

THE CHALLENGE ACADEMY TRUST Agenda

Trust Board Meeting Agenda

Thursday 27th March 2025, 4pm

Venue: TCAT Professional Development Centre

Chair: Howard Platt

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

Trustee Board Members			End of Term
LB	Linda Boys	Trustee (Foundation - Diocese of Chester)	31.08.2028
JC	John Cartwright	Trustee (Member appointed)	23.06.2025
MG	Matthew Grant	Trustee (Member appointed)	20.06.2028
PM	Phil McEwan	Trustee (Member appointed) (Chair, GSP)	14.07.2025
AM	Andrew Moorcroft	CEO , Trustee	N/A
HP	Howard Platt	Chair , Trustee (Member appointed)	01.07.2025
JW	John Warren	Trustee (Member appointed)	11.01.2028
LW	Linda Waterson	Trustee (Member appointed)	01.07.2025
SW	Stephen Whatmore	Vice Chair , Trustee (Member appointed) (Chair, BCA)	01.07.2025
PW	Peter Winter	Trustee (Member appointed)	11.01.2028
SY	Sheila Yates	Trustee (Chair, PRI)	01.03.2028
Also Invited to Attend			
PC	Phil Calrow	Chair of Governors, Meadowside Primary	
CO	Carole Owen	Chair of Governors, Padgate Academy	
FL	Fergus Laing	Chair of Governors, Broomfields Junior School	
PO	Paul Otter	Chair of Governors, Appleton Thorn Primary	
AP	Anita Pailing	Chair of Governors, Bridgewater High School	
MB	Moiria Bryan	Chair of Governors, Penketh High School	
CW	Carolyn Williams	Chair of Governors, Penketh South Community Primary	
GW	Geraint Williams	Chair of Governors, Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England Community High School	
AO	Ashlea O'Rourke	Chair of Governors, Dallam Community Primary School	
VB	Vicky Briggs	Director of Education, TCAT	
AL	Adrienne Laing	Operations Director, TCAT	
BL	Ben Logan	Head of HR, TCAT	
TL	Tim Long	School Improvement Lead, TCAT	
DH	David Halsall	CFO, TCAT	

Documents Shared Prior to the Trust Board Meeting:

Item 6a. Minutes from previous meeting 12.12.2024
 Item 6b. Minutes from Extra-Ordinary Trust Board Meeting 19.12.2024
 Item 7. Annual Impact Report
 Item 8. CEO Report
 Item 9: Strategic Action Plan 2023-25
 Item 10a. Audit and Risk Meeting Minutes 05.12.204
 Item 10b. HR, Finance and Operations Meeting Minutes 05.12.2024
 Item 10b. Quality and Standards Committee Meeting Minutes 13.02.2025
 Item 10c. Safeguarding Panel Committee Meeting 28.01.2025
 Item 12. TCAT Complaints Policy Revised February 2025
 Item 13. Department for Education SARA Annual Report

	Agenda Item	Lead
1	<p>Welcome: The Clerk welcomed attendees to the meeting.</p> <p>Part Two: The Clerk confirmed that there are no confidential items on the agenda.</p> <p>AOB: The Clerk confirmed that there are two items to discuss for AOB that will be covered in agenda item 13.</p> <p>Chair's Action: The Sutton Academy Gas Renewal Update (For Information)</p> <p>The Board was informed of a Chair's Action taken on Thursday, 20 March, regarding the renewal of utilities procurement for Sutton Academy. Due to a tight deadline imposed by the local council, a decision was made outside the regular board schedule.</p> <p>DH explained the procurement was historically managed via the council, which uses YPO, a recognised public sector procurement body. The annual cost of the contract is approximately £80,000, which would typically require formal Board approval and explained that given the urgency, the decision was supported by AM and led by DH in consultation with HP. The Board was assured that the procurement process is robust and compliant with regulatory expectations.</p> <p>The Board noted and endorsed the Chair's Action.</p>	<p>MA</p> <p>DH</p>
2	<p>Absence / Apologies / Non-Attendance:</p> <p>PM shared apologies in advance due to traffic and these were accepted by all Trustees. In PW's absence, safeguarding updates were delegated to JW.</p>	MA
3	<p>Register of Interests: There were no Register of Interests noted.</p>	MA

4	Declaration of pecuniary interests in relation to agenda items: There were no declarations of pecuniary interests in relation to agenda items.	MA												
5	Membership and Organisation: There are five terms of office approaching. The Clerk will directly liaise with Trustees to confirm their interest in continuing with the role as Trustee. A brief discussion took place regarding trustee vacancies. AM confirmed that the Diocese of Liverpool Trustee vacancy remains and that this has been discussed at a recent Members meeting and added as an ongoing action. AM shared that the Trust is actively engaging with potential candidates for trustee roles, and that Stacy Snagg, TCAT’s Stakeholder and Engagement Office has met with the University of Chester and has established a strong link with the University’s Head of Outreach and Access who has shared TCAT’s Governor Recruitment Pack.	MA												
6	Minutes of the Trust Board Meeting which took place on Thursday 12th December 2024. a) Approval of the Minutes: Trustees approved the minutes from the meeting that took place on Thursday 12 th December. b) Matters arising: No matters arising for this meeting. c) Action log: Actions have been completed. <table border="1"><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>9.</td><td>MA to invite all Trustees to an ‘Extra Ordinary Trust Board’ meeting.</td><td>MA</td><td>ASAP</td></tr><tr><td>9.</td><td>DM to circulate the Statutory Finance on 16.12.2024.</td><td>DM</td><td>16.12.2024</td></tr></tbody></table> Minutes of the Extra-Ordinary Trust Board Meeting which took place on Thursday 19th December 2024 a) Approval of the Minutes: Trustees approved the minutes from the meeting that took place on Thursday 12 th December. b) Matters arising: No matters arising for this meeting. c) Action log: No actions following this meeting.	Minute Ref.	Action to be taken	By Whom	Completion date	9.	MA to invite all Trustees to an ‘Extra Ordinary Trust Board’ meeting.	MA	ASAP	9.	DM to circulate the Statutory Finance on 16.12.2024.	DM	16.12.2024	HP
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7	Annual Impact Report: (For Information) AM explained that the format of the Annual Impact Report has been updated to provide a report which is more digestible. VB explained the purpose of the report is to celebrate the successes of the Trust and added that this report is shared	VB												

with wider stakeholders, partners, colleagues, parents and guardians. VB identified key elements within report and made referenced to the following areas:

Growth:

An updated overview was provided on the scale of the Trust's operations. VB explained that the Trust now serves a significantly expanded number of young people and staff across its academies. The geographical footprint has grown beyond Warrington, now encompassing wider areas in the Northwest, including The Sutton Academy and South Wirral High School. The update also highlighted the Trust's commitment to inclusion, with a strong focus on designated resource provisions and specialist support for SEND pupils.

Leadership Introductions

The report includes introductory messages from AM and HP setting the tone for the Trust's strategic direction and reaffirming its core values and priorities for the year ahead in line with the Trust's Strategic Action Plan.

Professional Development

The Trust has delivered a wide range of internal and external CPD opportunities, with impressive engagement levels. Headline figures were shared, showing the number of events held, hours of training delivered, and the breadth of staff participation across roles and academies. VB explained that this investment supports both individual growth and collective school improvement.

Ofsted Outcomes

The Trust continues to maintain 100% of academies rated Good or better, a significant achievement reflecting sustained quality. While the number of inspections has decreased compared to previous years, the Trust remains proactive, with Bev Scott Heron, Headteacher of Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School, leading a pilot of the new Ofsted framework to ensure readiness and alignment with evolving expectations.

Education Strategy

The Trust's education strategy remains focused on the following areas:

- System leadership: Empowering school leaders to drive improvement across the Trust.
- Curriculum delivery: Led by expert practitioners, ensuring consistency and quality.
- Compliance and standards: Ensuring all academies meet regulatory and educational benchmarks.

Network Collaboration

- The Trust facilitates over 30 education-focused professional networks, meeting half-termly which support peer collaboration, curriculum innovation, and school improvement. Overseen by AL, business and operations networks also operate to support operational excellence.

SEND Provision

The Trust continues to serve a higher-than-national average proportion of pupils with SEND. VB explained that this reinforces the importance of TCAT's inclusive approach and the ongoing development of specialist support and provision to support young people within the community.

Audit and Compliance Update

The Trust underwent a series of internal and external audits covering key operational and compliance areas. AL explained that these audits are part of the Trust's commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement.

- 16–19 Funding Audit:
This statutory audit, required for all providers of post-16 education, received a strong assurance rating. This reflects the Trust's effective management of funding allocations, compliance with ESFA requirements, and accurate record-keeping.
- Complaints Handling Audit:
Also rated strong, this audit confirmed that the Trust's procedures for managing and resolving complaints are clear, timely, and well-documented, with appropriate escalation routes and governance oversight.
- Corporate Governance Audit:
Received a substantial assurance rating, indicating that governance structures, decision-making processes, and board-level oversight are sound. Minor recommendations were made, none of which were high priority.
- Data Protection Audit:
Also rated substantial, this was the second audit cycle in this area. The audit noted clear improvements in data handling, staff awareness, and compliance with GDPR. Only low-level recommendations were made, showing progress since the previous review.

AL explained that the Trust continues to take a proactive and improvement-focused approach to audit selection, choosing areas that support strategic development rather than those likely to yield easy outcomes. This includes revisiting areas like data protection to track progress over time.

A Trustee queried what the difference is between 'Strong' and 'Substantial'.

AL explained that these gradings are based on the number of recommendations and stated that 'strong' is the highest, and most desirable grading.

Sustainability and Capital Projects Update

AL provided a brief verbal update regarding Trust investments and capital projects that support sustainability.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Trust has prioritised sustainability and estate improvement, focusing on energy efficiency and long-term cost savings. • Ground source heat pump installations are nearing completion across five academies, with final works at Meadowside Primary expected by April. • The LED lighting replacement project has been completed across 11 academies, delivering estimated annual savings of £618,000. • These projects contribute to both carbon reduction and financial efficiency and have attracted external interest for potential case study sharing. <p><u>Staff Voice and Well-being:</u></p> <p>VB explained that surveys are developed on Survey Monkey for anonymity and distributed centrally via Arbor to encourage engagement. VB added that data is shared with Headteachers and Principals and data is added to individual academy Education and Business Scorecards. The Central Team assess the data to identify key trends and areas for development which helps with the planning and preparations for future initiatives. Key headline data is shared in staff publications and communications, and staff voice/ requests are acknowledged.</p> <p><i>A Trustee questioned if there had been an increase of staff survey responses this academic year.</i> <i>AM confirmed that staff survey engagement is similar to the previous year, adding that this has been reviewed at Business Support meetings with Headteachers and Principals. Where staff engagement has been poor, surveys have been redistributed to ensure staff representation can be collected.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee asked if there are printed copies of the Annual Impact Report. VB confirmed that there have been a small number of copies printed. Wider stakeholders have been shared this report via email/ parent and guardian survey.</i></p> <p>A Trustee commented that the Annual Impact Report was well formed and easy to digest. This was agreed by the Trust Board.</p>	
8	<p>CEO Report: (For Information)</p> <p>AM selected key elements from the CEO Report and provided a brief verbal update relating to the following areas:</p> <p><u>Finance and Staffing</u></p> <p>AM shared that DH has joined as a permanent member of the finance team as Chief Finance Officer and was formally introduced to the Board. AM added that the first draft of the 2025–26 budget is scheduled for release on 9 April whereby significant preparatory work has been undertaken to ensure readiness.</p> <p><u>Capital Projects:</u></p>	AM

AM confirmed that Peel Hall developments are scheduled to begin in the summer, with a £3.5 million investment for Padgate Academy to improve facilities due to the increased number of students at the academy.

Ofsted and Inspection Readiness

Pilot Inspection: Beth Academy participated in a pilot inspection under the new Ofsted framework, led by senior HMI. This was primarily a learning opportunity for Ofsted but also provided valuable insights for the Trust.

Future Inspections: One more inspection is expected before summer; the Trust is preparing accordingly.

Curriculum and Assessment Reform

The Trust is closely monitoring the national curriculum and assessment review, which may lead to significant changes (e.g., GCSE reform, EBacc reconsideration, T-levels). AM highlighted that the key strategic implications of this review could signal a shift from evolutionary to revolutionary change in education policy.

Cybersecurity

AM shared that the Trust has achieved Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation and explained the significance of cyber security remaining as a key priority due to the risks posed in this area.

Internal Review: The IT team has been tasked with a comprehensive review of cybersecurity measures to ensure resilience against external threats.

Digital Strategy

AM shared that a Trust-wide digital strategy is being developed to address infrastructure, teaching tools, and administrative systems.

Pilot projects are in the process of being led by TL and Chris Hillidge. The pilot includes 1:1 device pilots in primary schools and a Chromebook rollout for Year 7 students. Discussions are taking place with TCAT Heads and Principals regarding the investment in IT and ensuring the Trust remain focused on the development of this strategy.

Capital Funding

The Trust's capital funding allocation for the next year has been confirmed and protected, despite broader funding pressures in the sector.

Ty'n-Y-Felin:

AM confirmed that there has been a huge amount of work completed by the Central Team in preparation for the first trip which is scheduled to take place on 09/04/2025. Further planning and preparations are underway for future trips. AM added that there have been additional quotes collected to move forward with the cottage refurbishment and confirmed that these quotes will be taken to the Working Party in due course.

South Wirral High School:

AM explained that due to the school being a PFI school, this has been more complicated, however, the school will officially convert on 01/04/2025. AM

	<p>confirmed that the Trust have followed all legal guidance and assured Trustees that a thorough due-diligence process has been implemented.</p> <p>A Trustee commented that the CEO report clearly demonstrates the key areas of focus for the Trust. There were no questions raised.</p>	
9	<p>Strategic Action Plan: (For Information)</p> <p>AM emphasised that the Strategic Action Plan has been developed based on the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) Principles. AM explained that this document reflects the work that will take place over the next two years and has enabled the Operations Team with the opportunity to embrace the explore phase. AM referred to the 'explore' phase within the SAP and conscious, deliberate decision making behind this to assist with strategic decision making. AM explained that the Operations Team have developed individual Implementation Plans to ensure clear timelines are being followed to achieve key milestones and use a 'RAG' rating to indicate progression within each area.</p> <p>AM referred to a number of key strategies that are in the process of being developed. AM introduced the TCAT Talks Strategy and the significance of oracy to ensure key skills are learnt to prepare for the world of work. AM also highlighted that a Governance Strategy is in the process of being developed due to the way in which governance has evolved and added that this with further improve consistency across the Trust.</p> <p><i>AM asked if there were any questions in relation to the Strategic Action Plan.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee commented that the document is incredibly detailed and enables clear insight into Trust developments.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee highlighted the importance of the long-term planning and the importance of assessing targets and core components to enable a systemised process.</i></p> <p>AM explained that the Strategic Action Plan has enabled the Operations Team to gradually develop key areas as well as consider future planning.</p> <p><i>A Trustee challenged the monitoring framework to ensure the Strategic Action Plan is regularly reviewed and monitored.</i></p> <p><i>AM confirmed that the Operations Team meet every two weeks whereby the Strategic Action Plan sits on the agenda. AM added that Implementation Plans are also regularly reviewed and highlighted that staff are responsible for updating their timelines.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee queried if there are aims for TCAT to expand beyond 14 academies.</i></p> <p><i>AM confirmed that there is no guideline to the number of academies and explained that opportunity for growth is welcomed, based on key non-negotiables.</i></p>	AM

The Future of TCAT: 2040 Vision

AM provided Trustees with an overview of the origins of The Challenge Academy Trust and the core vision to 'Serve, challenge and empower' the local educational community. TCAT's mission and values remain, and AM highlighted the significance of reviewing these values to ensure these are taken to the next level. AM referred to the success of TCAT, including Ofsted ratings, professional development, leadership development and organisational development. AM referred to the Strategic Action Plan and the significance of looking ahead, and planning for the future of current students, who will potentially be educated by TCAT until 2040.

AM referred to a list of areas which need to be considered to support the growth and development of the Trust, which included curriculum and progression linked to skills, effective safeguarding, inclusion and social equity and technology and security. AM proposed that a Trustee Summer Visioning Day takes place in the summer term at Ty'n-Y-Felin to support with the strategic planning to support future students.

AM asked if there were any comments or questions regarding the future of TCAT information.

A Trustee commented that the opportunity to engage with these discussions is a crucial opportunity to support with the future planning of the Trust.

The Chair asked Trustees if they would be interested in engaging with an 'Away Day'.

All Trustees expressed their interest in attending this.

Trustees expressed their interest in attending an 'away day' and it was noted as an action for the clerk to share provisional dates and liaise with Joe Obiro, the Centre Manager at T'yn-Y-Felin, to organise this event.

A Trustee commented the importance of the Penketh High School's rebuild and stated that this academy could be a 'trail blazer' in the developments in curriculum changes and student's learning experiences.

A discussion took place relating some of the outdated practices that are embedded within the education system and the Trust's role in developing curriculums that serve students and the community.

A Trustee raised that there are solutions to improve student engagement and highlighted the significance of having a strong IT infrastructure to improve and modernise student learning and enhance engagement.

TL contributed to this discussion and provided the example of a pilot that is taking place across TCAT academies. TL explained that iPads used within the primary setting have demonstrated transformational impact, enhancing students learning experiences and pedagogical practice. TL added that this has been a very positive pilot thus far and

	<p><i>the feedback from colleagues has been collected to assist with further planning.</i></p> <p><i>A Trustee challenged the cost implications of purchasing a large number of devices and queried if negotiations could be made for cross-wide purchasing of devices such as iPads to reduce the costs.</i></p> <p><i>AM confirmed that that careful considerations to costings have been made. AM added that Carlo Mullen, Trust IT Lead, is in the process of collecting costings for leasing/ purchasing devices support the Trust moving forward with the development of the Digital Strategy.</i></p>	
10	<p>Sub-committee minutes and updates: (For Information)</p> <p><u>Audit and Risk Meeting Minutes 05.12.2024</u> LW provided a brief summary relating to the Audit and Risk meeting and shared the following updates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Audit: Positive outcomes were reported and relationships with external auditors have been stabilised. • Internal Audit: Covered areas such as 16–19 funding, complaints handling, corporate governance, and data protection. LW added that the results from these audits demonstrate the Trust’s commitment to compliance and assurance for Trustees. • Safeguarding Review: A previous issue has now been reclassified as an observation rather than a formal concern. • Risk Register: Reviewed and discussed in alignment with the CEO’s report. Trustees acknowledged improvements and expressed confidence in the Trust’s current risk management processes and procedures. <p><u>HR, Finance and Operations Meeting Minutes 05.12.2024</u> PW provided a brief summary relating to the Finance, HR and Operations committee meeting and the key updates were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance: The committee welcomed DH as TCAT’s new Chief Finance Officer. PW added that DH’s contributions were positively received. • Operations: No negative issues were raised and PW confirmed that the committee noted a smooth operational period. • HR: Updates on staffing and systems were discussed, including the implementation of a new HR system. <p><u>Quality and Standards Committee Meeting Minutes 13.02.2025</u> SY referred to Section 2 of the CEO report which provides further details relating to school improvement. SY added that academy review reports provided the committee with key insights into the work taking place across the trust and key areas of development at an academy level. The key elements briefly discussed were as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Monitoring and Evaluation • Data-Driven Insights • Curriculum and Teaching Quality 	<p>LW</p> <p>PW</p> <p>SY</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development • Improvement planning <p>SY added that there were two presentations led by TCAT colleagues, Anna Mawby who covered careers and by Andy Hawley, who covered Alternative Provision. SY highlighted that these presentations were incredibly insightful.</p> <p><u>Safeguarding Panel Committee Meeting 28.01.2025</u></p> <p>JW provided an update on behalf of PM who was not present whilst covering this agenda item. JW explained that safeguarding visits, elective home education and children in care were the key agenda items covered. The key updates included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safeguarding Data: Increase in the number of safeguarding cases noted and the need for better data assessment and categorisation when recording on CPOMS to improve Trust consistency. • Looked After Children: Overview provided on Looked After Children across the Trust's academies whereby 54 pupils were identified, with some awaiting assessment. • Legislative Updates: JW highlighted that there have been recent changes in safeguarding legislation, as a result, Trust policy and practice will need to be modified. <p><i>A Trustee challenged if the safeguarding committee is serving well. JW confirmed that the Safeguarding Panel meetings are useful, and the details shared are beneficial to the committee.</i></p>	JW
11	<p>Admissions:</p> <p>AL verbally confirmed that the ratification for the Admissions Policy has been posted and the current admissions cycle (2025–26) is progressing.</p>	AL
12	<p>Policies: (For Approval)</p> <p><u>Complaints Policy:</u></p> <p>AL explained that amendments to the Complaints Policy have been highlighted in yellow to clearly signpost the updates within the policy. AL highlighted that there have been two key areas added which include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roles and Responsibilities - Duty of Care <p><i>AL requested the Trust Board's approval for the Complaints Policy: The Complaints Policy was unanimously approved by all Trustees.</i></p>	AL
13	<p>AOB:</p> <p><u>Department for Education SARA Annual Report:</u></p> <p>AM referred to the newly published Sara Annual Report, encouraging trustees to review its executive summary. AM explained that the report offers national benchmarks on resource use and financial efficiency, providing valuable insights</p>	AL AM

	to guide future strategic planning in areas such as curriculum reform and digital strategy.	
14	Date and time of next meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thursday 10th July 2025, 16:00 	HP
15	Part Two – Confidential There were no confidential items discussed during this meeting.	

The Chair thanked all attendees for their time and closed the meeting at 17:19.