



## **TRUST BOARD PEOPLE COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Audit Committee of the Trust Board of South East Cornwall Multi Academy Regional Trust held on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023 at 5.30pm.

<b>Present</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>In Attendance</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>
Mr S Lloyd - Chair	<b>Yes</b>	Mrs K Williams, Clerk	<b>Yes</b>
Mrs L Lawson	<b>Apologies</b>		
Mrs H Casson	<b>Yes</b>		
Mr D Buckley, CEO	<b>Yes</b>		

### **Summary Matters for the Trust Board – Agree key points from meeting**

- a) The People Committee have reviewed the areas of the Strategic Risk Register assigned to them. Only one area has an increased risk which is the recruitment and retention of governors and Trustees. There are additional actions being taken at Liskeard, Looe and Landulph.
- b) Trustees discussed the increase in complaints including those that are vexatious and the impact on the schools. It was noted that this increase is not only at SMART schools but across the county.
- c) The governors will receive some further advice and training on how to review the Strategic Risk Register in the People Link meetings next year.
- d) The committee received an update on the TOLT and Looe restructures. Some further recruitment will be needed but it is hoped that teams will be in place for September.
- e) Schools in most cases have not been able to return to pre Covid levels of parent engagement and Liskeard and Looe in particular have committed to including this in their SDPs next year.
- f) The Staff Attendance Policy and the Safeguarding Policy are both under consultation having been revised. It is hoped that both will be ready for Trust Board approval in July.

### **32. Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### **33. Declaration of Business or Pecuniary Interest and Academy-related parties - update on any changes since completion of written declaration**

There were no declarations.

### **34. Apologies**

Mrs Lawson had sent her apologies in advance of the meeting which were received and accepted by the committee. Mr Buckley joined the committee as a Trustee to ensure the meeting was quorate.

### **35. Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023, having been circulated in advance, were agreed as an accurate record and will be signed.

### **36. Matters Arising**

Feedback was given from the last meeting to the Trust Board. There were no action points.

37. **Consider the Strategic Risk Register in terms of risks assigned to the Learning Committee**

A document was circulated in advance of the meeting. From this:

a) Excellence in governance (failure to attract and retain governors)

Mr Buckley advised that in terms of the control procedures, the Clerk does a huge amount of work for this so we are strong in this area. Landulph and Looe have some additional actions. Many schools have governor recruitment posters in place and Liskeard is working on some further strategies to attract parents to this role. One school has suggested the risk is higher and the Clerk has the overview of this. Mr Buckley explained that the risk is dealt with well and there are no further actions to add to this.

b) **A Trustee noted that we are in a positive position given that the Clerk works across the Trust and Trustees continue to approve governor applications which gives oversight of the number of governors being recruited. A Trustee suggested that overall effectiveness of governors is also key.** Mr Buckley advised that OFSTED had raised this at one school where the governors were included in the judgement on leadership but we did not have confidence in this assessment. We have not had an external assessment that has highlighted this as a problem. The internal audit this year will be focused on governance. Mr Buckley advised that the support structures the Clerk has put into place is strong.

c) **A Trustee asked who undertakes the audit.** Mr Buckley advised that we have an internal audit from an external company. **A Trustee noted that external governance reviews are being used by Trusts and asked if this was something used in the Trust.** Mr Buckley advised that we have held these before at Saltash and Dobwalls.

d) Commons Vision and Values (a culture of low expectations)

Mr Buckley advised that as part of staff induction, he meets with all newly appointed staff personally. The Middle Leaders have also been brought together every year and the CPD group is looking at an agreed set of expectations this year. **A Trustee referred to staff induction and queried if a randomised follow up would be useful.** Mr Buckley advised that we circulate an annual staff questionnaire and also an anonymous survey. There were only 10 respondents to the anonymous survey last year and only minor issues were raised.

e) Commons Vision and Values (pupils or staff put at risk)

We complete the annual S175 safeguarding audit and we have a standard system for SCR (Single Central Record) and DBS processes. We have also done work on unconscious bias and gender equality. We review the safeguarding policy each year as well as hold a safeguarding audit.

f) Mr Buckley explained that we have had an external process for Liskeard following 5 complaints to OFSTED. All the complaints have now been resolved but we have had scrutiny from the LA (Local Authority). The LA were in support of the action being taken and they have provided advice. Mr Buckley summarised a situation regarding a vexatious complaint and the impact of this.

g) **Trustees noted that there is an issue in the county with a large number of complaints going straight to OFSTED and the number of vexatious complaints and they acknowledged that this could impact a school's ability to recruit staff to the sector. A Trustee asked if processes in place are working and if the Trust is dealing with issues. A Trustee asked if we have CCTV in places where we can have it.** Mr Buckley advised that where there have been issues, we have found that systems and how incidents are recording is robust and CCTV is in place and has been used effectively. Mr Buckley gave examples of incidents in the schools and the actions that were taken.

h) Continuous progress for all staff (De-skilling of teachers)

Mr Buckley advised that the Star project is in place and we have a model where we are making sure that we think deeply with concepts at the forefront. We have been looking at "complex and complicated" testing and the use of scripts have been discussed with Middle Leaders.

i) Continuous progress for all staff (failure to maintain employment relations)

Mr Buckley advised that we have actions in place which include an active JCNC in place in the schools and we use the HARTS ladder so we can demonstrate consultation. Mr Buckley summarised an issue raised by the unions at Liskeard and explained that there had been a full staff consultation which could be evidenced. Mr Buckley advised that consultation with parents needs improving at Liskeard but the school has made a commitment to look at this in September. Staff have been an opportunity and are able to contact Mr Buckley and the anonymous survey only raised minor points which were easily addressed.

j) Leadership at all Levels (Decreasing leadership capacity)

We use Leadership Ladders across the Trust. We have improved capacity but not to a point of extension. There have been some changes in leadership which Mr Buckley summarised. We have been trying to build capacity and have been asking “who would cover you if you were off” as part of succession planning discussions.

k) **A Trustee asked who would cover Mr Buckley if he was absent and noted that this is an ongoing concern.** Mr Buckley advised that this would be an issue. Trustees and governors would need to highlight this as a weakness. **A Trustee suggested that perhaps there is more capacity as a Trust rather than per individual school.** Mr Buckley advised that this should be looked at as a Trust as there should be more opportunities as a Trust.

l) Mr Buckley advised that we now ask Headteacher’s to review the Strategic Risk Register and indicate if they believe the risks are getting worse. Only one area is increasing in terms of the People Committee and this is the risk around recruiting and retaining governors and Trustees and the purpose of this requirement is to acknowledge that this is an issue and put actions in place.

38. **Consider if the LGCs are fulfilling obligations towards People issues**

a) Mr Buckley noted that governors should be looking at the Strategic Risk Register but this is not happening fully yet. Mr Buckley and the Clerk have discussed the reporting of compliance across the Trust.

b) **A Trustee suggested that perhaps that this should be raised in the People Link meetings and be part of the agenda for next year’s meetings.** It was suggested that we could discuss the risks increasing with governors.

**Action: The Clerk**

c) Mr Buckley advised that RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated sheets are useful to show compliance. We currently have a dependency culture and this has become apparent with the policy review schedule.

39. **Update on staff restructuring programmes currently in place**

a) Mr Buckley advised that there have been two restructures using the due process procedures and one minor one. Mr Buckley noted that some Trusts have not been robust with their approaches to restructures.

b) Mr Buckley advised that Looe’s pastoral restructure has gone well and they have appointed staff. This restructure has been met with positivity. It was noted that we could not recruit to Head of Science or Technology even though this was advertised nationally. We have however made good internal appointments.

c) The TOLT (Trust Operational Leadership Team) restructure is coming to a close. There has been significant pressure on the team this year but despite this, they have continued to operate but have not had the ability to make any developments. Mr Buckley summarised the changes in personnel and advised that we need to further recruit. We have made two good appointments and we confident that we will have a strong team from September but we do have to make some further appointments.

- d) The decision from the RG (Regional Group) has been delayed but we have decided to go ahead with the TOLT restructure.
40. **Changes at senior staff level** – to what grade do Trustees feel is significant to be informed
- a) Mr Buckley advised that TOLT should be included in this reporting process. We have started to see issues with recruitment of teachers but the most profound issues have been in IT and operations. There has been illness in these teams which are small anyway so the impact is significant. Succession planning documents need to be in place and they should include TSLT (Trust Senior Leadership Team) and TOLT as these groups are the powerhouse of the organisation.
- b) **A Trustee asked if there should be a caveat that staff would be able to step in for leaders from lower levels if there is a situation where there are multiple leaders off.** Mr Buckley advised that we have not got down to this level often and this need would be quite infrequent. Mr Buckley summarised the instances where this has happened, the procedures used to cover and the training opportunities we have for building leadership capacity and growing our own future leaders.
- c) **A Trustee suggested that there may be expectational circumstances that Trustees might need to be aware of.** Mr Buckley advised that he has envisaged that he would report on changes to TSLT, TOLT and the direct level down. Below this would be exceptional but if this would be a possible risk to the Trust, then it should be highlighted to the committee.
41. **Review of the effectiveness of student and parental engagement**
- a) Mr Buckley advised that the TAS (Team Around the School) meetings and the LA Locality meetings are hosted by the Trust and we have linked these two together which has been useful. The last meeting was focused on parental engagement and the LA have tried initiatives to extend parental engagement.
- b) We need to return to this as parental engagement has not returned to its former position since Covid. Landulph and Dobwalls have actively engaged with parents again but have only managed half the number of engagements held prior to Covid. Saltash have continued with parent forums. Looe has not engaged in this and Liskeard has a new headteacher who has needed to prioritise in other areas. Both school have recognised that not having this as a focus as created some issues so have the Headteachers have made commitments to look at this within their SDPs (School Development Plans) next year.
- c) The SHEU (Students Health Education Unit) survey results have been returned and will be shared with Trustees. Mr Buckley advised that there were not any areas which came out below average and there were five items in secondary and three in primary which came out significantly above. The results show that secondary students are less open to pressures of smoking and alcohol and they also feel that they have staff to speak to. The primaries were ahead on students feeling listened to. Mr Buckley explained that the secondary students did not feel listened too and student council representation is low which is disappointing.
- d) **A Trustee asked if we have action plans.** Mr Buckley advised that this is LA led data and the surveys that we have circulated before will be done again so we have an annual comparison. We have recently discussed the format and structure of the Equality Impact meeting which will help to take some further steps towards this.
- e) **A Trustee noted that work on this is a constant and we can only improve and suggested that perhaps some of these possible actions could be a Star project for staff members.** Mr Buckley advised that non-compliance should be reported to Trustees and we should then detail what actions we are taking. We will be looking at using standard forms. **A Trustee noted that measuring engagement is difficult and suggested that relationships have been damaged since Covid and there has been an impact on relationships between parents and agencies.**

42. **Discuss the S175 drafting and submission process ahead of 30<sup>th</sup> June deadline and Representation at CACE Safeguarding meetings from MO**

- a) Mr Buckley explained that he wanted to make sure we have different levels of networking. The Safeguarding network is now being led by Matt Oakes and the quality of debate is really good. The group have looked at where the S175 form originated from and have found that it was a CAPH (Cornwall Association of Primary Headteachers) initiative which was set up. CACE will be taking up ownership of the S175 and will be proposing ways of moving it online and will also be discussing having a SCR template which would be used by members of CACE. 90% of schools in Cornwall are now represented by CACE and the LA is part of this group.

43. **EHE/Safeguarding exploration from LA**

- a) Mr Buckley advised that we have documented minutes demonstrating that the schools have tried to discourage parents choosing to EHE (Elective Home Educate). We have committed to the LA that we would have discussions with the Middle Leaders regarding this. Some instances of EHE can be brilliant if well-constructed but schools should never advise parents to EHE.

44. **Review of Policies**

a) Discuss the changes to the Staff Attendance Policy

Mr Buckley advised that the Staff Attendance policy has been reviewed. The DfE adviser gave us some good indication of what actions we should take in terms of staff and student attendance. We therefore have a new tightened policy for staff and we also realised that the Leave of Absence Policy needs some revision. We have already had some positive feedback and we have trialled the new approach. It has a very clear structure. **A Trustee noted this is so helpful as is it process led.** Mr Buckley added that we may get challenge from Unions on the changes.

b) Safeguarding Policy

**A Trustee referred to the Safeguarding policy which has just been circulated by email for consultation and asked if we need to have localised school policies.** Mr Buckley advised that we have an overarching SMART policy and then some local level policies. **A Trustee asked if stakeholders were to look on the school website, would they find a SMART Policy or a school policy.** Mr Buckley advised that it is a Trust policy with some specific tables for the school. **A Trustee queried where the policy is located on the website.** It is listed under statutory information as a policy and also under the policies menu.

- c) Mr Buckley noted how well TOLT have done this year considering they have been so low in capacity. We are looking at policy schedules for next year.

45. **LGC minutes summary**

A document was circulated in advance of the meeting. From this:

- a) Mr Buckley advised that we are continuing to establish the role of the governors and the Clerk provides advice and guidance in this area. Mr Buckley advised that he has been invited to Trewidland and Saltash's LGC (Local Governing Committee) meetings to address any issues.

46. **Headteacher's Reports**

Documents were circulated in advance of the meeting. From these:

- a) The Learning Committee had acknowledged how much more consistent the reports are. **A Trustee noted how useful these are and enable Trustees to see the issues across the schools.** Mr Buckley will be adding the compliance checker for next year. The Risk Register is also really useful to see movement throughout the year.

47. **Guidance/instructions to LGCs**

- a) Mr Buckley will provide some guidance on the use and review of the Strategic Risk Register next year in the People Link meetings.
- b) Staff Attendance policy - This policy is currently out for consultation with governors, Trustees, Unions and Senior leaders. It will be approved by the Trust Board at their meeting in July.

- c) At the moment we are not recording parental engagement at Trust level so governors need to ensure that the level of engagement for student and staff is suitable for their setting. Governors need to review what they could report to the Trust Board as good examples of staff and student engagement.

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- b) Trustees discussed the increase in complaints including those that are vexatious and the impact on the schools. It was noted that this increase is not only at SMART schools but across the county.
- c) The governors will receive some further advice and training on how to review the Strategic Risk Register in the People Link meetings next year.
- d) The committee received an update on the TOLT and Looe restructures. Some further recruitment will be needed but it is hoped that teams will be in place for September.
- e) Schools in most cases have not been able to return to pre Covid levels of parent engagement and Liskeard and Looe in particular have committed to including this in their SDPs next year.
- f) The Staff Attendance Policy and the Safeguarding Policy are both under consultation having been revised. It is hoped that both will be ready for Trust Board approval in July.

49. **Agreements made by email**

- a) None.

50. **Date of next meetings**

19-10-2023, 21-02-2024 and 17-06-2024 at 5.30pm.

The Clerk will check with Trustees that 5.30pm is a convenient start time.

**Action: The Clerk**

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and their engagement. The meeting closed at 6.51pm.

<b>Action Summary</b>	
<p><b>M38. Consider if the LGCs are fulfilling obligations towards People issues</b>            b) A Trustee suggested that perhaps that this should be raised in the People Link meetings and be part of the agenda for next year’s meetings. It was suggested that we could discuss the risks increasing with governors.</p>	<p><b>Action: The Clerk</b></p>
<p><b>M50. Date of next meetings</b>            The Clerk will check with Trustees that 5.30pm is a convenient start time.</p>	<p><b>Action: The Clerk</b></p>