

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 26 February 2025 at 2.30pm

Present physically:

Present virtually: A Duffety, WSC Governor – **WSC Vice Chair**
C Higgins, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor
E D'Souza, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor (part)
K Chapman, WSC Governor
K Points, EEGT Trustee
M Chatt, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor – **Chair**
N Kellett, EEGT Trustee
R Hetherington, WSC Governor
R Murray, EEGT Trustee (part)

In attendance: A McGarel, Chief Finance Officer
C Willcocks, Group Director IT
G Grainger, Chief Information Officer
L Carroll, Group Head of Project Accounting, Risk and Transformation
L Chapman, Regional Director for SEND and Outdoor Learning
N Hart, Group Head of Sustainability
N Savvas, Chief Executive Officer
S Gales, Governance Professional
S Hope, Group Director of Compliance

Apologies: A Swift, Group Director Estates
D Wildridge, EEGT Trustee – **EEGT Vice Chair**
S Henty, HR Manager Wellbeing & Development

Absent:

1. Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence

Members recognised the standing declarations. No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

Apologies for absence were received from A Swift, D Wildridge and S Henty.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024

Members reviewed and **agreed** the minutes of 13 November 2024 as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising from the meeting on 13 November 2024

Five of the ten matters arising from the previous meeting were complete, with five ongoing.

E D'Souza joined at 2.35pm

MA3 – K Chapman, as Chair of WSC's Audit and Risk Management Committee, informed that further development of the Risk Rating including sub-risk ratings is underway and will be presented in the summer term.

MA4, 5 and 7 – N Hart informed that future sustainability reports will include Exning Primary School. The CEO informed that our immediate focus at the specialist SEN schools is on quality and safeguarding, in the slightly longer term we will expand our sustainability initiatives and reporting. Members agreed with this proposal and asked N Hart to propose the timeline for completing the matters arising.

Action

N Hart

MA8 – Members noted this was ongoing and asked A Swift to propose the timeline for completing the matters arising.

A Swift

4. **Risk Register Extract**

Members received and considered the paper provided.

Members discussed the red risk (EEG020 relating to integration) and the CFO informed that the Audit and Risk Management Committees have recommended that the risk name be amended to explain this risk relates to the specialist SEN schools. The CEO summarised how we are working with each specialist SEN school and the support we are providing staff, and the impact this is having on culture.

Members discussed the two proposed new risks - WSC (relating to DfE growth case funding) and EEG (relating to the implementation of the new finance system). L Carroll explained that the Audit and Risk Management Committees have agreed to add the WSC risk but considered the EEG risk to be operational and suitably mitigated and rejected the EEG risk. Members discussed that the new WSC risk is not appropriate for this Committee and should be allocated to the Finance Committee.

L Carroll

Members asked that future reports provide the risk name/number in the cover paper.

L Carroll

Members reviewed the risks and **felt assured** that the mitigations proposed were appropriate.

PEOPLE

5. **HR**

i. Termly KPI and EDI report (autumn term)

Members received and considered the paper provided which included analysis on headcount and workforce trends, staff absence and sickness trends, absence management, employee relations, recruitment and selection, and contract variations. The CPO summarised the key data.

R Murray joined the meeting at 3.05pm

Members queried how our staff turnover has been calculated and what is being done to reduce areas of the Group with higher staff turnover. The CPO explained how we calculate and analyse our staff turnover. Members queried if the benchmark is for the same reporting period or the full year. The CPO explained our staff turnover is a termly percentage, the benchmark is the sector's annual average percentage. The CEO explained that while we want low staff turnover, in certain areas we expect higher staff turnover as we are taking proactive steps to improve staffing at the specialist SEN schools.

Members discussed that the majority of staff with a Bradford Factor over 200 are within our specialist SEN schools, and the CPO explained how the HR team are working with staff to proactively manage staff absence.

Members noted that proactive absence management can take time and queried whether how the short-term impact of high absence is being addressed. The CPO agreed and noted that our recruitment team work very efficiently to fill vacancies, supported by our wellbeing team which work to support staff back into work. The CPO informed that where needed we do provide short-term cover via agency staff, though noted that reliance on agency staff is not ideal and wherever possible we look to recruit suitably skilled staff to fill vacancies.

The CEO commended the HR team for their proactive and impactful work improving absence post-merger, especially given this has been achieved without the additional staffing capacity we had planned (via TCAF) to support this.

Members queried whether there is a link between employee engagement and staff absence, and queried if this is something we can analyse. The CPO to consider.	CPO
Members asked for future reports to include a provisional milestones and/or timeline for evidence of impact of our absence management. K Points, as Trustee Lead for People, noted that culture change takes time and that we have to understand that progress and impact may not be linear.	CPO
Members discussed the Bradford Factor by role data and queried if there will be further analysis of this data to understand trends. The CPO informed that this is being investigated so we can identify and understand the issues, to put in place effective mitigations.	
Members noted that some senior leaders have high Bradford Factor data and queried if this was a particular cultural concern and asked the CPO to provide additional context/information on the support offered.	CPO
Members commended the clarity and transparency of the report, and asked for future reports to show the previous terms data to help identify trends/progress/impact.	CPO
<p>ii. Termly Wellbeing report (autumn term)</p> <p>Members received and considered the papers provided which included updates on the development zone, licence to lead, CPD, wellbeing, and future developments. The CPO summarised the key information</p> <p>Members commended the clarity and transparency of the report.</p> <p>Members discussed the licence to lead management training programme, and queried if the programme may over supply aspirational future senior leaders for EEG's needs which could overly raise career progression expectations. The CPO explained the programme is aimed at existing (rather than aspiring) managers, with an aim to support them to develop leadership and management skills. As such it is perceived as professional development, rather than a precursor to career progression. Members queried if there has been proportionate uptake from each school and college and the support service areas. The CPO agreed to provide this analysis in future reports.</p>	CPO
<p>iii. Gender Pay Gap reports</p> <p>Members received and considered the gender pay gap reports for EEGT, SENDAT and WSC. The CPO summarised the key points.</p> <p>Members noted that both the mean and median gender pay gap at WSC is much lower than that of EEGT and SENDAT and queried the reasons for this. The CPO explained that EEGT and SENDAT both have a high proportion of term time only roles which are predominantly filled by women, who are balancing family/caring roles, which are roles in the lower/middle quartiles; whereas WSC in sources a number of services (e.g. grounds keeping, estates, cleaning, etc.), which are predominantly filled by men, which are roles in the lower/middle quartiles.</p> <p>The CPO confirmed that EEGT and WSC operate the same employment processes, including recruitment, development, enhancement, growth/promotion opportunities.</p> <p>The CPO noted that our work on job families has helped to define and standardise the pay structures and salary range for each role.</p> <p>Members noted that, despite higher percentages of females to men in each quarter across each institution at each quartile, the percentage of men in upper quartile roles is greater than in the (upper and lower) middle and lower quartiles and queried if this indicates barriers to career progression opportunities for females.</p>	

Members **agreed** to convene a working party including the Governance Leads for People, CPO and CEO, to understand what KPIs we need to review to monitor career progression and staff pay to ensure equity of opportunity. The Chair invited members wishing to volunteer to join the working party contact the Governance Professional.

INFRASTRUCTURE

VIRTUAL INFRASTRUCTURE

6. **Data, Systems and Processes**

Members received and considered the paper provided which included a progress update on ongoing projects and analysis of the benefits/return on investment. The CIO summarised the key points.

Members discussed the use of robots and queried if there are additional costs for additional users. The CIO informed there are not, however we continue to monitor our usage so we can control costs.

Members discussed the use of AI by staff and by staff, and queried what guidance and controls are being put in place to keep data secure. The CIO summarised our AI strategy and the controls.

Members queried the acronym 'SET'. The CIO explained this refers to the senior executive team.

Members queried the use of the phrase 'single point of truth'. The CIO explained that we use multiple databases to store information about students and staff which can lead to data mismatches, hence our ambition to continuously improve our database management practices to ensure we have consistent and reliable data.

Members discussed what is meant by a data driven culture.

Members commended the clarity of the report.

7. **IT**

Members received and considered the paper provided which analysis of our IT security, desktop support, technical debt reduction, and an update on planned large IT projects. C Willcocks summarised the key points.

Members discussed the downtime data and queried if this is an improvement or decline from the previous period. C Willcocks informed it is a new dataset so we will be able to analyse trends in future periods. Members asked if the low reported percentage tallies with user perception of downtime data, and if not, how this will be managed. C Willcocks agreed to reflect on this in future reports.

Members noted the significant increase in desktop support and queried the reasons for the increase, and whether additional capacity is needed and/or if there are systemic issues we need to address. C Willcocks informed that the increase is due to changes in reporting whereby all support requests, including password resets, are recorded.

Members commended the improvement of first response time and resolution time, however queried what more can be done to quicken response and resolution for staff and students experiencing IT issues. C Willcocks explained that the data is aggregated at Group level and does not differentiate by complexity and confirmed that the resolution time for less complex requests which have the most impact for students and staff (e.g. password resets) is very good, however more complex requests can take longer which impacts the data.

Members queried if staff and student voice is collected in relation to IT desktop support to evaluate whether the service is working well for users. C Willcocks confirmed that this is in development. The CIO noted that staff feedback in relation to IT is anecdotally collected as part of our termly staff feedback meetings.

C Willcocks

Members queried if IT support for our primary and specialist SEN schools is now fully integrated into the EEG structure. C Willcocks confirmed that his team is working to support IT arrangements across all our schools and colleges.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

8. Estates and Property

Members received and considered the paper provided which included analysis of the planned and preventative maintenance, unplanned maintenance, desktop support, trends, core infrastructure reliability, asset maintenance, planned refurbishment, projects and investment summary. The CFO summarised the key points.

The CFO informed of plans to refine the format of future reports to help identify trends and impact, and informed that we are working with an external company to help us evaluate our current capacity per building/campus to inform our Group property strategy.

Members discussed the immediate capacity needs of our post-16 provision and queried if the development of a Group property strategy may be too late, to achieve the additional capacity needed for next academic year. The CFO informed that we are working to review this as part of our usual operational planning and annual room move processes, alongside developing a wider Group property strategy.

Members discussed the medium-to-longer-term property plans, including relocation possibilities.

Members **agreed** to convene a working party to support the CFO in developing the approach for our Group property strategy. The Chair invited members wishing to volunteer to join the working party contact the Governance Professional and asked the CFO to propose when to convene the working party.

All
CFO

As discussion of the agenda items was not concluded within the scheduled meeting, members agreed to convene an additional virtual meeting as a continuation of this Committee meeting on 7 March 2025, to discuss agenda items 9, 10, 11 and 12.

The meeting closed at 4.57pm