

**Minutes of a Governing Body Meeting of Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy on
Wednesday, 23 September 2020 at 5.30 pm**

Governors Present: Chris Smith (Chair), Andrew Fowler (Principal), Guy Currey, Cllr Sheila Gallagher, Claire Godfrey, Joel Greenwell, Dr Jane Halpin, Jayne Hooker, David Horn, Alison Logan, Heather McClean, Elena Ovington, Mark Surtees, Kevin Thompson

Observers: Joe Dicocco (Observer, Deputy Principal)

Clerk: Kim Ashford

The meeting started at 5.32pm and was quorate.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Denise Smith and Linda Alder. Consent was given for their absence.

The Chair explained that Denise Smith had requested a 'leave of absence' due to personal circumstances and asked that apologies be accepted in respect of all meetings that she is due to attend until the next Board meeting on 10 December 2020. This was discussed and **agreed**.

2. Declarations of Interest in any items on the agenda

There were no declarations of interest in any items on the agenda.

3. Election of Chair

One nomination had been received from the current Chair, Chris Smith. After a presentation from Chris, the Governing Body **agreed** unanimously that Chris would be re-appointed as Chair. The Chair left the meeting whilst the vote took place.

The Chair informed the Board that he does not intend to seek re-election to any further term as Chair and that therefore the Board needs to actively take steps in respect of succession planning. It was noted that there were no clear expressions of interest from any Trustees at this stage to work towards becoming Chair and that external interest would be canvassed.

4. Election of Vice-Chairs

Nominations had been received from the current Vice-Chairs, Alison Logan and David Horn. After presentations from Alison and David, the Governing Body **agreed** unanimously that Alison and David would be re-appointed as Vice-Chairs. The candidates left the meeting whilst the vote took place.

5. Minutes of the last Governing Body meeting on Wednesday 24 June 2020

- Governors received the minutes of the last Governing Body meeting on Wednesday 24 June 2020, as circulated via e-mail prior to the meeting. The minutes were **approved** as a correct record subject to the amendment below.
- At the top of page 3 of the minutes, the name of an attendee at a meeting to discuss the new MAT has been queried. It was noted that the attendee was Fraser Turnbull. The clerk agreed to amend the minutes accordingly.
Action: Clerk.

6. Governing Body

6.1 Register of Interests

The Register of Interests was passed to Governors to complete and sign, before passing back to the clerk. The Clerk stated that she would email a copy of the Register of Interests to the school. **Action: Clerk.**

6.2 Governor Code of Conduct

- Governors received the Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy Governance Handbook, which contains the Governor Code of Conduct, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- Governors **approved** and **adopted** the Governor Code of Conduct.

6.3 Governing Body Membership and Vacancies

- Governors received the Membership and Vacancies report, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- It was **noted** that there were no vacancies to fill and that the Governing Body was complete.
- It was noted that Chris Smith's term as a trustee was due to expire in February 2021 and the Trust **approved** a resolution requiring Members to appoint Mr Smith to a further term as a trustee to enable him to complete his term as Chair.

6.4 Governing Body meeting attendance

- Governors received the Meeting and Attendance report, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- It was noted that attendance had been exceptional at all meetings and that all Governors were present at this evening's meeting. The Chair thanked Governors for their commitment to their role.

6.5 Governing Body training and development

- Governors received the Training and Development report, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- The Chair **agreed** to email the Clerk details of Governor training that took place last term and this term so that the Local Authority's records can be updated. **Action: Chair.**
- All Governors were asked to email details of any training they undertake to the Clerk so that records can be updated. **Action: Governors.**

6.6 Link Governors – roles and visit schedule/reports

- Governors received the Trustee Impact Evaluation Links & Lines of Enquiry document, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- Governors undertook to visit the Academy twice during the year 2020/2021. It was **agreed** that Governors would meet with their Governor Partner and SLT Lead prior to arranging a visit, so that they would be aware of what needed to be scrutinised during the visit.
- The Chair agreed to circulate the visit report template to Governors, which would need to be completed in collaboration with their Governor Partner. **Action: Chair.**
- The visit reports will be included on the agenda for the next Governing Body meeting, taking place on 9 December 2020. **Action: Clerk.**

7. Committees

7.1 Committee Membership

- Governors received the Committee Membership report, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- It was **agreed** that the following Governors would be members of the Student Progress Committee:
 - Alison Logan (Chair)
 - Chris Smith
 - Andrew Fowler
 - David Horn
 - Cllr Sheila Gallagher
 - Kevin Thompson
 - Heather McClean
 - Jayne Hooker
 - Jane Halpin
 - Claire Godfrey

- Mark Surtees
- Denise Smith
- It was **agreed** that a Vice Chair would be appointed to the Student Progress Committee at a later date.
- It was **agreed** that the following Governors would be members of the Academy Management Committee:
 - Guy Currey (Chair)
 - Jayne Hooker (Vice Chair)
 - Chris Smith
 - Andrew Fowler
 - David Horn
 - Alison Logan
 - Kevin Thompson
 - Jane Halpin
 - Elena Ovington
 - Joel Greenwell
- It was **agreed** that the following three Governors would be free to hear Appeals, as they are not members of the Academy Management Committee:
 - Cllr Sheila Gallagher
 - Heather McClean
 - Claire Godfrey

7.2 Committee Meeting Attendance

- It was noted that there were no issues with attendance.

7. **Principal's Report**

Governors received the Principal's Report, which was circulated at the meeting.

8.1 Review school-based end of year assessment data

A discussion took place where the following points and comments were made:

- Joe Dicocco, Deputy Principal, commented on the results presented in the Principal's Report. A minor error was pointed out in page 2, where the figure for 'Achieving both English and Maths' for English 5+ should read 4.8 and not 4.2.
- While it was recognised that there was considerable variation between departments, it was **agreed** that it was important to focus on stretching and challenging the higher achievers which would push up the average grade scores.
- It was noted that the approach had moved towards Work Scrutiny this year, as there was a need to examine what learning had been

retained long term, and what had been lost due to the amount of time pupils had been away from school.

- A great deal of change had occurred due to Covid-19, which had been embraced by all staff who were demonstrating positive attitudes and reactions in extremely challenging circumstances.

The Deputy Principal provided the following response to a question from a Governor:

- *How does all this change fit in with everyone's capacity?* It is more a redirection of effort and a greater use of leadership time, rather than a greater volume of work; a cultural change which undoubtedly will bring improvements.
- It was noted that there was a strong focus on lesson design and on challenging the higher achievers by setting tangible higher targets. Where departments are struggling, appraisal objectives will be put in place. Some staff will need clearer leadership and guidance so that their skills and abilities can further develop.

The Principal provided the following response to a question from a Governor:

- *Are the changes being made collated and documented?* Yes. Observing a lesson does not tell you a great deal; only how someone reacts with you being in the room. What is important is what is in the pupils' exercise books, which cannot be misinterpreted.

8.2 Implementation of Recovery Curriculum

A discussion took place where the following points and comments were made:

- A lot of work is being undertaken on the Recovery Curriculum, focussing on remote learning where students and teachers may need to self-isolate.
- The platform used for remote learning is Microsoft Teams. Staff are uploading work to Teams including videos, PowerPoint presentations and MP3 audio files. Students can submit completed work and communicate with their teachers online.
- It was noted that while there were few children without IT access, there was still a need to obtain more devices from the DfE, which can take time. The school is currently seeking more laptops for pupils to use if they do not have access to a device at home. Dongles will also be supplied to those who have no access to WiFi at home.

- It was agreed that it was important for parents to support the new learning environment and for the school to educate parents in using Teams. It was suggested that the school could hold online classes for parents to assist with this.

The Principal and Deputy Principal provided the following responses to questions from a Governor:

- *Are children in self-isolation getting their work?* This is patchy at the moment. We are working hard to become more efficient regarding preparing and sending out work more quickly.
- *Is it possible to see who is accessing work online?* Yes, in setting work electronically, you can see when someone has accessed the work.

The Principal commented on the cost to the school of Covid-19, as follows:

- The pressures that the school is currently facing are significant. There are parents, pupils and teachers who are self-isolating; others awaiting test results, and cover needs to be put in place for teachers who are not able to attend school due to illness or self-isolation – all of which is having a substantial effect on the school.
- The administrative workload has increased significantly, not least due to the number of telephone calls being received from parents. The school is looking to hire temporary staff to help deal with the administrative workload and also to provide cover for senior staff.
- The use of social media to send out messages to parents was considered, but this was ruled out in favour of using Messenger which has the capacity to group people's queries and allow the recipient to respond en masse. The Headteacher agreed this might be a way forward and stated that he would welcome suggestions on implementing this.
- The Principal proposed recruiting 3 temporary posts:
 - IT Technician
 - Administrative Assistant
 - Senior Leader (for project work)

The Principal will liaise with the Chair of the Academy Management Committee to discuss the possibility of obtaining emergency funding for hiring temporary staff.

- A Governor suggested using a managed service to hire temporary staff on an as-needed basis. The Principal agreed that this was an option, and that he would consider any leads that were put to him.
- It was agreed that the Principal would send his proposals regarding recruitment of temporary staff to everyone on the Governing Body

and that a decision would be made on this matter at the Academy Management meeting on 21 October 2020. **Action: Principal.**

- The Principal stated that he would be happy to begin looking into the recruitment of temporary staff with immediate effect, alongside awaiting approval on this matter, so as not to lose time. **Action: Principal.**

8.3 School Improvement Plan

Governors received the Opportunity North East Action Plan – Quality of Education document, as circulated during the meeting.

- It was noted that a large amount of work was in progress on the School Improvement Plan, as reflected in the extensive and comprehensive plan circulated to Governors.
- The school will work closely with Cardinal Hume Learning and Teaching Team on many aspects of the School Improvement Plan.
- It was noted that the Senior Leadership Team and subject leads would meet with Cardinal Hume Learning and Teaching Team to observe policies in practice through book scrutinies and lesson observations.
- The school will work with Cardinal Hume to create new learning and teaching policies and review their implementation and effectiveness. There will be fortnightly visits from Cardinal Hume Senior Leadership Team to quality assure new policies.

8.4 Safeguarding

The Principal confirmed that the school was compliant in terms of its Safeguarding strategy.

The Principal provided the following responses to questions from Governors:

- *How are the children feeling since their return to school?* The children are very resilient. Not all of the children have been traumatised by the Covid-19 situation and most are working well and appear happy to be back in school. We are not holding whole school assemblies, but tutors are mindful of the children's needs and are keen to encourage an outlook of hope and self-efficacy among the children.
- *Have you engaged the Regional Integrated Support for Education (RISE) team?* Yes, RISE will be working with the school and the Local Authority has allocated us a social worker who will be

embedded in the school. We also have an in-school counselling service.

- *How many staff are trained in mental health?* All staff are compliant regarding safeguarding matters, but not necessarily trained in 'mental health' which encompasses a wide area of specialist knowledge and practice.

8.5 Children with health needs who cannot attend school

The Principal confirmed that the school was compliant in terms of following the statutory guidance for ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school due to health needs.

8.6 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)

The Principal confirmed that the school was compliant in terms of following statutory guidance for the induction of NQTs. The school currently has 3 NQTs who have been appointed an induction tutor, Chris White.

Joe Dicocco left the meeting at 7.26pm.

9. Academies Financial Handbook

Governors to ensure they meet the key requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook.

9.1 Structures

The Principal confirmed that the school is compliant in all matters pertaining to the school's governance including Board meetings structure.

9.2 Management Accounts

The Principal confirmed that he receives management accounts.

9.3 Audit and Risk Committee

The Principal confirmed that the school is compliant with the requirements of the Audit and Risk Committee.

9.4 Submit audited accounts

The Principal confirmed that the school is compliant in submitting audited accounts.

10. Statutory responsibilities

10.1 Information to publish on a school website

The Principal stated that the school was not compliant at this time, but confirmed that the school now has the ability to carry out all necessary checks and will be compliant for the next Governing Body meeting. This item will be added to the next Governing Body meeting agenda.

Action: Clerk.

10.2 Policy schedule

- Governors received the Policy schedule and policy documents for the Governor's Payments and Allowances Policy and the Complaints Policy, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.
- Governors were asked to approve the following policies:
 - Terms of Reference – Student Progress committee (see Handbook)
 - Terms of Reference – Academy Management committee (see Handbook)
 - Governors' Payments and Allowances Policy – Chris Smith (*attached*)
 - Complaints Policy – Chris Smith (*attached*)
- The above policies were **approved**.
- It was **agreed** that the following policies would be considered at the next Governing Body meeting on 9 December 2020:
 - Child Protection Policy
 - SEN Information Report
 - Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Policy
- Governors were appointed to lead on key policies, as follows:
 - Jane Halpin – Child Protection
 - Jane Halpin – Supporting Pupils with Medical Conditions
 - Chris Smith – Exclusions
 - Chris Smith – Sex Education
 - Joel Greenwell – Capability
 - Claire Godfrey – SEN Information Report & SEND
 - Claire Godfrey – Antbullying
 - Kevin Thompson – Adoption Leave
 - Heather McClean – Attendance and Punctuality
 - Heather McClean – Behaviour
 - Sheila Gallagher – Educational Visits
 - Guy Currey – Health & Safety
 - Jane Hooker – Pay Policy

11. PFI Dispute with ESFA

Governors received a copy of a letter from the Education & Skills Funding Agency, that had been sent to the school's lawyers, Hempsons, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.

A discussion ensued regarding this ongoing matter. It was noted that while the letter from the ESFA states that they will agree to a formal meeting with the school, their stance on this matter remains unchanged.

After some consideration, the Governors **agreed** that a formal meeting would not achieve anything and therefore that they would not go forward with this. Governors **agreed** that the funds that were unfairly demanded of the school but would be paid to the ESFA and that the school would publish an open letter setting out what had been done to the Academy so that stakeholders could appreciate the issue that the Academy has faced and the impact it has had.

It was **agreed** that the Chair would draft the above open letter, which would be circulated among the Governors for input prior to publishing. **Action: Chair; Governors.**

12. The Board to note the letter received from Eileen Milner, Director of Academies and Maintained Schools

Governors received a copy of a letter from Eileen Milner, Director of Academies and Maintained Schools and Chief Executive, ESFA, dated 13 August 2020, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.

The above letter had been sent to the Chair, asking the school to account for having too many senior staff who were in receipt of high salaries. However, it was noted that this letter had been based on data taken from the school's 2018/19 pay structure, which is now out of date. The letter therefore does not make sense in light of the school's current pay structure, details of which will not yet be accessible to the ESFA, hence their reliance on old data.

It was noted that while this was a public letter and therefore potentially damaging to the school, a phrase at the end of the letter states that the school "does not meet the EEP (Excessive Executive Pay) criteria at this time..." which would appear to negate the accusation made.

The Chair stated that he would respond to the ESFA explaining that their letter had been based on data which was no longer valid, and that hopefully this explanation would suffice to draw a line under this matter. **Action: Chair.**

13. Dates and times of future meetings

Governors received a list of upcoming meetings, as circulated by email prior to the meeting.

14. Any other business

Mark Surtees offered heartfelt thanks to the Principal for ensuring a successful and well-planned return to school for all pupils and staff. This sentiment was echoed across the Governing Body.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm

Date.....

Signed.....