

Minutes of the Board of Directors' meeting
Thursday 10 July 2025
Held at Hereford Sixth Form College

Present: Sheila Boniface
Peter Cooper (Chief Executive Officer)
Marion Hawkins
Craig Holden
Ken Hopkins (Chair)
Katie Jackson
Daniel Pearce-Higgins
Shirley Tully

In attendance: Sallyanne Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer)
Andrea Marshall (Director of Quality)
Linda Watkins (Director of Governance)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Jane Britton, Peter Jackson, Ceri Morgan and Rachel Salter.

2. Opening standing items

- I. There were no declarations of interests.
- II. No items were deemed to be confidential.
- III. Any other business – none identified.

3. Hereford Sixth Form College

The Principal outlined positive aspects and challenges at HSFC. Safeguarding and pastoral support is effective, the curriculum offer of Level 3 vocational and A levels are open to all, there is wide enrichment and attendance has improved. Staff retention is high with very experienced staff, MAT collaboration enables support to the Principals and Vice Principals. Allocation of capital funding has improved the campus for students.

Challenges overlap with some of the positive points above. There is an ageing staff demographic; early careers teachers (ECTs) are being employed to provide stability in areas where staff are aged 60+ years. The curriculum review and AI will have significant impact on courses. Space to accommodate student numbers remains an issue despite capital improvements. Disparity between the Welsh and English GCSE curriculum means some students who studied the Welsh curriculum find Level 3 courses challenging; there are c25% of students travelling from Wales. There is competition locally both with courses offered at Hartpury College and in Wales. The college needs to maintain high quality standards and its outstanding judgement from Ofsted. Transport issues continue to be addressed for students using public transport (40 students withdrew due to public transport). Students

Action

with EHCP have increased; a new SENCo appointed to provide support for students. The Trust and HSFC are liaising with Herefordshire Council to secure a 5-year lease for Churchill House to accommodate the Trust and provide exam space which would release space on the campus to provide additional classrooms.

The Chair thanked the Principal for her presentation.

4. Chair's Report

This was the Chair's last report when he thanked everyone for their support during nearly 20 years whilst he was proud to have been involved with HSFC and latterly the Trust. During his tenure, in 2016 HSFC was awarded the best sixth form by TES. DfE undertook area reviews in 2017 and HSFC was the first sixth form college to academise followed by subsequent growth, including WSFC, KEVI and schools joining the Trust. The Chair felt that the Labour government's policy on academisation was disappointing which was originally a Labour government policy. Alternative growth options are being investigated in the Trust. The Chair thanked everyone for their support and best wishes.

5. Minutes of the last meetings, resolution and matters arising

The Board agreed to approve the minutes and confidential minute of the meeting held on 10 April 2025. Actions had been addressed which were evidenced in the action list. There were no matters arising.

6. CEO's Report

The CEO summarised key points from his report. A recent inhouse strategy day was held with external speakers from the Coop Trust and Speakers for Schools with attendance by invited representatives from Worcester University and Trusts that HoM works with collaboratively.

Each academy head had been requested to prepare 'black papers' this year to identify potential savings based on anticipated uncertainties of future funding in 2025/26; which subsequently evidenced a reasonably sound financial position. Capital projects are making positive impacts in the academies.

Developments which could potentially increase student numbers across the academies including the introduction of VAT on private schools and the Eton Project for Dudley being paused; the latter is highly likely to increase numbers at KEVI. There are preliminary discussions with another Trust which has a sixth form college. A Director enquired about potential expansion opportunities noting that schools which were due to join the Trust during the last year had withdrawn in response to the change in Government. The Trust is working collaboratively with several sixth form colleges and SFC trusts which are unlikely to be viable or sustainable in the future. In response to a further question it was noted that the DfE Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence (RISE) team are supporting Aylestone School. DfE has not, to date, appointed a Regional Director following the retirement of the postholder in December.

The Director of Quality reminded Directors that the Trust commissioned a SEND review which will be reported to the Trust in the autumn. The Trust will appoint a senior SEND lead in response to the increase of students with EHCPs and SEND needs. SENCo groups will be established in sixth forms and secondary schools across the Trust. The SEND budget has increased significantly.

The Chair thanked the CEO for the report inviting questions. He invited the CFO to present the finance report commenting that he has confidence in the CFO who manages finances competently.

7. Finance report: May 2025

The CFO outlined the report which showed the year end EBITDA forecast of c£1m which is above budget due to additional funding (core schools grant, NI grant funding, SEND high needs funding). Payroll is broadly to forecast with the exception of some agency staff costs at JKHS. IT costs were brought forward with equipment purchased in February to avoid inflationary increases. SCA funding was marginally higher at £2.7m (a £500k increase) which will fund the capacity project at KEVI, phase 2 fire safety works at WSFC and remodelling in the schools including food technology, pastoral space and upgrading toilets.

Cash balances are strong and investments reviewed and maturing regularly. The CFO commended staff in the finance department for their efficiency. The Finance and Resources Committee Chair commented that the 30% improvement to the EBITDA was an excellent achievement.

8. Trust budget 2025/26 and 3-year financial forecast

The CFO presented the budget which had been discussed in detail by the F&R Committee and was recommended for approval. The Secretary of State announced an increase in funding at the end of May to enable academies to pay the 2025/26 pay award. This will provide a buffer for the Trust in 2025/26. Changes to the funding regime and pay awards will need to be confirmed in September. An EBITDA of £358k is forecast in 2025/26 with deficits in the 2-year financial forecasts. The CFO is working closely with academies to manage costs.

The Board approved the budget 2025/26 and 3-year financial forecast for submission to the DfE.

SAG

9. Summary from Committees: 12 June 2025

The written summary from committees was discussed with Chairs highlighting key issues and items for approval.

- I. Audit and Risk Committee (including confidential minute). Following tendering, new internal and external auditors have been appointed for 2025/26 (RSM and Cooper Parry respectively). The risk register and cyber security report provided reassurance that risks are managed effectively. An update on Free School Meals at KEVI was provided with no further update to report to date. The Board approved the business continuity plan.
- II. Finance and Resources Committee: The Committee Chair reported that April 2025 accounts were discussed. May 2025 accounts showed a positive increase in the EBITDA. SCA funding projects were reported with confirmation that £700k unspent capital funding to date will be spent during the year. The draft budget was a key focus of meeting which the Board has approved. Following negotiations regarding the fire at the Chantry, the contractor had accepted liability which has reduced the insurance premium to a similar level to the previous year. The Board approved the following:
 - a. Gender pay gap report

	b. Health and safety policy	
III.	Curriculum and Quality Committee: Daniel Pearce-Higgins commented on wider safeguarding issues and educating people to respect others. The Board <u>approved</u> the following: a. Equality, diversity and inclusion policy b. Equality statement and 4 year objectives including amendments proposed by the Committee to add timescales to implement the objectives and an additional sentence proposed by a Director in the introduction (end of third paragraph): "It is the duty of every student, staff and stakeholder to act accordingly."	LJW
IV.	Search and Governance Committee minutes were noted with key points highlighted. The Trust will operate with eleven Directors whilst the Committee continues to seek additional Directors being mindful of future expansion and diversity. The self-assessment exercise completed by Directors last year will be repeated. The incoming Chair and Director of Governance will arrange one to one conversations with the LGB Chairs to get to know each other. An external review of governance will be arranged next year as reciprocal arrangement with another Trust.	LJW
10. Governance appointments to the Trust Board 2025/26		
The Chair nominated Sheila Boniface as Chair whose contribution has been tremendously helpful whilst she had served as Vice Chair. The Board <u>agreed</u> to make the following Chair appointments for 2025/26 following nominations, including recommendations from the Committees:		
I.	Chair: Sheila Boniface	
II.	Vice Chair: Peter Jackson	
III.	Audit and Risk Committee: Craig Holden	
IV.	Finance and Resources Committee: Shirley Tully	
V.	Curriculum and Quality Committee: Daniel Pearce-Higgins	
VI.	Search and Governance Committee: Peter Jackson	
VII.	Remuneration Committee: Craig Holden	
VIII.	Interest was invited for Designated Directors noting the links for 2025/26 agreeing these should continue: Careers Information and Guidance (Marion Hawkins), Safeguarding (Katie Jackson), SEND (Sheila Boniface). There are revisions to the Academies Trust Handbook 2025 requiring Trusts to understand and work towards meeting the digital and technology standard by 2030. A Designated Director to Digital and Technology Standards will be appointed.	LJW
IX.	<u>Appointed</u> Sean Devlin, Matthew Adams and James Adnett as Independent Governors for 4-year terms at WSFC	
X.	<u>Appointed</u> Matthew Osbourne as Independent Governor from 01/09/25 for a 4-year term at KEVI.	
XI.	<u>Appointed</u> Marie Tucker as a Independent Governor from 01/09/25 for a 4-year term in office at the Chantry School.	
XII.	A summary of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 had been provided. Action is required by Directors before the autumn to complete identity verification checks; step by step instructions would be issued to support Directors to verify their identity with Companies House.	Directors LJW
11. Items from Committees for information		
I.	Audit and Risk Committee	

a. Risk register Trust Portal Home b. Cybersecurity, data protection and fraud report c. KEVI Free School Meals II. Finance & Resources Committee a. Estates report b. Health and safety report c. HR report III. Curriculum and Quality Committee a. Student progression report b. Student performance headline data c. Safeguarding report d. Student progression e. Quality reviews: JKHS and The Chantry f. Quality Improvement Plans progress report IV. Search and Governance Committee a. Board and Academies Trust Code self-assessment (RAG rated) b. Training and development report 2024/25-2025/26 c. Calendar of business 2025/26 d. MAT and LGB dates 2025/26 were noted with a request for volunteers noting that KEVI had encouraged more Directors to attend their LGB e. Governance development plan 2024/25	Directors
12. Summary from LGB meetings I. WSFC 4 June 2025 II. KE VI 11 June 2025 III. HSFC 22 May and 26 June 2025 IV. JKHS 16 June 2025 V. The Chantry 22 May and 5 July 2025 (to follow)	
There was a comment that the summaries varied with a request to provide more meaningful summaries in the consistent tabulated format.	LJW
13. Any other business The CEO recorded appreciation to Ken Hopkins as he retires from the Trust Board which was unanimously echoed by all.	
14. Date of Next Meeting Board meeting: Thursday 16 October 2025 commencing at 6.00pm at The Chantry School (TBC).	