



Company number 8098956

**MINUTES**  
**OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF**  
**BRIDGWATER COLLEGE TRUST HELD ON**  
**MONDAY 17 OCTOBER 2016 AT 6.00 PM AT BRIDGWATER COLLEGE**

Present: Mike Robbins (Chair), Peter Elliott (CEO), Heather Strawbridge, Simon Brewer, Paul Holtam, Denys Rayner, David Hannay, Marc Bevan

In attendance: Gill Warren (Director of Business and Finance), Gail Griffith (Company Secretary)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Carole Chevalley, Ann Dyer, Wendy Dick, Moya Hill, Mark Swallow, Sid Gibson

**2. “EVERY CHILD MATTERS”: proposals for change for BCT 2016/2017**

The Chair introduced the meeting which was for the purpose of one item only, the proposals of the CEO for the development of the Trust. The Regional Commissioner and the Head Teachers had already been consulted. Peter Elliott introduced his paper which was meant as a springboard for discussion of the future plans over the next two to three years. He was looking for guidance from the Board as to whether his proposals were heading in the right direction. There were four strands to the Delivery Plan: an Education Strategy, a Business Strategy, a Governance Strategy, and a Growth Strategy. He would like general feedback on these ideas.

Trustees commented that they were not sure what “achieve well” meant, and proposed “making the most of every pupils’ talent”, or “develop the full potential of the pupil”. The Plan would need more development to show measures on which the delivery could be measured. The dates were very ambitious, and probably would extend over 18-24 months. Trustees thought the ambitions should be clearer and more expansive, such as recognition as a Centre of Excellence, or national recognition. It would be important to specify exactly what the Trust has to offer in order to attract other schools. At the moment the academies are all quite separate, and vulnerable to the loss of key individuals. In order to grow the Trust it will need to put into place a central system which will provide the capacity to acquire other schools. The Chair commented that there was a need to be very clear about the expectations of the Board and the requirement to operate consistently. The Trust is not a high performing organisation as yet, despite the good results in the academies.

At the moment the Trust could not take on another school with (either or both) educational and financial difficulties. The Trust needed to develop resilience and capacity first. For instance the Trust does not as yet have an Improvement Strategy, and this would be part of the compelling offer to new schools, and for the Regional Commission to have confidence in the Trust.

One Trustee commented that the resilience lay at the local academy level, where the culture was strong and adaptive. It was possible for each academy to have some autonomy provided that the governance is strong enough to hold the school to account. The processes should “have high impact, but low profile”. Individual schools would make

their own decisions within very tight guidelines. For instance there should be clarity over risks and the mitigation steps to be taken. There was a balance to be struck over the location of decision-making. Systems would need to be in place across all schools, with a strong framework. An example would be the CEO and the Headteacher deciding the type of system to teach children reading; it would be for the Board to hold the CEO to account for the success or otherwise of that decision.

The CEO was looking at ways of comparing experiences between schools and using the best ideas: what can we learn from each other? What works best for white working class boys? A wealth of expertise exists within the schools, but often with one person. By spreading the expertise resilience, increases and knowledge is shared. A talent map could show where the experts are, or where there is a gap. At the moment there is no Trust-wide skills audit.

It appeared that there was broad agreement on the direction of travel shown in the first two pages of the Plan. Each Strategy of the Delivery Plan was then examined in turn.

### Education Strategy

In addition to producing a school improvement strategy, the CEO was beginning to introduce peer review, e.g. between infant schools, and exchanging expertise, e.g. in reading between BCA and Hamp. Additionally the CEO had noticed that “safeguarding” was dealt with differently across each school. Each school had different procedures and documentation. He thought that if one person could provide the documentation for all the schools this would save time and provide a model policy for all to adopt. It was for the Board to be assured that each academy complied with national advice. Another area for such work could be Special Educational Needs: was there a need for four SENCOs in the Trust? The finances for such arrangements would need to be considered. The redesign of the Financial Regulations would be a crucial piece of work.

### Business Strategy

The CEO said that there was currently £750k of traded activity within the Trust, with a net profit of £27k, 4%. He believed it should be possible to consider further use of the assets of the Trust outside of the 38 weeks per year of school use. In particular there was underuse of the WSC sports facilities.

With regard to central services a single finance system across all the academies would save resources, and allow more resources for educational purposes, certainly to the extent of maintaining funds against cuts from government. The Trustees advised including procurement within central services. As far as risk management was concerned, this should be at academy level, with the Board seeking oversight and reassurance. With common systems, structures and standards across the Trust, the Board would be able to monitor risks. The Audit Committee could look at 15+ score risks each meeting, with a review of all the risks once a year.

The Financial Regulations will need a full revision to reflect the new structures. This would include considering the use of uncommitted balances.

Some aspects of setting up central services could be quite straightforward; other areas may occur when the opportunity arose.

### Governance

There was generally agreement that a Finance Committee should be set up separate from the Audit Committee. This could look at ratios of staffing and IT, for instance, as well as external and internal benchmarking. Audit activities look backwards, while Finance activities should look to future plans. The Board would allocate resources to the

academies, who would control spending. Capital resources could be prioritised across the Trust.

One Trustee was concerned that the impact of the changes should be examined before implementation. Alternatively savings made by setting up central services could be made without impact on classrooms. It looked as though there would be individual strategies in the areas of Estates, IT, Funding, Capital, HR, etc. Each academy could then buy into the services as needed.

### Growth Strategy

The CEO said that the Growth Strategy was predicated on the delivery of the first three strategies. He gave some indication of the potential schools for joining the Trust, **and agreed to give further information, including geographical locations, in due course.** The Trustees were clear that the governance would need to be strong to demonstrate a clear offer to potential schools. At the moment the finances of the Trust are very tight, but it would be necessary to build central services before acquiring any more schools. The CEO did not wish to give an optimum size for the Trust, but could instead talk about the numbers of students, e.g. 5-6000 (2700 currently). Travel costs could be very significant, and this should be taken into account when considering new schools. It would be useful to plot the costs of teaching against support costs, to monitor improvement. It was clear that there would be a more detailed Delivery Plan, with costs and revised timescales, at the operational level.

The Chair concluded that there was a broad consensus of agreement on the Delivery Plan, but the Board would be a need to consider:

- **A revised Strategy Plan, to include financial and operational implications**
- **An Action/Implementation Plan over a 12-36 month period.**

This would be addressed as the first part of the next Board meeting on 7 December 2016, at the earlier time of 5.30pm.

### **3. NEXT MEETING: 7 December 2016 at 5.30pm at Bridgwater College**