

THE CHALLENGE ACADEMY TRUST

AGENDA:

Finance, HR, and Operations Committee meeting to be held on Thursday 13th March

Venue: TCAT Professional Development Centre

Chair: Peter Winter

Clerk: Melissa Alexander m.alexander@tcat.uk.com

Committee Membership

Name	Category	Term Ends
Linda Boys	Trustee	31.08.2028
Andrew Moorcroft (AM)	CEO , Trustee	N/A
Anita Pailing (AP)	Committee Associate	N/A
Howard Platt (HP)	Trustee	01.07.2025
John Warren	Trustee	11.01.2028
Linda Waterson (LW)	Trustee	01.07.2025
Stephen Whatmore (SW)	Trustee	01.07.2025
Peter Winter (PW)	Chair	11.01.2028

Also in Attendance

Name	Role
Adrienne Laing (AL)	Operations Director
Ben Logan (BL)	Head of HR
David Halsall (DH)	Chief Finance Officer
Melissa Alexander (MA)	TCAT Clerk

Documents Shared Prior to the Meeting:

Item 6. Minutes from previous meeting 5th December 2024
 Item 6b. Extra Ordinary Trust Board Meeting Minutes 19th December 2024
 Item 7a. Finance Report
 Item 7b. School Resource Management Checklist
 Item 8. HR Report
 Item 9. Trust Policies Schedule
 Item 10. Business and Operations Report
 Item 11. Estate Management Report 2025

Agenda Items		Time Allocated
1	Welcome/ Part Two/ AOB: PW welcomed the Committee at 18:01. The Clerk introduced DH to the committee. DH introduced himself and provided a brief summary relating to his previous roles and experience.	
2	Absence / Apologies / Non-Attendance: There was full attendance for this committee meeting.	
3	Register of Interests: There were no register of interests declared during this meeting.	
4	Declaration of Pecuniary Interests: There were no declarations of pecuniary interests in relation to the agenda items.	
5	Membership & Organisation: The Clerk noted that there are terms of office approaching for three Trustees and will discuss this with the Chair in preparation for the next committee meeting.	
6	Minutes of the Finance, HR and Operations meeting held on Thursday 5th December a) Acceptance of the minutes : Minutes from previous minutes were accepted by the committee. b) Matters arising : There were no matters arising discussed or noted. c) Review of Action Log : No actions to be reviewed from the previous meeting.	5 Minutes
7	Finance Update: DH confirmed that the Trust's accounts were approved by the ESFA in December 2024. DH confirmed that that the annual report accounts for year ending 31 st August 2024 have been added to the TCAT website and will be filed to Companies House in due course. DH referred to page two of the Finance Report and highlighted the summary table that demonstrates TCAT's comfortable financial position. DH highlighted the significance of ensuring Heads and Principals understand and adhere to their budgets in preparation for staffing structures.	30 Minutes

	<p>DH explained that the budget comparator is based on 4/12th and shared that this is not most effective, and that the Trust will move towards 'phased budgets' which is an effective control to use to assess budget. DH emphasised that this move will be gradual.</p> <p>DH referred to the four million pounds of reserve at the beginning of the academic year and highlighted key details relating to reserved reconciliation. DH explained that he will be investigating the financial position of The Sutton Academy and Priestley College to further understand why both academies are currently in deficit.</p> <p>DH shared that TCAT have received money from insurance following the flood at Meadowside Community Primary and Nursery School and explained that the breakdown of figures can be found in the Finance Report.</p> <p>Reference was made to generic indicators and to the recommended teacher pay rise. DH highlighted that support staff may receive a higher increase. DH provided justification to the increased CPI projections and explained that a range of KPIs will be used to assess and centre check commissions.</p> <p>Finance Team Structure: DH made reference to the team's individual roles within the Finance Team. DH confirmed that considerations are being made to ensure that the Finance Team is organised in the most efficient way to support colleagues in their roles and workload. DH added that ongoing training will be provided by Civica to ensure colleagues are able to make the most effective use of this finance system.</p> <p><i>DH asked if there were any questions relating to the Finance Report.</i> <i>A Trustee highlighted that TCAT will be facing pressures from the government due to restricted budgets.</i> <i>DH confirmed that honest budgets need to be developed as a result of these restricted budgets.</i></p> <p>A Trustee thanked DH for clear projections and commented that the visuals included within the report were helpful. DH welcomed feedback from colleagues.</p> <p>School Resource Management Checklist: AL explained that the School Resource Management Checklist is a requirement for all Trusts which is a government requirement. AL confirmed that this document is a draft and requires approval for submission on Friday 14th March.</p>	
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	<p>AL explained that TCAT have received strong audits to support the commentary that will be submitted.</p> <p><i>AL requested approval from Trustees for the School Resource Management Checklist.</i> <i>The Committee approved the School Resource Management Checklist.</i></p>	
8	<p>HR Report: BL (For information and discussion)</p> <p>BL referred to the HR Report that was provided prior to the meeting. BL shared that there are a number of key updates and provided a brief update relating to the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of CPD is in the process of being developed to provide an offer to support staff across the Trust, covering mandatory training, enhanced CPD and career development support. BL shared that details will be shared with Heads and Principals in June, and with the Operations Hubs at the annual conference which takes place in July. • Sixth form pay negotiations have been agreed. • Employment Rights Bill/ Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill have been released. • Compliance Assurance Reviews have been hugely beneficial and provided colleagues with the opportunity to engage in further training/ receive additional support where required. BL added that these reviews are important and developmental. <p><i>A Trustee questioned if there will be any implications to TCAT following the Employment Rights Bill.</i> <i>BL confirmed that there are some potential challenges and provided the examples of zero-hour contracts and notice periods. BL added that TCAT will assess how this works for the casual workforce.</i></p> <p>A Trustee acknowledged the significance of a provision of Support Staff pathway. BL made reference to the most recent staff survey and the importance of addressing support staff requests to engage in meaningful CPD and career development opportunities.</p>	15 Minutes
9	<p>Policies: BL/ AL (For information and approval)</p> <p>AL confirmed that the Pension Policy was due to be shared with the committee with one slight amendment. However, this policy could not be shared as the banding information is not yet</p>	15 Minutes

	<p>available and therefore cannot be brought to the committee for their approval.</p> <p>AL confirmed that the Pensions Policy will be carried over to the next meeting. It was agreed that the Pensions Policy would be carried over to the next meeting.</p> <p>AL confirmed that the Policy Schedule is available for Trustees to view which contains the full list of Trust policies and the date in which they are due for renewal.</p>	
10	<p>Building and Operations: AL (For information and discussion)</p> <p>Operational Procedures: AL confirmed that the Operations Team are in the process of completing a mapping process to complete procedures documentation. AL explained that procedures are developed and shared with colleagues at the Operations Hub for feedback. Recommended amendments are made and final procedures are accessible for colleagues via the shared Teams. AL highlighted that HR, Finance and IT are the least developed functions and that efforts are being made to develop procedures in these areas.</p> <p>Compliance Assurance Reviews: AL provided a brief executive overview relating to the Compliance Assurance Reviews and shared that the key areas audited are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accidents and Investigations - Governance - Complaints - Data Protection <p>AL added that Lisa Gannon is also completing Health and Safety audits, and Paul Sinnott is carrying out estates checks to ensure all key elements are covered. AL confirmed that final reports which include executive summaries and actions will be provided to Heads and Principals, and that follow up meetings will take place in June for further support academies.</p> <p><i>A Trustee queried if the same questions are posed to colleagues across each academy. AL confirmed that the same questions are asked to each academy and added that the questions are amended on a year basis based on the key areas of concern.</i></p> <p>Business Support Scorecard Autumn Analysis:</p>	20 Minutes

	<p>AL made reference to the autumn scorecard data and the implementation of the RAG rating. AL explained that the addition of RAG ratings has been effective and that scorecards are regularly reviewed and monitored to ensure actions are being followed up.</p> <p><i>A Trustee highlighted the positive data demonstrated in Padgate Academy's business support scorecard. AM commented that Nicola Hutchinson is an exceptional Business Manager.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee challenged why there are no greens for website compliance.</i> <i>AL confirmed that website compliance has been set at 100% and explained that this is justified and shared that Robin runs reports six times a year. AL explained the importance of website compliance being 100%.</i></p> <p>AM added that Robin is an AI tool that has been implemented and has reduced the time it takes to manually monitor website compliance.</p> <p><i>A Trustee queried if an interim data could be shared with Trustees due to some Autumn Analysis being the same as information shared in previous meeting.</i> <i>AL explained that the Business Support Scorecard Spring update demonstrates significant improvements.</i> <i>AL confirmed that Business Support Scorecards are currently manually updated.</i></p> <p>AM added that Education Scorecards are currently being updated via Arbor, which has reduced the time it takes to update scorecards and shared that this is something TCAT are exploring for Business Support Scorecards.</p> <p>Health and Safety: Accidents and Incidents 2023-24:</p> <p>AL explained that accidents and incidents will inevitably increase due to the growth of the Trust.</p> <p>AL referred to 23 unresolved incidents and explained that this was previously 36 in the last meeting and referred to the significance of the Compliance Assurance Reviews to encourage colleagues to monitor and update RiskMate. AL shared that a number of trends that have been identified and guidance is provided to colleagues to mitigate risks.</p> <p>AL highlighted that there is not a classification to log burns as heat, only fire.</p>	
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	<p><i>A Trustee queried if TCAT have any concerns regarding any particular academies.</i> <i>AL confirmed that there are no specific concerns, but added that the support of Compliance Education has been extremely beneficial. Lisa Gannon is leading on accident report checking to ensure there is consistency with the recording of accidents.</i></p> <p>Summary Compliance Review: AL referred to statutory compliance and the positive progress that is being made by individual academies. AL referred to the data from the Compliance Assurance Reviews and explained that actions have been noted for both TCAT Central and individual academies. Follow up meetings will take place via June to follow up on recommendations and any further support which may be required.</p> <p>Data Protection and Reporting: AL explained that data breaches are still being recorded and AL added that there is an ISO audit in May.</p> <p>SARS and FOIs: AL shared that there has been an increase in requests for SARS and FOIs which are being effectively managed by Dawn Golden, TCAT's Information and Compliance Manager.</p> <p>Operations Update: AL provided updates relating to the following key areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ty'n-Y-Felin: Trips are scheduled to begin in April and a significant amount of work is being completed by the Central Team to prepare for trips. • South Wirral High School: AL confirmed that South Wirral High School are due to join the Trust 01/04/2025. AL added that the PFI provider are the final and that pressure is being applied. • Governance Offer: STB pilot has been successful and TCAT are in the process • Estates: AL confirmed that there will be further information shared when exploring agenda item 11. • IT: The five-year plan is in the process of being developed and a review of the IT structures is underway. 	
11	<p>Estate Management: AL (For information)</p> <p>Estates Management Report: Reference was made to the Estates Management Report and AL highlighted key details within this report. AL made reference to the issues experienced at Padgate Academy with the ground source heat pumps and confirmed that a meeting took place on</p>	20 Minutes

<p>13/01/2025 to resolve these issues. AL confirmed that the contractors have taken full responsibility and that work will begin to resolve the issues faced at the academy.</p> <p><i>A Trustee queried if there are any capital projects that are posing as concern.</i> <i>AL confirmed that there are no concerns regarding capital projects.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee challenged why the rebuild at Penketh High School is taking a long time.</i> <i>AL confirmed that the rebuild is scheduled to begin in June 2026 and that regular meetings take place with The Department for Education.</i></p> <p>Capital Projects 25/26: AL referred to Figure 1 in the paper and explained that all projects included within this table that have been identified as key projects required within individual academies. AL added that the academy's have completed their own Five Year Estates Plan, which has been used to develop the projects plan. AL added that for the instances whereby academy projects are not approved, honest conversations are had with Heads and Principals.</p> <p><i>A Trustee highlighted the significance of ensuring all Heads and Principals feel included and do not feel left out in this process.</i> <i>AM added that Business Support Scorecard meetings provide clear evidence of investment at an academy level and explained that honest conversations take place, and specialist advice given by AL and Head of Facilities Management is taken on board.</i></p> <p><i>AL confirmed that TCAT do not have the SCA. AL requested approval in principle from the committee for the capital projects 25/26 pending SCA funding.</i> <i>All Trustees approved the request to approve capital projects for 25/26 pending SCA funding.</i></p> <p>Padgate Refurbishment: AL confirmed that confirmation was received on 13/04/2025 relating to the 3.4million to fund refurbishment at Padgate Academy. AL referred to page 8 of the Estates Management Report and the schedule of works for the academy.</p> <p>A Trustee highlighted that TCAT are able to fund short term cash flows should this be required. AL added that there is no</p>	
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	<p>and highlighted the significance of the Deed of Covenant which protects TCAT.</p> <p>A discussion took place regarding Padgate Academy's increased PAN. AM shared that in 2022, Padgate Academy received 51 applications for first choice. Applications for 2025 are now at maximum capacity.</p> <p>3G Pitches Update:</p> <p>AL confirmed that both pitches are scheduled to be delivered in summer 2026.</p> <p>Broomfields Junior School Project Work:</p> <p>AL confirmed that this has now gone out to tender and decision making relating to the provider will be finalised in April.</p> <p><i>A Trustee queried if there are different examples of the remodelling for Broomfields Junior School.</i></p> <p><i>AL confirmed that the redesign included in page 9 of the Estates Management Report is the final version of the remodelling of the academy. AL added that the classrooms will be extended to allow for a higher number of students as well as the provision of additional study spaces.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee challenged if there will be monitoring of the LED lighting.</i></p> <p><i>AL confirmed that this will be carefully monitored that will allow the Trust to monitor on a real time basis. Bills are also being assessed to make comparisons.</i></p>	
13	<p>AOB:</p> <p>PW requested that a thank you for the work completed by Damian McGuire was formally noted by the Clerk.</p>	
14	<p>Date and time of next meetings: (For information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thursday 26th June 2025 	
15	<p>Part Two: Confidential Items</p> <p>There were no confidential items discussed in this meeting.</p>	

This meeting was closed at 19:29.