

# MINUTES

**The Challenge Academy Trust**  
**Wednesday 15 July 2020, 6pm**

**PRESENT:**

Howard Platt (HP)	Andrew Moorcroft (AM)
Steven Whatmore (SW)	Matthew Grant (MG)
Linda Waterson (LW)	Tim Long (TL)
Sheila Yates (SY)	Adrienne Lang (AL)
Susan Richardson (SR)	Ben Logan (BL)
Vicky Briggs (VB)	John Monaghan (JM)
Stuart Titchard (ST)	Damian McGuire (DM)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**            **Lisa Adams – Clerk to Governors**

Part One – non confidential business

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**1. Welcome**

The Chairperson welcomed everyone.

**2. Absence and apologies**

Apologies were received from Lacy Muir and Jane Griffiths

**Agreed: The governing body consented to the absence of those listed above.**

**3. Declaration of personal interests**

There were no declarations of personal interest.

**4. Minutes of the previous meeting**

AM reported on the process for awarding GCSE grades this year. The schools submit the assessment grades and then a cumulative normalisation of the GSCE grades is carried out. Students may appeal the decision or apply to re sit the exams. There has been a lot of speculation in the press about unconscious bias of teachers. However AM felt that a robust process has been put in place to ensure that this doesn't happen.

## **5. Membership**

It was reported that at the Members Board meeting they appointed AM as a Trustee from the 1 September 2020 in his capacity as new CEO.

There are currently 3 vacancies on the board of trustees.

## **6. Executive Report**

MG provided Trustees with an outline of what has been happening during COVID-19. The trust managed to obtain 491 devices from the DfE to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils and Year 10s which was beyond the initial offer.

MG expressed his thanks to everyone involved in ensuring the academies were ready to re-open on 15 June. The online learning continues for those pupils not able to return to school or college. Appendix one provides the numbers of pupils attending at different times during lockdown. It was noted that the primary schools have been most under pressure with having to invite reception, Year 1 and Year 6 back to school. It was also noted that everything had gone smoothly and no issues have arisen since the re-opening. AM reported that Warrington is top in terms of the attendance figures for schools across the North West. It was felt that this is something to be extremely proud of. MG noted that this is credit to the Local Authority focus group that AM has been involved with. AM reported that there are some schools in Warrington which are still not open which is disappointing. Trustees were informed that TCAT have very much been part of leading on key strategies during the pandemic.

MG reported that in terms of planning for September the guidance varies for each setting. It is important to ensure that there are consistencies across the trust where possible. Each academy has an action plan which will give trustees a flavour of how much work has gone into the re-opening. Plans are in place for all academies to be open to all pupils and students from September. Arrangements for Priestley may vary as the college is being directed to use a blend of in college and remote learning to ensure it can comply with the needs to protect students and staff. The plan is to bring Year 13 back a week earlier. Action plans are being developed which will be shared with Trustees when available. Trustees were informed that the biggest challenge is that the guidance states that learners do not need to socially distance but staff are required to. This is proving a challenge in terms of staff rooms etc. It is anticipated that the guidance will change between now and September. AM reported that he has arranged a CET meeting in the middle of August to review plans in line with any changes in the guidelines. It was noted that the Trustees may be required to meet during the summer to sign plans off.

In terms of managing the process associated with the full opening from September as a Trust the responsibilities have been split between the trust and local management teams. It is important that academies respond locally as the estates are all different. Academies and schools are required to consult with trade unions regarding the risk assessments.

AL reported that she attended a public health meeting where they were asked what the local position is on a local outbreak. An outbreak is classed as 2 and will be managed in different ways depending on the types of building.

AM reported that the 7 day figures for Warrington is that there have been no COVID deaths or new cases or outbreaks in care homes. **SW asked** if the risk assessments are to be shared with local governing boards. MG reported that Priestley's risk assessment will be finalised next week. AL reported that all academies have a draft risk assessment which reflect the various conditions. AL is due to meet with the academies to finalise the risk assessments once they have amended them to reflect their own estates. The risk assessments will be shared with Adele, Health and Safety Consultant to check that they are on the right track. It is hoped that they will be available to share with local governing boards the first week in August.

SR noted that on page 5 it talks about the number of cases and responses being led by public health. **She asked** what the relationship has been like. AL reported that she attended a meeting which was led by the North West Public Health England. It was made very clear that Public Health England North West lead the outbreak management for consistency. Trustees were informed that there is now an outbreak plan on the Local Authority website which links in with all the risk assessments. If there is an outbreak at a school they need to contact Paula Worthington's team. **SR asked** what if a parent is diagnosed with COVID. AL reported that it is not a case in a setting unless it is a child. If a child is diagnosed then it is expected that they will isolate for 14 days. **SR asked** if it is expected that all staff will return even those that have been shielding. She was informed that there are HR policies to deal with these issues. BL reported that the guidance is quite clear. The default position is that all will return to work in September. It was noted that part of the risk assessment process is to encourage leaders to work creatively and flexibly. All staff in school need to adhere to strict social distance measures. AL reported that the categories for shielding are changing in August. The guidance is that the clinically extremely vulnerable will receive a letter and be contacted by their own consultant. It was noted that the likelihood is that it will only be a small number of people who have immune compromised issues such as receiving chemotherapy that may not be able to return.

MG reported that Ofqual have now confirmed that there will be a full series of GCE A, AS and GCSE resits in all subjects available in autumn 2020. It was

noted that the CET are meeting tomorrow to discuss further. At this point it is unknown who might want to re-sit. It was also noted that there is no funding available for re-sits therefore those students from a socially difficult background may not be able to afford it. **HP asked** if students aren't happy with the grades do they go to the school to appeal or re-sit. MG reported that they have the option for both. The Trust Board needs to agree an appeals process. The Trust is able to appeal in terms of discrimination but it will be very difficult to prove. It is hoped that the Trust have all the evidence to be able to prove that all students have been treated fairly. Equally the student can choose to go straight for a re-sit. **HP asked** if students can do both. MG noted that they can. **HP asked** how quickly the appeal would need to be heard. Trustees were informed that the process isn't in place yet. MG felt that it would be a written process and not a hearing. **HP asked** if there are any timescales in place. It was noted that students would be required to enter for a re-sit however if their appeal was successful then they would be able to withdraw.

Trustees expressed their thanks to everyone for ensuring that all children entitled to a free school meal were able to access food. It was noted that everything is in place to source vouchers for during the summer. DM reported that the schools are unable to claim costs for the wider opening if their budget is in a surplus position. It was noted that the only costs schools can apply for is the vouchers and if it has had to have a deep clean because of a COVID case. The Trust will be able to claim against some additional costs for Sir Thomas Boteler, Penketh High and Padgate Academy. All claims need to be submitted by 21 July. MG reported that the current summer holiday scheme is not allowing new families to join the scheme and that if family circumstances change they can't be considered. **ST asked** if this is something that the Trust need to make consideration for if families fall into this category. MG felt sure that schools would support families. There are still some central vouchers that could be used if required.

MG reported that the guidance on catch-up funding for secondary pupils is due to be published. The priorities for next year will be on the Year 10 and Year 11 students. AM reported that the Trust is exploring its own offers in terms of catch-up. It was noted that there are a lot of online resources that can be accessed. There is also the possibility of providing our own tuition programme with part time staff or retired teachers.

MG reported that there is a policy in place in terms of quarantine arrangements for if anyone goes on holiday during the summer. BL reported that discretions are being applied for those that have booked a holiday some time ago.

MG reported that the CET survey results in appendix 2 are very positive. VB reported that the idea was to gauge where we were up to and to highlight any

gaps. The survey would also capture what the Headteachers value. LW noted that it is really good to see that everyone is really positive. She expressed her concerns around the finance questions and felt that we should be in a better position. ST noted that the finance managers have been in position for a full year so progress should have been made. HP noted that two schools have only recently joined so it could be them that have responded in this way. MG reported that there are 2 academies that are under pressure in terms of budgets. The Trust has started to put pressure around financial issues and recovery programmes. AM noted that it is a valid concern which he has discussed with DM. A communication plan is being worked on which is hoped will support the timing of reports and information. SR noted that Broomfields governing body have had some concerns around timing of budget information and the lateness in receiving it. She felt that this is partly because we are new and that some information from the local authority was outstanding. It was noted that Broomfields budget is very tight and it is important that finance reports are received in a timely manner. **ST asked** if there are thoughts of including a next layer. VB reported that part of the planning is to expand. AM reported that there are a number of surveys planned and a lot will be answered in the communication plan.

MG reported that the funds for the Bridgewater High project are coming through.

MG reported that Premier Tankers have just received planning permission for the development of their site which is adjacent to Priestley College. It was noted that Priestley governors have set up a working party to look at the plans. DM is currently working on the valuation and it is estimated around £100,000. Further work needs to be done with Priestley governors before it is presented to Trustees. **SW asked** if this is the one that effects the entrance to the college. MG reported that it is and that it will move the entrance away from the main road.

MG reported that the housing development partnership is ongoing. The Trust need to approve that they are happy with the proposed partnership. It was felt that it would help with the development of some of our schools. Trustees were informed that the plans include the provision for a new primary school. SY declared an interest as a local resident and doesn't support the development, however if it got the go ahead she would support TCAT being involved in the primary school. Trustees voted in favour of becoming a partner of the developer. SY abstained.

MG reported that the earliest Ofsted may inspect schools is January 2021 however they may visit before without grading. It was noted that Sir Thomas Boteler may have to wait another 6 months.

MG reported that in terms of Padgate Academy the IEB are confident that it is able to move towards a Local Governing Board. Thanks were expressed to all those involved. It is anticipated that the building work is due to be completed by the end of next week with snagging to be carried out. Thanks were expressed to AL for all her work on ensuring the building work is completed. It was felt that it would be good for the Trustees to hold a meeting at Padgate Academy in September so that they can see all the work.

The final edition of the TCAT Good News will be released shortly. It was noted that this has enabled communication across the trust at all levels. MG reported that a Priestley student has won a place at an art academy.

A Trustee Seminar is being planned for 23 September which will be an opportunity for Trustees and Senior Leaders to review the vision and strategic objectives of TCAT as it moves forward.

MG thanked everyone for their support over the last few years. It has been an honour to have been the first CEO of an academy trust that really is making a positive difference for thousands of young people and those that work in our academies. HP noted that one of his regrets is that this is an unsatisfactory way for Trustees to say good bye to MG. It was proposed that a get together be arranged in September. HP thanked MG on behalf of TCAT.

AM reported on the score cards. It was noted that a decision was made to continue to complete. An example of a post COVID action plan was shared with Trustees. It was noted that the priority is to get the schools back up and running for September. SY reported that as committees haven't met there hasn't been an opportunity to go through the score cards. SY and JG have met however the focus was on preparation in line with COVID-19. It was felt that the score cards are very detailed and it was suggested that an executive summary be produced for all schools. SY noted that the absence and attendance figures are completed differently by some schools. It was felt that this was due to the interpretation of what is being asked. AM reported that the Trust has invested in some management software which should resolve these issues.

## **7. Finance**

DM reported that the forecasted outturn is almost in line with predictions. It has been a little more difficult than normal due to the way in which income and expenditure has changed due to the impact of COVID-19. LW reported that she has looked back at the agreed budget from last year before Broomfields and Meadowside joined and if you compare like for like it would be a £625k deficit. DM reported that the surplus from Meadowside has masked the outturn. LW noted that the auditors made a comment that when

schools join in year you have to look at like for like. DM reported that the issue is the deficit budgets at Penketh High and Padgate Academy. He assured Trustees that plans are in place to recover the debt.

It was reported that the agreement for the expansion at Bridgewater High School has been signed which included the funding related to the split site. There has already been a draw down on that funding which will be used to fund improvements to the two sites, rather than attempt to return through revenue.

DM reported that the nursery funding is still an ongoing issue. Conversations have been held with Garry Bradbury and some answers have been received. It was noted that some background work is required. If funding is such as we will have to operate creating deficits at the primary schools. **SW asked** how much it would be. DM reported that Penketh South and Great Sankey would have a shortfall of £50,000, the shortfall at Meadowside is lower. It was noted that Great Sankey can manage the deficit. **HP asked** what assumptions have been made. DM informed Trustees that they haven't been included. **SW asked** where DM has got with Garry Bradbury. DM noted that he has been helpful to a point but when asked about funding he has not really answered the queries. AM reported that MG has raised the issue with Paula Worthington. **HP asked** if DM feels he has the support of the Trust. DM noted that he does and that once he has the facts he will be able to put a plan in place. **HP asked** if Garry Bradbury is the right person to speak to as this is a serious issue and affects 3 schools. DM reported that Paula Worthington and Steven Broomfield are aware of the issue. It was noted that the potential consequence is that the nursery provision will have to stop. HP noted that the further consequence is that if the primary school loses the nursery it may affect the numbers in the school.

**LW asked** if the formula used is being applied to all schools. DM reported that it is. The rules and regulations changed back in 2017 and this seems to be the catalyst. VB reported that the funding for private nurseries and maintained has been aligned however the out goings for a maintained nursery are significantly higher. HP informed DM to not be afraid to escalate the issue if he needs to.

#### **ST left the meeting at 7.11pm**

DM reported on the COVID-19 funding. **SW asked** what costs the Trust will not be able to recover. DM informed them that they will be able to claim back free school meal vouchers and additional premises costs associated with opening over the holiday periods to provide the key worker provision. It was noted that although there has been a huge amount of disruption in terms of expenditure it hasn't. DM reported that there have been some savings from certain areas which has helped.

It was reported that the main issue is the loss of income at Padgate Academy and the leisure centre which is currently £60,000. It was noted that the staff have been furloughed so some savings have been made.

**SW asked** about budget for 2021 around the electricity costs. DM informed Trustees that the forms have been completed and they are just waiting to transfer them across to a new tariff. SW asked when we would have visible sight of what schools will be paying out. DM noted that it should be by the end of next week.

LW noted that it is pleasing to see that the cash balance has improved. She also noted that she is conscious that the audit committee hasn't met. She reported that the liquidity is the same as last year which is a good position to be in. **LW asked** where the Trust was up to with external audits. DM reported that this needs to be planned out. It is proposed that the audit committee meet in early September to pick up the work that has been taking place during lockdown. DM informed the Trustees that he has discussed the plan of work with AM. Trustees were assured that work has still been going on but not been able to access some of the documents. DM reported that the Trust is in a strong position because of the capital funds it has received.

SY noted that some schools have significant deficits and felt that the Trust needs to re-enforce that schools need to live within their means. It was noted that one school has a deficit of a million pound and because of the other surpluses the Trust is in a strong position. HP noted that the Trust aren't saying they are ok with the deficits and robust plans are in place to recover the debt. It was noted that the cumulative surplus is less than the surplus at Priestley.

AM assured Trustees that recovering the deficits is a priority. SY noted that the experience of headship is that they are aware of the link between the finance and curriculum. It is important that everyone understands that the Trust is only in this position because of the surpluses at the other school. MG reported that there are robust plans in place for next year. Two of the schools are now turning in significant surpluses. The growth in pupil numbers and the 'good' ofsted grading for Penketh High should improve its financial position. In terms of Padgate Academy the leadership structure has been trimmed down which will support the budget. Trustees were informed that there is only one school showing a deficit budget for next year. HP noted that it is fine to have a plan but it needs to come to fruition.

It was reported that due to Matthew Grant's impending retirement, a number of potential banking changes have been identified:



## **TCAT Bank Account**

The bank mandate requires two signatories for any transaction. It is therefore proposed that Andrew Moorcroft and Tim Long be added as signatories.

## **Online Banking Facility**

The online facility requires a minimum of two administrators to authorise any change to the operation of all accounts and users within the Trust. It is proposed that the Andrew Moorcroft and Vicky Briggs be added.

The Trustees approved the proposals.

## **8. Operations Report**

HP noted that the Estate Management Plan is a really useful document and that he would be pleased to show it to any perspective school.

AL highlighted the planned programme of works for 2020/2021. There are a number of projects ongoing which Trustees are aware of. The condition survey report has identified category C and D issues which require rectification within the next 5 years.

It was reported that tenders have been sought for the roof replacements at Broomfields and Meadowside. If the work is combined the cost will be significantly less. It was noted that the quote is from a reputable builder who completed the work on the roof at Bridgewater.

AL reported that the other works that are taking place in 2020/2021 are:

- **Penketh South**  
Facias, front entrance including rendering and external stair upgrade  
Full flat roof replacement
  
- **Meadowside**  
Roofing works  
Kitchen refurbishment

Works have been included in the plan for work at Priestley College and COVID-19 related issues. £60,000 has been allocated to look at fire system adjustments and cycle lanes. In terms of works at Priestley the Trust is looking at a modular building for an additional hall/exam room. It was noted that Priestley will part fund the project. A reduced contribution of £30,000 has been allocated for the refurbishment to the food technology room at Bridgewater High.

It was reported that the two new schools joining the Trust are getting a lot of work. Broomfields will have their boilers replaced next year. There are big

issues in terms of Meadowside estate and the roof work will be completed in 3 phases.

**HP asked** what the likelihood of getting a new build at Penketh High. AM reported that this has been raised with the RSC and they are looking into it. HP felt that the Trust need to be mindful not to spend too much money on Penketh High if it could get a new build. AL reported that £150,000 has been allocated to the improvements to the school frontage at Penketh High. It was noted that any plans drawn up can be submitted towards a bid for a new building. DM informed Trustees that the amount of capital being awarded by the DfE has been cut and currently only free schools are getting the new builds.

**SW asked** if the Trust were aware of the extent of the issues which have been identified at Meadowside. AL reported that some areas were identified in the condition survey. During lockdown the Trust was given the option to have free detailed surveys and these were carried out at 5 schools and Priestley. The survey identified that some of the roofs are in quite a poor condition. The first phase of the project has been out to tender and has come back cheaper than expected. **SW asked** if we knew about the issues before the Trust took it on. AL reported that we knew about the £700,000 costs. It was noted that in terms of due diligence when another school joins questions need to be asked if the condition survey is enough. AL reported that the survey that was carried out didn't do core samples which is the difference. LW noted that it is worth investing in a detailed survey as part of the due diligence process. AL informed Trustees that she took advantage of the survey's being free. HP noted that it has been an expensive lesson.

The IT specification draft document was circulated to Trustees. AM noted that the Trustees raised at the last meeting about future proofing the academies in terms of IT capabilities. AL was asked to explore some plans and ideas. Trustees were informed that an IT partner is being sourced to advice. It was noted that there are some simple things that can be put in place over the next few months. AL reported that she has sat down with a number of the IT providers to get a flavour of what is on offer. There are some very clear views on what is required. AL informed Trustees that she had a zoom meeting with another Trust which reassured her that it is not as complex. The proposals will be circulated to selected trusted suppliers and invite them to provide a roadmap for the Trust with associated costs. Costs will be requested specifically for the following areas:

- Provision of broadband for all academies with 7 moving onto the new provision by April 2021 and the remaining 3 academies moving as their current contracts cease
- Provision of cost-effective links between the academies such as VPN or MPLS

- Movement of primary networks to TCAT systems

It was noted that bringing the primaries into a wider network is difficult whilst with the Local Authority. It is anticipated that this will take a year to implement. The aim is to set up a central platform to share documentation through office 365 and create hubs to provide better support. **HP asked** if the Trust could put in place a central IT support team similar to finance and HR. AM felt that to make it completely centralised would be a significant cost. It was noted that the current IT support staff based at the high schools have a blended role. AL reported that this is going to be a journey and this is the first stage. It was noted that this is a scaled back plan to get where we need to be in the next 2 years. AL informed Trustees that there is a significant amount of work to do in the long term so it is easier to break it down to stages. AM felt that in some respects the Trust is moving towards a centralised function but for some high schools there will need to be someone on site. HP felt that if the trust has a credible IT structure it is another reason for schools to want to join us. AM felt that the current system is working and it is important to not destabilise what is already in place.

## 9. HR Report

BL reported that the focus has been on the challenges of COVID-19.

It was reported that in the main the workforce has been supportive of plans and returning to work. The Trust acknowledges that employees have concerns. Risk Assessments are in place and have enabled managers to have structured conversations with employees. There has been less than 5% of the workforce absent.

It was noted that COVID-19 will have had an impact on the mental well-being of staff. It is planned to use better place to work to provide support.

A meeting has been held with the unions to discuss plans for September and they are very supportive with what has been put in place. Trust wide policies are being developed to support the workforce.

BL reported that a need has been identified for a trust wide central system in terms of payroll. It is hoped that a central system will help achieve efficiencies and modernising routines.

In terms of online recruitment, training and development the Trust is in the process of getting demonstrations from providers. Proposals will be presented to Trustees at the next board meeting.

## **10. Admissions**

It was reported that there are no plans for any changes to the admissions criteria at any of the schools.

## **11. Any Other Business**

There was no any other business.

## **12. Dates and times of future meetings**

**Action: dates and times to be circulated to Trustees**

It was proposed that the committees will start to meet next term.

The meeting closed at 8:04pm