumption that additional grant funding for staff pay awards would be received from the government; there were risks associated with this approach, and a decision had been taken for the rationale to be considered and articulated by the Trust on a case-by-case basis, erring on the side of caution. It was acknowledged that concerns remained about pupil numbers, but that a conservative budgeting approach was appropriate.
- 4.3.4 It was noted that although unfilled places remained in some years at some school, places were being filled from the bottom up. The data indicated that pupil numbers were falling as pupils progressed from Reception to Y6, and that this was compounded by additional in-years leavers. Consideration would be given to tracking both trends. **CS to action.**
- 4.3.5 Trustees asked about the level of pupils in nurseries transferring to the corresponding schools. It was confirmed that most pupils did join Trust schools if they had attended Trust nurseries, and that parents were disappointed when this was not possible. The Trust was keen to attract and retain pupils from as early a stage as possible, in order to offer the best possible start to their education.
- 4.3.6 It was noted that the budget commentary suggested that the current picture was reasonably healthy, with surpluses forecast for 2023/24, which reflected an improvement on previous forecasts. There was no certainty as to future pay awards, however the work on restructuring and careful budgeting had had a positive impact on the 3-5 year plan. The Trust was now operating at c75% of spend on staffing following the financial impact of the latest restructure plans, which reflected significant progress, and there was scope for further improvements, such as the 'one school' approach.
- 4.3.7 The budget was approved by Trustees.
- 4.4 3-year budget forecast return**
- 4.4.1 The draft three-year budget forecast return (appendix 10) had been reviewed by the auditors, who had raised several points which would be clarified by the CFO. It was agreed that authority would be delegated to the Chair and Vice Chair to approve the return on behalf of the Board prior to submission to the ESFA on 27th July 2021. It was requested that a report including the following information would be provided to inform the request for approval:
- the Excel workbook, if appropriate
 - key assumptions
 - areas of challenge
 - confirmation that the auditors were happy with the return. **CS to action.**

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4.5 Monthly management accounts to May 2021

- 4.5.1 There were no questions on the monthly management accounts to May 2021 (appendices 11 to 17), which had previously been circulated to FARCO by email.

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

4.6) i Interactive Flat Panels

- 4.6.1 Trustees were referred to the spend request for 8 Interactive Flat Panels, which had been recommended for approval by FARCO (appendix 18). The request was approved.

4.6) ii CPS expansion

- 4.6.2 Trustees considered the spend request for the CPS expansion project (appendix 19), which had been recommended for approval by FARCO. It was noted that a query had been raised in advance of the meeting relating to investment in the school, given the current pupil number forecasts. It was confirmed that the lowest possible numbers had been used for budgeting purposes and the request was approved.
- 4.6.3 The COO thanked Trustees for their email approval of the name of Elmstead Wood Primary School for the amalgamated school, which was ratified. This would enable the Trust to instruct solicitors to begin the legal work required on funding documentation. It was confirmed that papers had been submitted for the Trust to be released from the lease of the DRIS land and it was anticipated that the official date of amalgamation and the relaunch of the new name would take place in Autumn 2021. Trustees asked whether the funds from the sale of the site had been included in the budget forecast, and it was confirmed that this was the case. The final phase of the CPS expansion would begin in summer 2022.

4.6) iii Catering contract extension

- 4.6.4 The proposed extension to the catering contract (appendix 20) had been recommended for approval by FARCO, subject to feedback on school meals from staff and pupils. The COO provided positive verbal feedback relating to the healthiness and choice of meals. The Trust was happy with the service and the extension was approved. Trustees thanked the COO for seeking the views of stakeholders, which was pleasing to hear.

4.6) iv Insurance contract

- 4.6.5 Trustees were referred to the indicative breakdown of costs (appendix 21) in the Executive Report of the renewal of the insurance contract; only the cost of medical malpractice had been confirmed and the CFO was liaising with the broker regarding final figures. The Trust had been asked to answer questions on the unoccupied DRIS site and it was possible that a one-off fee may be incurred. The cost of the cyber insurance package had increased from the indicative cost of £2,750 to £4,700 for cover of £250k. It was noted double the cyber cover could be provided for an additional premium of £200, which was considered good value for money in the context of the current risks in the sector. The excess for cyber claims was £5k.
- 4.6.6 A discussion followed on balancing a range of points relating to cyber insurance, including:

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- the high cost of the insurance
- whether the cover would reduce the risk of cyber-attacks, such as the recent serious attack at a school in Kent; it was confirmed that the risk would be reduced by the cover.
- the detail of the cover, beyond cover for an ICO fine
- no educational establishment had yet been fined by the ICO, and fines were only issued in cases of negligence
- the grey area around negligence – most cyber-attacks were triggered by clicking links in emails
- the controls already in place, the need for staff to be sensible, careful and to guard against complacency

4.6.7 It was agreed that the cyber element of the insurance policy would be circulated to the Chair, **CS to action**, who would review the detail of the breadth of cover. **JC to action**. The 11% increase in the broker fee would also be queried, **CS to action**. The Board agreed the delegation of authority to approve the insurance contract to the Chair and Vice Chair.

4.6) v Voice 21 spend request

4.6.8 Trustees were referred to the spend request for the Voice 21 oracy programme (appendix 22), which had been brought to FARCO, which had sought educational input from ACC on the proposed spend and subsequently recommended the request for approval by the Board.

4.6.9 Trustees noted the challenge of assessing the value for money of spend requests which were not directly comparable with alternative products, and going forward, would expect some form of evidence to confirm value for money. It was confirmed that ACC was clear as to the importance of oracy and had asked the CEO and EHT if it could be delivered at a lower cost by alternative means. ACC was satisfied that alternative approaches had been carefully researched and considered by the CEO and EHT before concluding that the original approach was the most effective. The request was approved. It was agreed that future spend requests for which it was not possible to source quotes from comparable alternative products should be supported by paperwork reflecting the stages of referral to and responses from appropriate committees as evidence. **JB to action**.

4.7 CIF update

4.7.1 Trustees congratulated the COO on the successful outcomes for the majority of Trust CIF bids. Due to the delay in the CIF process, it would now be challenging to arrange contractors and plan work. The timelines of some projects would have to be revised, however all projects were moving forward, pre-meets had been held with contractors and the majority of work was still planned to be completed in the summer holidays.

4.7.2 The COO was keen to carry out a procurement exercise for CIF bid writing. The Trust was not dissatisfied with the current provider, but was conscious that the provider had been used for some time and wanted to ensure that it was delivering the best possible service. With the next cycle of CIF planning due to resume in September 2021 for bids which would be written in 2022, there was insufficient time for a review process to be conducted. Trustees agreed that it would be prudent to remain with the current consultant, RPT, for the next round of CIF applications, and a procurement exercise to be held in advance of the CIF submissions in Autumn 2022.

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- 4.7.3 Trustees noted that the COO was not contracted to work during school holidays and asked about how the projects at five sites would be overseen and delivered according to schedule. It was confirmed that the day-to-day management of the projects would be undertaken by site manager, who was contracted to work 52 weeks/year and had been involved in the pre-meets with contractors. It was explained that the site manager currently worked at HPS and CPS, but following the site management restructure, would become the Trust-wide site manager across all sites from September 2021, and was happy to manage the works on a day-to-day basis across at all five schools over the summer. Whilst the main bulk of the works would be completed before pupils returned to school in the autumn term, some elements of work would be on-going from September 2021. In response to a question as to escalation routes in the event of an emergency, the COO, as a member of the executive team, would become involved if required.
- 4.7.4 Trustees requested that consideration be given to seeking feedback from schools on the impact of restructured site management, factoring in comparison of the service pre- and post-restructuring. **VB to action.**

4.8 Draft meeting schedule 2021/22

- 4.8.1 Trustees were referred to the draft meeting schedule (appendix 23). The following was agreed:
- The dates of meetings of the Trust Advisory Council would be added to the schedule, and the meetings would be scheduled ahead of Trust Board meetings.
 - Trust Board meetings would be held in person at The Warren.
 - FARCO and the HR Committee would meet remotely.
 - ACC would meet in person at The Warren. The meeting schedule would be updated and recirculated. **KC to action.**

5. Trust Committee Business

5.1 HR Committee

- 5.1.1. The focus of the recent meeting of the HR Committee had been the new professional growth plan, which takes a focussed approach to the performance management for all staff, all year round. Individuals would take ownership of their goals through on-going conversations throughout the year. The Chair of the HR Committee congratulated the EHT for her work on this project, on which feedback had been provided by the Committee ahead of circulation to staff for comment. The performance management and pay policies (teaching and non-teaching staff) had all been revised in line with the professional growth approach. The Chair highlighted the removal of automaticity around pay progression for all staff. At the end of each year, conversations would be held with staff around their development in line with their professional growth plan, culminating in a conversation around recommendations for pay progression.
- 5.1.2 There was a query regarding the treatment of CEO performance management in line with the professional growth policies. It was agreed that the CEO Performance Review Panel would need to take a view on whether the professional growth approach was appropriate for CEO performance reviews and objective-setting. It was noted that the Panel would need to be reconstituted following the resignation of Ms Hawker. It was agreed that the policy would be circulated to staff for comment, noting that changes to CEO performance

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management may be added to the policy at a later date, subject to discussion at the CEO Performance Review Panel.

5.2 FARCO

- 5.2.1. There were no questions from Trustees on the minutes of the FARCO meeting on 30th April 2021 (appendix 24).
- 5.2.2 The main foci of the FARCO meeting in June 2021 had been the three-year budget forecast, spend requests and the internal audit report, on which two findings had been made in relation to Pupil Premium (PP) funding controls. The first finding related to a documented PP strategy detailing roles and responsibilities for PP spend, including controls to ensure that the funding was fully spent in-year; the second related to a plan to allocate the unspent balance. A meeting had been arranged for the Chair of FARCO to conduct a post-implementation review with the Head of School at SMCPA in the second half of the autumn term.

5.3 ACC

- 5.3.1. The Committee had not met since 5th May 2021 and would next meet on 14th July 2021. Further to post-meeting discussion by email on safeguarding audits, the Committee had agreed that an external safeguarding audit would be commissioned for early 2021/22. JB to action.

6. Local Academy Councils (LACs)

6.1 Notes of LAC meetings

- 6.1.1 Trustees were referred to the notes of LAC meetings (appendices 25 – 31), which highlighted the need for closer links between Trustees and LACs. It was noted that sharing the notes of LAC meetings with Trustees represented a useful step forward and offered a sense of the oversight and concerns raised by LACs. The notes also gave confidence that LACs were fulfilling their roles as local 'eyes and ears'. The CEO noted that her attendance at LAC meetings had enhanced her understanding of local issues and what could be done to make improvements.
- 6.1.2 Further to requests from LAC Chairs for Trustees to attend LAC meetings, LAC Chairs would be informed that Trustees would welcome invitations to meetings subject to the availability of Trustees. LAC Chairs would be invited to propose a purpose for the attendance of Trustees, such as a review of academic data, with a view to ensuring Trustee with relevant skills would attend the meeting. Reciprocal arrangements could also be made for LAC members to observe appropriate sub-Committee meetings, the dates of which would be shared with LACs. **KC to action.**
- 6.1.3 Further to a query about the OPAL sheds at MPS being destroyed by arson, it was confirmed that this had been brought to the attention of Trustees and minuted at the meeting of 13th May 2021.
- 6.1.4 A response from Trustees to LACs would be drafted and shared at the next meeting of the Local Advisory Council on 19th July 2021, to be cascaded by Chairs to LACs. **KC/LAC Chairs to action.**

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7 Policies

7.1 Complaints Policy

- 7.1.1 Trustees were referred to the Complaints Policy, appendix 32, which had been updated for changes to terminology and the use of recordings and video conferencing. The policy was approved, subject to minor changes to the wording on membership of panels. **VB to action.**

8 AOB and date of next meeting

- 8.1 A Trustee with a pupil at a Trust school reported concern about possible lack of inclusivity at a planned school event, which would be investigated and addressed by the CEO. **JB to action.**
- 8.2 The next meeting would be held on 14th September 2021 at 7pm at The Warren.
- 8.3 The meeting closed at 7:40 pm.

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