

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 27 March 2025 at 2.00pm

Present physically at ASFC:	D Bicker E D'Souza, Chair	K Points (part)
Present virtually:	A Duffety (part) C Higgins, Vice Chair C Ridgeon (part) J Wakelam (part)	M Chatt R Attwell R Inman S Daley, Vice Chair S Snowdon
In Attendance:	A McGarel, CFO G Grainger, Chief Information Officer J Clark, Regional Director Primaries J Robson, Group Sixth Form Principal (part) L Chapman, Regional Director SEND and Outdoor Learning N Savvas, CEO R Bamford, Group Vice Principal Quality S Gales, Governance Professional S Graham, Chief People Officer	
Apologies:	D Wildridge	N Kellett R Murray

Absent:

The agenda was discussed in the following order: 1, 6.5, 6.7, 7, 3, 4, 2, 5, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.6, 8

1. Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence

A Duffety, C Higgins, E D'Souza, J Wakelam, M Chatt, S Daley and S Snowdon declared their roles as Governors of West Suffolk College.

N Savvas declared his role as CEO and Governor of West Suffolk College.

No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

Apologies for absence were received from D Wildridge, N Kellett, and R Murray.

The Chair informed that the Board operates a committee structure, where the majority of scrutiny is undertaken by the specialist committees, with high-level summary reports coming termly to the Board for review.

The Chair welcomed Alexandra Duffety as a newly Member appointed Trustee, and Trustees introduced themselves.

2. Feedback from 'First Hand' activities

Trustees received and considered the First-Hand activity feedback forms provided from visits to University and Professional Development centre and to schools of the Trust in the spring term.

E D'Souza and S Daley fed back on their visit to OSFC's culture day and commended the vibrant, inclusive event.

E D'Souza fed back on his visit to ASFC's drama performance and commended the positive collaborative event run by ASFC and WSC students.

Action

J Wakelam fed back on her visit to Extended Project Qualification student showcase event at ASFC and congratulated the students on the calibre of their projects.

3. **Minutes of the meetings:**

- **Trust Board meeting on 12 December 2024**
- **EEG Strategic Conference on 17 January 2025**
- **Joint Trust Board and Corporation meeting on 3 February 2025**
- **Joint Trust Board and Corporation meeting on 7 March 2025**

The minutes of the meetings above were **agreed** as an accurate record.

The Governance Professional **noted** that, in January 2025, the Trust Board appointed Josie Finch and Mike Cadman to the SEND Educational Excellence Committee.

The Governance Professional **noted** that, in February 2025, the Trust Board appointed Karen Points to the SEND Educational Excellence Committee.

The Governance Professional **noted** that, in March 2025, the Trust Board established and appointed members to the joint Finance Committee and wound down the Academy Councils and redesignated the SEND Educational Excellence Committee as an LGB.

4. **Matters Arising from the above meetings**

Nine of the eleven matter arising from the last meeting was complete, with one noted and one for discussion at the Strategic Conference in the summer term.

Trustees reflected that we need to reflect on lessons learned following our recent inorganic growth before further growing the Trust. The CEO informed that an analysis paper will be brought to the Board after Easter, before we further grow the Trust. Trustees also asked for a reflective analysis paper after future growth to assess the impact of the changes.

CEO

MA11 – The Governance Professional provided the updated terms of reference and scheme of delegation to reflect the changes made to our governance structure agreed on 7 March 2025. Trustees **agreed** the updated documents.

5. **CEO's Briefing**

5.1 **EEG Highlights**

Trustees received and considered a report on student achievements, student development including trips and experiences, an update on business and partnerships, shows and exhibitions, staff news and successes, and on progress against our sustainability strategy. The report also included links to the Group's newsletters to students and their families.

The CEO commended the Incident Management Group led by Louise Carroll and Steve Hope, to professionalise how we coordinate responses to emerging situations across our large Group, e.g. re-arranging three overseas student visits when Heathrow Airport was closed due to the nearby fire.

The CEO commended Rob Bamford and Colin Shaw for their support of the SEND schools following several qualifying complaints and the inadequate Ofsted judgement of Stone Lodge Academy.

The CEO informed that the DfE have approved the redesignation of Chalk Hill from an Alternative Provision school to a SEMH special school. The CEO summarised the implications for the redesignation and informed that we are working with Suffolk County Council to relocate the school from its Sudbury premises to Bury St Edmunds and to increase its residential capacity.

Trustees commended the strength of the report and the support of the team. The Chair commended the positivity of the staffing culture at the weekly Comms call, and the best practice sharing on display.

Trustees recommended we share the document with external stakeholders, e.g. councillors.

CPO

5.2 Strategic update

Trustees received and considered a report updating on key developments in education policy, funding, governance, and strategic initiatives affecting colleges, schools, and further education in England, including parliamentary updates, regulatory changes, funding challenges, and new government initiatives. The report also included a link to the 'dear accounting officer' letter from the DfE regarding the closure of the ESFA.

J Robson joined the meeting at 3pm

The CEO summarised the changes to education policy and funding and explained how this links to our Group approach and strategy, and our wider stakeholder strategy.

The CEO summarised the implications of the changes to Ofsted and to the local authorities as part of the devolution deal.

A Duffety left the meeting at 3.07pm

Trustees discussed the potential impact of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill on the sector.

Trustees queried when the new Ofsted framework will be introduced. R Bamford advised that it is not yet known and summarised that there could be further potential changes.

A Duffety rejoined the meeting at 3.14pm

Trustees **noted** the 'dear accounting officer' letter from the DfE regarding the closure of the ESFA.

5.3 Executive structure update

Trustees received and considered a report providing an update on the Senior Executive Team and their areas of responsibility, following several recent changes to the structure.

6. Committee Chair's Summary Reports

6.1. EEGT Primary Educational Excellence Committee Overview

Trustees received and considered the report provided which summarised the discussions and recommendations of the Committee meetings in the Spring Term.

The Committee considered feedback from governance member's deep dives and First-Hand feedback. The Committee reviewed Exning Primary School's autumn term data return to Suffolk County Council and the headteachers report which included an update on attendance, staffing, student progress, the school development and improvement plan. The Committee discussed the termly safeguarding report and the SEND report.

D Bicker, as Committee Chair, summarised the discussions by the Committee and noted that the transition to SONAR has been positive as a tool to monitor students' progression. D Bicker confirmed that the school continues to self-evaluate as Ofsted outstanding.

Trustees queried if there are plans to expand the capacity for SEN students. J Clark informed that the existing Key Stage 1 unit is over-capacity at 17 students, so we are exploring whether we can build a Key Stage 2 unit to support these students to progress.

Trustees commended the approach of the governance deep dives and supported plans to extend this across all our primary schools.

6.1.1 Safeguarding Termly Report

Trustees received and **noted** the termly report which was scrutinised by the Committee.

Trustees discussed the higher level of concerns at the SEN unit (the Hive) and queried what action is being taken. D Bicker, as Trustee Lead for Safeguarding (primaries) explained that it is typical for there to be higher levels on concerns in the autumn term and they start to reduce as the students embed. J Clark summarised the training and support provided to staff in the Hive.

The Chair informed that we have received confirmation from the DfE that they consent for Stanton Community Primary School to academise and join the Trust from September 2025.

6.2. EEG SEND Educational Excellence Committee Overview

Trustees received and considered the report provided which summarised the discussions and recommendations of the Committee meetings in the Spring Term.

The Committee discussed First Hand feedback, the Risk Register Extract and updates on changes to executive structure, governance structure, safeguarding arrangements and quality linked to improving quality and standards. The Committee received and considered updates on complaints and Ofsted visits, and their corresponding action plans, as well as reports on attendance and behaviour, and student welfare, safeguarding and residential Standard Three reports. The Committee also considered feedback escalated from the Academy Council meetings and reviewed and recommended policies in agenda item 7.

S Snowdon as Committee Chair, summarised the discussions by the Committee and noted that due to significant quality of education and safeguarding concerns, there were multiple changes to the committee over the term to strengthen governance oversight and reporting by the executive. S Snowdon thanked the Senior Executive Team and safeguarding team for their support of the SEND schools, and reflected their support was pivotal in the strong Ofsted outcome for Sunrise Academy.

S Snowdon reflected that while reporting from the executive has improved, further improvement is needed to improve analysis of the data to inform decisions.

The Chair reflected that it would take time for the newly formed committee to establish.

Trustees reflected that the redesignation of the committee as an LGB and the removal of the academy councils, adds additional workload to the committee, which we need to keep under review to ensure governance is effective.

The CEO explained the rationale for a singular committee overseeing the SEND schools, to support the executive to develop common ways of working which are effective and robust, and culture of best practice sharing. The CEO summarised the significant improvements required to improve and raise standards at the SEND schools.

Trustees queried how we will strengthen the leadership of the SEND schools to lessen the demand on the Group's leadership capacity and to address high levels of absence and use of agency staff. The CEO summarised how we are bringing together the leaders of the SEND schools to implement robust systems and to develop KPIs which allow trend analysis, continuous improvement and support informed decisions. The CEO informed that the Headteachers are being supported by mentors and Group leaders, and we are fully integrating the schools into the Group so they can benefit from our established and proven systems. The CEO informed that we are also reviewing what staff we need at the SEND schools to ensure we have the right staff to meet the needs of the students.

6.2.1 Safeguarding Termly Report

Trustees received and **noted** the termly report which was scrutinised by the Committee.

S Snowdon summarised the extensive work undertaken by the Trust to strengthen safeguarding arrangements at the SEND schools and commended the impact as evidenced by Sunrise Academy's positive Ofsted.

Trustees thanked the CEO and Senior Executive Team for their support of the SEND schools.

6.2.2 Complaints and Investigations

Trustees received and **noted** the report which was scrutinised by the Committee.

S Snowden reflected that there were several 'qualifying complaints' at the SEND schools and sometime a significant delay before the local authority/Ofsted/DfE notify the schools of those complaints. R Bamford summarised how we are working to improve reporting of complaints and relations with stakeholders to resolve concerns before they escalate into complaints.

6.2.3 Ofsted reports – Chalk Hill (residential), Stone Lodge Academy and Sunrise Academy

Trustees received and **noted** the reports which were scrutinised by the Committee.

6.2.4 DfE assurance letter request and response

Trustees received and **noted** the report which was scrutinised by the Committee.

6.2.5 Residential Standard Three Visit reports

Trustees received and **noted** the reports.

6.3. **EEG Post-16 Educational Excellence Committee Overview**

Trustees received and considered the report provided which summarised the discussions and recommendations of the Committee meetings in the Spring Term.

The Committee considered the risk register extract, key performance indicators to monitor student progress and experience and discussed the First-Hand Feedback. The Committee reviewed progress on Quality Improvement Plan and updates in regard to student welfare and safeguarding. The Committee also reviewed and recommended policies in agenda item 7.

S Daley, as Committee Chair, summarised the discussions by the Committee and reflected that the joint committee is now well established and effectively oversees the three post-16 colleges. S Daley explained the introduction of 'working at' grades to replace predicted grades and reflected that we will monitor the impact of this as part of the self-assessment report. S Daley explained that many of the amber KPIs are an improvement on previous years, and reflected that while retention is very high, the level of attendance is not as high as we want. S Daley informed that there are higher levels of students with SEND at the colleges than in previous years, and confirmed the committee are expecting detailed reports in the summer term to analyse the impact.

Trustees queried how attendance compares to the sector and whether the benchmarks are realistic and achievable. The CEO informed that the attendance is above the sector average. J Robson reflected that GCSE resit maths achievement nationally is very low and this impacts attendance, as students have poor previous experience of maths in schools and do not believe they can achieve and therefore are not as motivated to attend lessons. J Robson informed that the sector is pushing to change the maths resit curriculum.

6.3.1 Safeguarding Termly Report

Trustees received and **noted** the termly report which was scrutinised by the Committee.

6.4. **EEG Resources Committee Overview**

Trustees received and considered the report provided which summarised the discussions and recommendations of the Committee meeting in the Spring Term.

The Committee considered the Risk Register Extract and received updates on People (including key performance indicators for HR and wellbeing), Compliance (including the termly Health and Safety Report), Virtual Infrastructure (including a Data, Systems and Processes update and IT update) and Physical Infrastructure (including Estates and

Property update and a Sustainability update). The Committee reviewed and recommends the policy in agenda item 7.

M Chatt, as Committee Chair, summarised the discussions by the Committee and the key trends across the Group. M Chatt informed that the committee suggested it establish a few working parties to enable further discussion and debate, in readiness for bringing it back to the committee.

C Ridgeon and J Wakelam left the meeting at 4.20pm

C Higgins, as Governance Lead for Health and Safety, commended the improved reports and informed that the next focus is on preventative mitigations.

Trustees discussed that sustainability is a cross-disciplinary theme and discussed how to raise sustainability in other committees beyond the resources committee e.g. to the educational excellence committees. R Bamford informed of plans to add sustainability as a theme within the 2025/26 quality improvement plans. The CEO suggested we discuss it as a major theme of one of the EEG Strategic Conferences in 2025/26.

Chair
CEO
Gov.
Prof.

6.4.1. Health and Safety Termly Report

Trustees received and **noted** the termly report which was scrutinised by the Committee.

6.5. **EEGT Finance Committee Overview**

Trustees received and considered the report provided which summarised the discussions at and recommendations of the Committee meetings in the Spring Term.

The Committee considered the risk register extract, management accounts and key performance indicators, reviewed student enrolments and applications compared to budgetary targets and reviewed and recommend the reserves policy.

M Chatt, as *then* Committee Vice Chair, summarised the discussions by the Committee and noted the forecast surplus/deficit KPI is rated red however the position has significantly improved since the autumn term and the committee discussed the risks and opportunities and felt assured that it would achieve a year-end surplus position. M Chatt summarised the current student enrolments and explained the anticipated position for next academic year based on current applications.

Trustees reflected that the lagged funding model does not support significant year-on-year growth, and queried if there is a risk that the Trust could grow too rapidly to balance expenditure/income. The CEO informed that our mainstream primary school is at capacity (based on its PAN) so cannot grow and our SEND school placements are fully funded, hence this is of biggest concern for our post-16 colleges. The CEO informed that we are carefully monitoring applications to balance growth at a sustainable and viable level.

Trustees discussed the additional expenditure required to support quality improvements at our SEND schools, and queried if we will need to draw on reserves. The CFO summarised the plans for funding these unbudgeted roles to create additional capacity.

Trustees reflected that the reserves policy is higher than the DfE guidance and queried if there is a risk that reserves funds could be clawed back. The CFO advised that we are clearly outlining the rationale for the higher level of reserves, i.e. linked to planned large capital projects.

Trustees queried what actions are being taken to ensure all staff are aware of the whistleblowing policy, linked to the schools

6.5.1 Reserves Policy

Trustees received, considered and **approved** the Reserves Policy which was reviewed and recommended by the Committee.

6.5.2 Schools Resource Management Self-Assessment

Trustees received, considered and **noted** the self-assessment which was reviewed and recommended by the Committee.

6.6. **EEGT Audit and Risk Management Overview**

Trustees received and considered the report provided which summarised the discussions at and recommendations of the Committee meetings in the Spring Term.

The Committee considered the findings reports of the internal auditors so far in 2024/25 and reviewed the Executive's audit recommendation tracking report to monitor implementation progress. The Committee received updates regarding GDPR, subject access requests, freedom of information and data breaches to ensure proper process was followed and effective measures put in place to lessen the risk to the organisation. The Committee scrutinised the Risk Register to ensure that pertinent risks were identified, and that appropriate and effective mitigations were in place to minimise risk; and recommends the Risk Register to the Board. The Committee also reviewed the incident management updates and reviewed the skillset and suitability of the Committee's membership.

K Points left the meeting at 4.45pm

R Inman, as Chair of the Committee, summarised the discussions by the Committee and the rationale for the changes to the risk register.

The Chair commended the strong working between the Executive, Chairs of the Audit and Risk Management Committees, and with the other committees via the risk register extracts.

6.6.1 Risk Register

Trustees received and **noted** the Risk Register.

6.7 **EEG Nominations and Governance Overview**

Trustees received and considered the report provided which summarised the discussions at and recommendations of the Committee meeting in the Spring Term.

The Committee reviewed the membership of the Group's governance including the constitution and committee membership, as well as EDI analysis and skillset analysis, discussed the feedback from the Chair's annual 1:1 meetings with governance members and the results of the 360-degree survey on the performance and effectiveness of the Chair, CEO and Governance Professional, including the 3-year trend analysis of survey results. The Committee also reviewed and recommended the proposed changes to governance structure discussed on 7 March 2025.

6.7.1 Membership

Trustees **noted** the updated membership of the Group's governance.

6.7.2 Appointments

Trustees **noted** the resignation of Sarah Healey Pearce as a Trustee in January 2025, due to personal circumstances.

Trustees **noted** the resignations of Zoe Whiteman, John McCourt, Sophie Cowell, and Paul Rana as members of the Academy Councils, Kacper Gwara as a member of the Post-16 Educational Excellence Committee and Bruce Hamill as a parent member of the Primary Educational Excellence Committee.

Trustees **noted** the dissolution of the Academy Councils and the termination of Academy Council members.

Trustees **appointed** Annette Goodfellow as Vice Chair of the Primary Educational Excellence Committee, replacing John Malone.

7. Policies

Trustees received, considered and **approved** the EEG Job Description DSL, EEGT Schools Child Protection and Safeguarding policies for Chalk Hill, Duke of Lancaster, Priory, Sunrise, and Stone Lodge, EEGT Schools Child Protection Counselling and welfare records, EEGT Schools Fitness to Study policy, EEGT Schools Prevent in school settings, EEGT Schools Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment between Children or Young Adults, EEGT Schools Social, Emotional, Mental Health Strategy (SEMH), EEGT Schools Suicide Safety Amongst Students Policy, and EEGT Schools Young Carers Policy which were reviewed and recommended by the SEND Educational Excellence Committee. Trustees received, considered and **approved** the EEG Compliments and Complaints procedure and EEG Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy which were reviewed and recommended by the Post-16 Educational Excellence Committee, and the Corporate Health and Safety Policy which was reviewed and recommended by the Resources Committee.

Trustees commended the Senior Executive Team for the quality of the policies.

9. Any Other Business

9.1 Review of the meeting

The Chair welcomed feedback on the meeting. Trustees fed back that the hybrid meeting remains highly effective and allows full participation. Trustees appreciate the flexibility of hybrid meetings, though reflected it is reliance on the video conferencing set-up.

9.2 Reminder: election for Chair and Vice Chairs of the Trust Board

The Governance Professional reminded all that in the summer term there will be an election for the Chair and Vice Chairs of the Trust Board and explained the process for applying.

9.3 Memorial for former WSC Chair

The Chair informed that on behalf of the Corporation he attended the memorial for Richard Stewart, who was Chair when the college incorporated, to honour Richard for his service.

The meeting closed at 5.01pm