

THE CHALLENGE ACADEMY TRUST

Minutes of the meeting of the Finance, HR and Operations Committee held on the 9th of March 2023

Time: 18:02 – 20:01

Venue: TCAT Development Centre

Chair: Stuart Titchard

Clerk: Katie Whitmore katie.whitmore@entrust-ed.co.uk

Membership and Attendance

Name	Category	Term Ends	Attendance
Andrew Moorcroft (AM)	CEO, Trustee	N/A	Present
Howard Platt (HP)	Trustee	01.07.2025	Present
Stuart Titchard	Chair, Trustee	31.08.2025	Present
Linda Waterson (LW)	Chair, Trustee	01.07.2025	Present
Stephen Whatmore (SW)	Trustee	01.07.2025	Present

Also in Attendance

Graham Bratley (GB)	Associate Committee Member
Adrienne Laing (AL)	Operations Director
Ben Logan (BL)	Head of Human Resources
Damian McGuire (DM)	Director of Finance
Katie Whitmore (KW)	Entrust Clerk

Documents Shared Ahead of the Meeting

- FINAL Agenda TCAT Finance HR Operations Committee 09.03.2023
- 6) FINAL Minutes TCAT Finance HR Operations Committee 01.12.2022
- 6) FINAL Confidential Minutes TCAT Finance HR Operations Committee 01.12.2022
- 7) Banking and Investment Strategy
- 7) Finance Report
- 9) HR Report – FHO March 23 (narrated)
- 8) BUSINESS AND OPERATIONS Report 9_2_2023 (narrated)
- 10) Capital Projects Update 28.02.2023
- 10) Capital Projects Update 28.02.2023 Appendix A (updated)
- 11) HR Policies Overview Document
- 11) TCAT Admissions Policy 2025-26 DRAFT
- 11) TCAT Disciplinary Policy (Staff) 2023
- 11) TCAT Grievance Procedure 2023
- 11) TCAT Menopause Policy 2023
- 11) TCAT Modern Slavery Statement 2022
- 11) TCAT Pension Discretions and Statements Policy March 2023
- 11) TCAT Procurement Strategy (Draft)
- 12) School Resource Management Self-Assessment Tool Checklist – AF-495151536 (DRAFT)

Signed.....

Date.....



The meeting was quorate, with more than three Trustees present.
The meeting opened at 18:02

1	Welcome and introductions. The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Trustees and attendees.																		
2	Any items for AOB / Confidential Appendix The following items would be discussed within AOB: a) SRMA (School Resource Management Assessment) There were items that would be discussed within a confidential appendix.																		
3	Absence / Apologies / Non-Attendance. Associate Committee Member (AP) had sent apologies in advance of the meeting. As associate/advisor to the Committee this absence would not affect quorum.																		
4	Declaration of personal interests There were no declarations of interest in relation to items on the agenda.																		
5	Membership There were no changes to the membership of the Committee, nor any terms of office due to end.																		
6	Minutes of the Finance, HR and Operations Committee meeting held on Thursday the 1st of December 2022. a) Acceptance of the minutes Resolved: Trustees accepted the minutes from 01.12.2022 as a true and accurate record of the meeting. They would be duly signed and made available on request. b) Matters Arising There were no matters arising in relation to items in the minutes from 01.12.2022: c) Review of Action Log <table border="1" data-bbox="240 1675 1436 2024"> <thead> <tr> <th>Minute Ref.</th><th>Action to be taken</th><th>By Whom</th><th>Completion Date</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>6</td><td>Ongoing open invitation to invite non-trustee LGB representatives to join committees as observers.</td><td>All</td><td>Ongoing</td></tr> <tr> <td>8</td><td>The Director of Finance will investigate the use of reserves to generate income through investment, and report back at the next Committee meeting 09.03.2023.</td><td>DM</td><td>COMPLETE</td></tr> <tr> <td>11</td><td>Trustees will ask LGBs to note any further training they would like, for example around remit and process for</td><td>All</td><td>Ongoing</td></tr> </tbody> </table>			Minute Ref.	Action to be taken	By Whom	Completion Date	6	Ongoing open invitation to invite non-trustee LGB representatives to join committees as observers.	All	Ongoing	8	The Director of Finance will investigate the use of reserves to generate income through investment, and report back at the next Committee meeting 09.03.2023.	DM	COMPLETE	11	Trustees will ask LGBs to note any further training they would like, for example around remit and process for	All	Ongoing
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		different committees, further to the TCAT CPD – Introduction to Governance, produced on Microsoft Sway.		
	11	Teacher Pay Policy, Staff Grievance Procedure, and Staff Disciplinary Policy will go to LGBs for note.	BL	COMPLETE
7	<p>Finance Report</p> <p>a) Finance Report</p> <p>The Director of Finance referred to the finance report that had been shared with Trustees in advance of the meeting, and noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay rises, and the partial pay agreements for sixth form teachers, would be factored into the April revision; surplus would be lower as a result. • Mainstream additional supplementary grants would see funding increases from 01.04.2023. • Academies with deficit were because of pay increases; it was expected that these deficits would work out of the budget by the end of the year. • TCAT were part of a schools' forum working group where the allocation of Growth Funding by the LA (Local Authority) was being discussed. It was expected that Penketh High would benefit from this funding due to the rapid increase of pupils on role. • Issues going forward would continue to be around pay, lagged funding, energy costs, and cost of living. <p>Trustees asked about the expectation for year-end figures.</p> <p>The Director of Finance anticipated an overall small surplus for the Trust. Penketh High may not receive enough money from Growth Funding to keep out of deficit this year, however Penketh would be in receipt next year of lagged funding for the rapid increase in number on role this year.</p> <p>b) Investment Strategy</p> <p>The Finance Director referred to the document that had been shared with Trustees in advance of the meeting, and noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lloyds could offer a MAT (Multi-Academy Trust) mandate which would allow TCAT to pull surplus cash across academies together easily. • Short term investment would involve surplus cash being spread across a number of banks taking advantage of higher interest rates. • Considerations for investment in the longer term included investment management, purchase of property and investment in wind/solar. <p>Trustees challenged longer term investment strategies as being too risky and not in line with TCAT's principle aim of education. Trustees felt there was not skillset within the Trust to hold a potential investment manager to account. Trustees were uncomfortable that longer term investment would not offer stability should cashflow be impacted in the mid-term. Trustees were unsure how supportive LGBs would be that school surplus was tied up in long term investment.</p> <p>Trustees supported short term investment where Trust-wide surplus would be spread across banks to take advantage of higher interest rates and noted that it was unfortunate that this had not been implemented sooner.</p>			



	<p>Resolved: Trustees approved short term investment of Trust-wide cash surplus across banks to take advantage of higher interest rates.</p>
8	<p>HR Report</p> <p>The Head of HR referred to the documentation that had been shared with Trustees in advance of the meeting, and noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further to strike days at the start of the month, academies had revised the arrangements for upcoming strikes and prepared for partial opening and a good level of provision. NEU were likely to strike again after Easter. Further action for support staff would be balloted in May, with likely action in September. • Staff sickness absence levels were back to that of pre-pandemic. Twenty percent of absence was related to mental health, resulting in a wellbeing offer being put in place. There was nothing of major concern. • TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)) consultation process would be completed by 01.04.2023 for Appleton Thorn staff. Staff and Unions were happy with proceedings. <p>Trustees asked if any trends had been identified across the Trust regarding mental health absences, and how middle leaders were being supported.</p> <p>The Head of HR advised that there were no particular trends and there was no evidence of an upward trend. Work was being done across TCAT to enable managers to have conversations with staff regarding mental health, and to support managers in terms of policy and process. A training session was planned for all senior leaders, and coaching was in place.</p> <p>There were further items discussed within a Confidential Appendix.</p>
9	<p>Buildings & Operations Report (inc. H&S)</p> <p>The Operations Director referred to the report that had been shared with Trustees in advance of the meeting, noting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Trust Operations Manager was investigating anything that had been reported and a subsequent risk assessment and actions would put in place. Further, misreporting was starting to level out. • There were plans in place to move away from WBC (Warrington Borough Council) contracts. There was confidence that the RAG (red, amber, green) rating on these items would come down from red now they were back within Trust control. • Some capital projects had been moved into next academic year's estate management plan in line with capital funding which would run from April to March • The application for the decarbonisation bid had been successful; Padgate, Meadowside, Sir Thomas Boteler, Broomfields and Bridgewater lower site would receive funding for heat pumps, insulation and cavity roofing. Salix will be announcing this work; this was not common knowledge across TCAT. A full project programme would be brought to Trustees. • A DFC (Devolved Formula Capital) grant would be used to install energy monitors and LED lighting across academies; surveys were currently taking place for this. Should there be any of the grant remaining, solar surveys would be undertaken. • TCAT had received a good internal audit around cyber security and had received Cyber Essentials accreditation.



	<p>Trustees congratulated the Operations Director on the successful decarbonisation bid. The CEO advised that TCAT were one of the first Trusts to be awarded funding for this.</p> <p>Trustees asked when work on the decarbonisation project would begin. The Operations Director advised that work on the walls, roofing, windows, and heat pumps would take place over the Summer holidays. All sites were leasehold, and there was no requirement to take the works to planning as criteria were not met. Bridgewater lower site would be completed initially, as this was a small site where lessons would be learned for the other sites.</p> <p>Trustees questioned if there was enough resource within the Operations team for the plans ahead. The Operations Director advised that that there was an effective team, and it was felt there was sufficient resource.</p>
10	<p>Capital Update</p> <p>a) Capital Projects Update The Operations Director referred to the update that had been shared with Trustees in advance of the meeting, and the following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report detailed proposed projects for 2023/24; large projects would be supported by E3Cube as contracted Project Management, and smaller projects could be managed by academies with support from the Operations team. • It was assumed that TCAT would receive £2m of capital funding to fund the projects listed. • Most projects were as a result of request by schools themselves. • The list did not include projects funded by external agencies, for example the rebuild at Penketh High would be funded by the DfE, and the proposed works at Great Sankey Primary would be funded by WBC. <p>Trustees sought clarification on the contract with E3Cube. The Operations Director advised that the process of evaluating the contract would take place over the next few months, with a tender ready for 2024 when the contract with E3Cube was due to end.</p> <p>Trustees questioned if the list of projects included items identified in health and safety audits. The Operations Director advised that health and safety actions had already been completed over the past year.</p> <p>Resolved: Trustees approved all projects listed, subject to funding being received.</p> <p>b) Capital Projects – Appendix A The Operations Director referred to the appendix that had been shared ahead of the meeting which detailed issues further to the works completed at Bridgewater. The following was noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There had been a significant snagging issue with the electrics, which had resulted in extensive investigation. • Power supply to school, in particular to the server room, had been affected, which had a significant impact on school. • This issue had this not been identified as part of the original build. SPEN (Scottish Power Energy Networks) had shared the draw from the sub-station with E3Cube,



	<p>which showed that the specification for original works would be suitable for the power draw by school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was a cost of just over £42,000 for a cable upgrade. Further, a generator was being used until the upgrade was complete, estimated at a total cost of £10,000. • E3Cube had agreed to waive their management costs for the cable upgrade work. • It was noted that had this work been identified at the time of the original build, there would have been an additional cost of £42,000 in the original plan. • Trustees were asked to consider options; approve the £42,000 spend or pursue a breach of contract. <p>Trustees concluded that pursuing a breach of contract would be unsuccessful; E3Cube had created a specification for the works based on information they were provided from SPEN therefore it would be difficult to prove contractual liability. Further, it was noted that legal proceedings would take up a lot of Operations Director's time.</p> <p>Trustees agreed that the pragmatic option was to pay the extra £42,000 for the remedial works; this amount of spend would have been paid if it had been identified in the original works.</p> <p>Trustees asked how this spend would be funded. The Operations Director advised that this would be funded from the savings on the overspend on the original project; original overspend had been planned at £60,000 which had been reduced to £4,000, which would be shared equally between TCAT and Bridgewater.</p> <p>Resolved: Trustees agreed to pay £42,000 for the additional works at Bridgewater.</p>



11	<p>Policies</p> <p>a) Procurement Strategy This policy was for information only.</p> <p>Trustees asked if the new banking system would lend itself to global payments across TCAT. The Director of Finance advised this was the case; further the procurement strategy would encourage the use of frameworks in line with financial regulations, with all schools following process. Trustees noted that procurement process had been highlighted at internal audit; the strategy would make it clear at what level approval was needed.</p> <p>b) Modern Slavery An update to the Modern Slavery Statement had been uploaded to the TCAT website in February 2023. HP had approved this as a Chair's action.</p> <p>c) Pension and Discretions This had been updated to reflect annual changes in contributions, a technical requirement of Cheshire Pensions. This was for information only.</p> <p>d) Admissions policy This was for information only; each school had produced their own admissions policy and this document pulled them into one central document.</p> <p>e) Grievance There has been a clarification by Stone King (TCAT lawyer) to item 2.5 regarding covert recordings, and the policy had subsequently been updated. The updates had also been agreed with Unions.</p> <p>f) Disciplinary The policy had been updated further to clarification by Stone King regarding covert recordings. The updates had also been agreed with Unions.</p> <p>g) Menopause This was a new policy reflective of TCAT workforce based on standard framework based on industry best practice. Unions had review and approved the policy. Support would be put in place for managers such as coaching and line management toolkit.</p> <p>Resolved: Trustees ratified Grievance, Disciplinary and Menopause Trust-wide policies, which would be effective at a local level. These policies would be shared with LGBs to note and share with staff; LGB approval would not be required.</p>
12	<p>Any Other Business</p> <p>a) SRMA The Director of Finance advised that an SRMA assessment would need to be completed by Trustees annually; the submitted response was required by 15.03.2023. The Finance Director had completed the assessment and asked Trustees for any response to the document that had been shared.</p> <p>Action: Trustees will comment on SRMA response by 13.03.2023.</p>



13	Confirm Date and Time of the Next Meeting Thursday 29 th of June 2023 at 4:30pm, TCAT Centre at Bridgewater High School
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The meeting closed at 20.01.

Action Log

Minute Reference	Action to be taken	By Whom	Completion Date
6	Ongoing open invitation to invite non-trustee LGB representatives to join committees as observers.	All	Ongoing
6	Trustees will ask LGBs to note any further training they would like, for example around remit and process for different committees, further to the TCAT CPD – Introduction to Governance, produced on Microsoft Sway.	All	Ongoing
12	Trustees will comment on SRMA response by 13.03.2023.	All	13.03.2023

Signed.....

Date.....