

MEMBERS

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024 at 3pm

Present physically: N Wingfield-Digby

Present virtually: A Maltpress
J Bloomfield

S Howard, **Chair**

In Attendance: A Brewster, Group Head of Finance
A McGarel, CFO
E D'Souza, Trustee and Trust Board Chair
G Cowles, Deputy Governance Professional
N Savvas, CEO
S Gales, Governance Professional

Apologies: A Mathur
J Gazzard

Absent:

Action

1. **Election of Chair**

The Members **elected** Sarah Howard to Chair the meeting.

2. **Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence**

E D'Souza declared his roles as a Trustee of the Eastern Education Group Trust and as a Governor of West Suffolk College. N Savvas and S Howard declared their roles as Governors of West Suffolk College. No other conflicts of interest were declared.

Apologies for absence were received from A Mathur and J Gazzard.

3. **Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2024**

The minutes of the meeting on 27 February 2024 were **agreed** as an accurate record.

4. **Trust's performance in 2023/24**

Members received and considered the update report which included the student achievements, student experiences, careers and progression, staff wellbeing, community outreach, marketing events, shows and exhibitions, trips and experiences, business and partnerships, Principals' highlights, sustainability and Group newsletters.

The CEO summarised the significant successes of the Group in 2023/24 and the positive impact of the Group on our wider community.

The CEO informed that our sponsor (West Suffolk College) achieved Ofsted Outstanding across all areas and a 'strong' skills judgement, which means all the Group's post-16 provision is now Ofsted Outstanding.

Members congratulated the CEO and Executive on the sustained, tremendous success of the Group. The Chair informed that multiple national stakeholders (e.g. businesses, policy makers, etc.) are aware of the strength of the Group.

5. **Update on Trust Board's Governance**

Members received and considered the update report which included analysis of current membership, attendance, diversity information, skillset information, the planned training and development offer for 2024/25, and information on the outcome of the internal governance review in 2023/24. Members received and **noted** the 'Dear Accounting Officer' letters from the DfE.

Members queried the progress on aligning governance practices and operating joint governance across the Group. E D'Souza (as Trust Board Chair) explained that we continue to operate as two legally distinct boards with some joint governance committees

(where appropriate) in furtherance to our Group strategy of acting as ‘one organisation, multiple sites’. The CEO advised that we continue to work with policy makers to explain the rationale for Group-working and the benefits of MAT and FE College partnerships.

Members discussed the proposal to re-appoint Richard Murray and queried, given his poor attendance, this is advisable. E D'Souza (as Trust Board Chair) explained that Richard would like to continue to serve and has committed to improve his attendance. Members **agreed** to re-appoint Richard Murray for a further 1-year term of office.

6. Update on Group strategy (Trust and its sponsor)

Members received and considered the report provided which summarised progress on our Group strategy, inorganic growth, organic growth and key internal changes across each phase of provision, and a high-level update on operations and cultural integration.

The CEO advised that the DfE has changed policy and will no-longer provide additional funding to support schools to academise and/or for MAT mergers, which will likely significantly slow the growth of MATs nationally and locally.

The CEO advised we are considering how to expand our primary arm and are working to improve the quality of education at the five specialist SEN schools.

The CEO informed we are working to redesignate Chalk Hill Academy and to relocate the school to more suitable premises, co-located with our soon to be built new Alternative Provision Free School (Empowering Futures), and to rebuild Priory School.

Members queried where Chalk Hill will be relocated. The CEO explained that it will be in Horringer Court, Bury St Edmunds. Members queried if the relocation would inconvenience students. The CEO advised that the current students travel from across the region, so it does not inconvenience them. The CEO informed the staff are the most likely to be inconvenienced however a consultation has commenced.

Members queried whether Priory School will be relocated. The CEO advised it will be rebuilt on the same site.

The CEO advised that we continue to focus our attention on the most vulnerable in our society including students with SEND, carers and care leavers.

The CEO informed that our Extended Reality lab has won an award for ‘most inspirational’ learning space.

Members queried if the Executive feel confident, they can deliver the Group’s strategy given the limitations of the finances and need for ongoing financial sustainability. The CFO confirmed we remain confident that we can continue to reinvest sufficiently in our people and infrastructure to deliver our strategy – and informed the Trust is now large enough to automatically qualify for school condition allocations (rather than applying for condition improvement funding) to support re-investments. E D'Souza (as Trust Board Chair) confirmed the Board continue to set budgets with a net surplus outturn, and contribution to reserves, in furtherance of ensuring financial sustainability.

7. Any Other Business

i. Thanks to staff and governance members

Members thanked the staff and all governance members for their outstanding achievements and vast contributions.

ii. Schedule of meetings

The Chair informed of plans to review the schedule of meetings for 2024/25 and beyond to best fit with operations.

The meeting closed at 3.44pm