

Minutes - Board Briefing

Version: Approved
Meeting Date: Thursday 7 May 2026
Location: Online via MS Teams
Time: 4.00pm

Chairing this meeting Mark Davies (MD) Trustee
Yvonne Beach (YB) [part] Chair of the Board
Vice Chair: Rachel Mortlock (RMO) Vice Chair of the Board
Trustees: Georgie Gough (GG) Trustee
Nicky McAllister (NM) Trustee
Adrian Coleman (ACM) Trustee
Orville Lynch (OL) Trustee
Nitin Parmar (NP) Trustee
Bryony French (BF) Trustee
Jemma Griffiths (JG) Trustee
Amanda Coffey (ACF) Trustee

Attendees: Steve Taylor (ST) CEO
Sally Apps (SA) Deputy CEO
Andy Ling (AL) Director of Technology and Information
Sarah Lovell (SL) COO
Liz Tincknell (LT) Head of Governance
Martin Thomas (MT) Director of Estates and Facilities
Susie Weaver (SW) Education Director
Kate Richardson (KR) Director of Performance
Tony Searle (TS) Education Director
Rachel Mylrea (RMY) Director of HR
Wendy Hellin (WH) Clerk
Apologies: Alison Fletcher (AFL) Director of CLF Institute

Minutes

Item	Description	Action
1	Introductions, Administration, Apologies	
1.1	MD welcomed everyone and introductions were made. Apologies are recorded above.	
2	Declarations of Interest/Member & Director Declarations	
2.1	No verbal declarations were made.	
3	Verbal updates	
3.1	Damien Egan, MP – Review completion, publication and updates	
3.1.1	ST explained that the situation first began following the national news coverage in January regarding the postponement of Damien Egan MP's visit, which led to an unannounced Ofsted inspection and a trust-wide review led by Dame Joan McVittie. The review concluded at the end of February.	
3.1.2	The review and Ofsted inspection found no evidence of antisemitism or external lobbying influencing the decision, which was based solely on safeguarding concerns. ST noted that the findings were widely covered in the media, including radio and television. ST highlighted statements from the Confederation of School Trusts (CST) and the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), both commending the trust's leadership and integrity. These endorsements were seen as important validation for the trust and school.	

3.1.3	ST described ongoing challenges, including the MP's request for the release of the unredacted report and the need to justify redactions made in consultation with Dame Joan and the Department for Education. The trust maintained that all redactions were standard practice for such reports and were intended to protect individuals.	
3.1.4	ST acknowledged that the review process was a significant distraction, affecting the trust's ability to focus on school improvement and engagement with some schools. The team reflected on the need to catch up on these priorities moving forward. A discussion took place about the financial implications of the review, including direct costs, legal fees and the broader impact on staff time and wellbeing.	
3.1.5	NM reported that, based on recent meetings, the situation within the academy appears to be stabilising, with no significant lasting negativity detected, though the long-term impact will continue to be monitored.	
3.2	Industrial Action Tewkesbury Academy, Hanham Woods Academy	
3.2.1	RM explained that the dispute at Tewkesbury has involved several weeks of industrial action centred on behaviour and pastoral staffing. Both NEU and NASUWT unions have been involved, with NEU representing a larger group. The trust has engaged in ongoing negotiations with union representatives and has increased pastoral capacity to address concerns. The NASUWT staff have returned, but NEU action continues, with further meetings scheduled to seek a pause or cessation.	
3.2.2	RM advised that at Hanham Woods Academy, previous industrial action mandates have expired, but the NEU has secured a new mandate for a year. No action dates are set yet, and discussions are ongoing to address behaviour management and staff support.	
3.2.3	TS emphasised the stress on Principals and staff and the importance of supporting them through supervision and regular contact. The trust is also mindful of the pressures on local union representatives and is committed to supporting all colleagues' wellbeing during disputes.	
3.3	Industrial Action, national picture	
3.3.1	ST and SA provided an outline of the national picture regarding industrial actions and the information that is being shared in the media. ST highlighted some of the work taking place that is focused on supporting trusts that find themselves in such challenging situations and seeking resolutions to restore positive working relationships between trusts / employers and unions.. ST has shared briefings issued on 5 May (ASCL) and 6 May (CST). Industrial relations are one of the largest threats currently seen across the education landscape and continues to be a focus for the trust.	
3.4	Governance updates	
3.4.1	LT provided an update on governance, focusing on changes to Board membership and succession planning. It was noted that Zarah Morwood has formally resigned from her position as Trustee. The Board placed on record its sincere thanks for her time, commitment and the valuable contribution she made during her tenure and wished her well for the future.	
3.4.2	LT advised that ACM's second term of office will come to an end in June, at which point he will step down from the Board. However, it was confirmed that he will continue to support the Trust in a number of ways, including taking on the role of Chair of the new Airfield Primary Academy in Weston-Super-Mare when it opens in September, and continuing his involvement through Trust committees. The Board recorded its thanks to ACM for his significant service and welcomed his ongoing contribution.	
3.4.3	An update was provided on new appointments. ACF's induction is currently underway, while Sunchi Chen's pre-appointment checks are nearing completion, after which her induction will commence. LT advised that recruitment for Trustee vacancies will begin shortly, with further updates to be provided in due course.	
3.4.4	ST provided an update on plans for Chair succession. It was noted that YB has previously indicated her intention to step down during the year, as her new role is not compatible with	

	continuing as Chair. Discussions regarding a smooth transition are ongoing, with further conversations planned and a more substantive update expected at the June meeting.	
3.5	Staffing updates	
3.5.1	RM reported that a disciplinary process relating to the Trust's Inclusion and Diversity Coordinator had been concluded. Following investigation into social media activity that did not align with Trust values, nor the regulatory position on political impartiality, the individual was dismissed. An appeal was subsequently heard, with members of the Board involved in the appeal panel, and this process has now been fully concluded internally. Thanks were expressed to those Board members who supported this complex and sensitive case.	
3.5.2	SA advised that Ian Walsh was appointed as Principal to Broadoak Academy mid-year following earlier leadership changes. Despite the school having experienced significant leadership turnover, he is settling well into his first Principal role and is being supported by colleagues across the Trust.	
3.5.3	SA advised that Principal Chris Ballard, seconded to Hanham Woods Academy (HWA), was now returning to Digitech Studio School. Subsequently, Kath Cooper, Senior Principal, has taken on oversight of HWA alongside her role of Principal of Post 16. Adjustments to roles within the wider team have been made to support this arrangement, with Kath Cooper now primarily based at HWA and making a strong start in addressing key issues.	
3.5.4	SA reported that Tracy French, Executive Principal, will be leaving the Trust at the end of the academic year. This was recognised as a significant loss. It was confirmed that her role will not be advertised at this stage, as the Trust takes time to review its leadership structure and ensure a prudent approach in the context of wider budget pressures across schools.	
3.6	CLF Institute Updates	
3.6.1	In AFL's absence, ST provided an update on the work of the CLF Institute, focusing on initial teacher training, partnerships, and school improvement activity. It was noted that the Ofsted report for the SCITT provision has not yet been received. Recruitment to the SCITT remains strong, with 90 trainees recruited to date, representing an increase on the previous year. This was recognised as important both in terms of supporting the wider teaching workforce and as a key income stream for the Institute. It was noted, however, that this sits alongside a current national context of fewer teaching vacancies.	
3.6.2	The CLF Institute continues to expand its partnerships, with Lighthouse Schools Partnership and Futura Learning Partnership now working alongside CLF and the SCITT. This reflects a strategic approach to recruiting and training teachers across the wider sub-region. In addition, a new partnership with Bristol Beacon and Amplify has been launched to support the development of music teachers, aligning with anticipated curriculum changes. Despite financial pressures across the Trust, trainees have continued to secure roles within CLF schools and are performing strongly in recruitment processes, competing effectively with more experienced candidates.	
3.6.3	ST reported that there is ongoing work to support mentor development, including planned conferences across the region, and the Institute's involvement in the Department for Education's RISE (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence) programme. Through this work, the Trust is contributing to regional school improvement activity and may access associated grant funding, particularly in Bristol and Somerset. Senior Executive Leaders are playing a significant role at a regional level, including AFL chairing key school improvement groups across the South West.	
3.6.4	The Institute's school improvement team continues to provide targeted support to a number of schools allocated for intervention, while also working internally to support exam readiness and curriculum planning for the next academic year. Planning is underway for the Trust-wide conference on 3 July, with communications having been briefly paused but now resumed, recognising the importance of this event to staff engagement.	
3.7	Ofsted Updates	

3.7.1	Ofsted preparation KR reported that a structured programme of Ofsted preparation has been in place since September, initially focussed on the 12 academies within their inspection window. This work has included strengthening self-evaluation processes, developing tracking tools aligned to the Ofsted framework, and sharing intelligence from inspections nationally to support schools in benchmarking performance. Leaders have also engaged in practical preparation activities, including simulation and detailed feedback sessions, to ensure readiness for inspection. The Board noted the value of shared learning across the Trust, with leaders from inspected schools feeding back promptly to colleagues. This has enabled insights from earlier inspections to be applied in real time to subsequent inspections, including Digitech Studio School. Feedback from the first inspections under the new framework highlighted a rigorous process with evolving expectations.	
3.7.2	Frome Vale Academy and Wallscourt Farm Academy Inspections At Frome Vale Academy, outcomes included five areas judged as strong and two as expected standard, with areas for development identified in inclusion and early years. At Wallscourt Farm Academy, the inspection confirmed expected standard across most areas, with strong judgments for inclusion. It was noted that outcomes were broadly in line with the academy's own self-evaluation, and that there are important distinctions between Ofsted judgments and other external recognitions, such as DfE accreditations. KR and SW advised that emerging themes across inspections include changes in inspection focus, with increased emphasis on senior leadership engagement during inspection activity and less focus on traditional deep dives. Consistent themes such as expectations around writing, foundational curriculum, and evidence in pupil work were also noted, although these present differently across phases.	
3.7.3	Digitech Studio School SA provided an update on the live Ofsted inspection at Digitech Studio School. The outcome will be shared with the board once published.	
3.7.4	ST advised that the Trust continues to adapt to the new Ofsted framework, including managing perceptions of "attention needed" judgments, which may be reported externally as "requires improvement" despite being intended as developmental. It was recognised that some areas, such as attendance in secondary schools, may present challenges under the new framework.	
3.7.5	The significant contribution of Trustees to inspection processes was acknowledged, with thanks expressed for their active participation and support during inspections.	
3.8	Looking Ahead to End-of-key-stage tests / exams	
3.8.1	KR provided an update on preparations for upcoming assessments and examinations at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4, with both SATs and GCSE examination periods commencing the following week. It was noted that any Ofsted inspections during this period may coincide with live examination activity, presenting an additional operational challenge.	
3.8.2	KR shared the latest data following the second Year 11 mock examinations. Current outcomes indicate that performance in Basics stands at 49% for all students, representing the lowest point in recent years at this stage, with outcomes for disadvantaged pupils at 30%.	
3.8.3	Attainment 8 is also lower than previous years at this point, with an overall score of 39.6, although outcomes for disadvantaged pupils are slightly improved compared with previous cohorts. It was acknowledged that this position has been known for some time and that targeted work has been underway at academy level to address gaps, with a strong focus on individual students and ensuring leaders are closely tracking and supporting those at risk of underachievement.	
3.8.4	KR provided an update on Key Stage 2, following the most recent outcomes from the fourth round of mock assessments. In mathematics, attainment currently stands at 71% for all pupils, representing the lowest point in recent years despite a pattern of steady improvement across the year. Reading outcomes are more stable, with attainment at 77% for all pupils, and	

	performance for disadvantaged pupils showing comparatively stronger outcomes in reading at 67%. KR advised that, while there have been some positive improvements, there is continued focus on maximising outcomes in the final lead-up to SATs, particularly in targeted support for identified pupils and managing performance risks across schools. Across both phases, there is a strong emphasis on performance culture, with leaders increasingly expected to know individual pupils' needs and to take targeted action to support improvement.	
3.8.5	Questions from trustees	
3.8.6	Does current data suggest that the attainment gap between all pupils and disadvantaged pupils is widening, particularly in Key Stage 2 mathematics?	
3.8.7	It was acknowledged that while overall attainment is improving, the gap between all pupils and disadvantaged pupils remains a concern. The Trust is actively working to ensure that improvement is accompanied by gap narrowing, although this remains a challenge and a key area of focus.	
3.9	Key projects and Lease Approval	
3.9.1	Lime Hills Academy It was reported that progress has now commenced at the Lime Hills project following earlier delays related to environmental requirements. Construction is now underway, with the first site meeting scheduled for 20 May.	
3.9.2	Airfield Primary Academy An update was provided on Airfield Primary Academy, where construction is progressing well and the scale of the development is becoming evident. The school is due to open in late October 2026. Temporary accommodation will be provided from September to October to support initial pupil intake. Discussions are also ongoing regarding the development of a community hub on the site.	
3.9.3	Hans Price Academy At Hans Price Academy, work continues on the Resource Base, which is progressing to plan and is expected to open on 1 September.	
3.9.4	Monkton Wood Academy At Monkton Wood Academy, a number of projects have been completed over the past year, with a significant £2 million investment in a new canteen facility due to open in September. This development will greatly improve dining provision and will enable refurbishment of the existing canteen into additional teaching space. The importance of this investment was highlighted, given historical underinvestment in the school's estate.	
3.9.5	Post 16 MT advised that there is no further update at this stage on the Post-16 free school bid. However, planning permission has been secured and the lease on temporary accommodation at John Cabot Academy has been extended until August 2030.	
3.9.10	Proposal to expand capacity at the CLF Institute	
3.9.10.1	MT then introduced a proposal to expand capacity at the CLF Institute. It was explained that the Institute is heavily utilised for training and development, and there is a need to increase available space. The proposal involves leasing a currently unused building adjacent to the Institute from Bristol City Council at a peppercorn rent. The intention is to relocate the Executive Team into this building, thereby freeing up space within the Institute for additional training and working areas.	
3.9.10.2	A feasibility study has been completed, identifying a preferred configuration for the building, subject to cost refinement. The proposal is designed to be cost-effective and to support future growth in training provision, including the SCITT programme and other income-generating activity. The proposal also aligns with longer-term strategic growth and improved use of estate assets across the site.	
3.9.10.2	Questions from trustees	

3.9.10.3	Is this proposal an opportunistic use of available space, or were other options being considered?	
3.9.10.4	The building has been vacant for two to three years and is located centrally within the Trust's estate. The proposal represents an opportunity to utilise available space at low cost, following discussions with the local authority confirming it is not required for other purposes.	
3.9.10.5	Is the proposal cost-effective compared to alternative options?	
3.9.10.6	The lease is at a peppercorn rent, making it a low-cost option. The focus is on ensuring that fit-out costs remain within budget, representing good value when compared with other potential solutions.	
3.9.10.7	Have the costs and affordability been fully considered?	
3.9.10.8	£250,000 has been earmarked from reserves for the fit-out. Further work is being undertaken to ensure the project remains within this budget. Ongoing running costs will be determined once final plans are agreed, but provision will be made within future budgets.	
3.9.10.9	Are there wider financial benefits to the proposal?	
3.9.10.10	Yes. By freeing up space within the Institute, the Trust expects to increase capacity for training and development activity, including SCITT, which may generate additional income streams.	
3.9.10.11	Decision: Following discussion, the Board approved the proposal to proceed with leasing and developing the additional building to expand Institute capacity.	
3.10	2026/27 Financial Position and Budget Progress	
3.10.1	SL provided an update on the Trust's current financial position and emerging budget plans for the next financial year. It was reported that the Trust is broadly on track to deliver its current year budget, which was set at £365k, with a small forecast variance of approximately £20k below target. This is expected to be recovered by year end. The Trust's financial position remains stable, with total reserves projected to be just under £9m.	
3.10.2	SL detailed the Trust's three-year budgeting approach, with formal approval required for the forthcoming financial year and the subsequent two years provided for information. The Trust is currently managing 41 individual budgets, including academies and central services, with a total projected income of approximately £167m. The Trust continues to aim for a 0.5% surplus, which contributes to reserves and supports future investment in school improvement and estate developments.	
3.10.3	An update was provided on progress towards setting next year's budget. At this stage, 33 budgets are meeting the required 0.5% surplus target, while a number remain below target, particularly within some primary schools, some secondary schools, and central services. SL advised that, although funding levels are increasing modestly, with an average rise of around 2% per pupil, this is being outpaced by cost pressures. Key challenges include staff pay awards, particularly the proposed 3.3% increase for support staff, alongside wider inflationary pressures affecting non-pay expenditure and major contracts. It was recognised that there is limited flexibility in managing pay awards without risking industrial relations issues.	
3.10.4	In response, the Trust is actively managing its financial position through detailed budget-setting discussions with school leaders, reviewing high-cost contracts such as cleaning and catering, and identifying efficiencies through its organisational sustainability strategy. These measures aim to control costs while maintaining educational delivery and staff support. Further work is underway to refine the budget position, with a full update to be presented to the Finance Committee and Board in June.	
3.11	Early thoughts on 2027 strategy	
3.11.1	ST provided an update on the strategic direction for the next academic year, with particular focus on the Trust's evolving priorities. It was noted that the Trust had originally planned to shift its strategic emphasis from People to Partnerships as part of its multi-year strategy cycle. However, in light of ongoing challenges, particularly in relation to staff relations and the wider operating environment, it is now proposed that the Trust retains an enhanced strategic focus	

	on People for a further year. This reflects a significant change in context over the past year, with emerging risks and pressures requiring sustained investment in staff engagement, culture and stability. The Executive Team considers this focus critical to ensuring organisational resilience and maintaining performance, and that without this continued emphasis, current risks could develop into longer-term weaknesses.	
3.11.2	ST reported that the Executive Team is undertaking a detailed strategic review process, including a series of planning sessions and analysis of both internal performance and the external environment. This work is informing the development of revised objectives for the next academic year, aligned with the Trust's longer-term 2030 ambition. It was emphasised that the strategy will remain responsive to current conditions, rather than simply progressing previously planned priorities. ST stressed that while People will remain a key area of emphasis, this does not reduce the importance of other strategic priorities, including Partnerships and outcomes for vulnerable pupils. Rather, the intention is to provide additional focus and investment in People while continuing to progress all core elements of the Trust's strategy.	
3.11.3	ST advised that the Trust is increasingly recognised externally, with other organisations seeking advice and support in navigating similar challenges. The importance of careful and considered communication of the Trust's approach was highlighted, particularly to ensure that messaging remains inclusive and aligned with values of belonging and collaboration. ST confirmed that a more detailed proposal will be presented in June, ahead of the formal strategic review in July.	
3.11.4	Questions from trustees	
3.11.5	Should People remain a core focus of the strategy on an ongoing basis, rather than being treated as a time-limited priority?	
3.11.6	People is a core element of the Trust's long-term strategy and will always remain central. The proposed approach reflects an additional, time-bound emphasis rather than a shift away from other priorities.	
3.11.7	How will the focus on People be communicated to staff to avoid any misunderstanding or unintended messaging?	
3.11.8	Communication will need to be carefully managed to ensure clarity and alignment with the Trust's values, particularly around inclusion, belonging and staff engagement.	
3.11.9	Does retaining a focus on People reflect incomplete progress this year?	
3.11.10	The past year has been unusually challenging, and that maintaining the focus is a considered response to those circumstances, rather than an indication of failure. Continuing the focus is seen as necessary to consolidate progress and address ongoing risks.	
3.11.11	Decision: Board members expressed strong support for the proposal, noting that retaining a focus on People represents a prudent and strategic response to the challenges experienced over the past year.	
3.12	Growth: state of play ahead of next week's Growth Committee (AL, ST)	
3.12.1	ST and AL provided an update on potential Trust growth, specifically in relation to Mitton Manor. AL reported that due diligence for Mitton Manor had been completed earlier in the year, with initial work concluding in March. The Trust has been engaging with the Department for Education throughout this process, and responsibility for progressing these discussions is now transitioning to SL as Chief Financial Officer.	
3.12.2	A detailed paper outlining the risks and opportunities associated with the potential transfer will be presented to the Growth Committee next week. It was explained that the process is subject to a revised DfE approval framework, with multiple decision points required before any transfer can proceed. An indicative timeline has been developed, which, if all approvals are secured, could lead to a potential transfer date of February 2027.	

3.12.3	The Board was advised that no public communication will take place until appropriate governance approvals have been secured. Subject to initial discussions at the Growth Committee, a formal proposal will be brought to the Board meeting in June for consideration.	
3.13	Anticipating the Government's Schools White Paper (ST)	
3.13.1	ST advised that the sector is anticipating emerging developments relating to the Department for Education (DfE) White Paper and the associated policy landscape. There is currently a significant volume of activity and change across the education sector, with multiple reforms being progressed in parallel. These include anticipated changes to the national curriculum, assessment frameworks, accountability measures, expectations for teachers, and a revised approach to SEND provision. The scale and pace of these developments were described as substantial, creating a complex and evolving policy environment.	
3.13.2	ST confirmed that the Trust is actively engaged in this work, including participation in ministerial advisory activity to provide feedback to the DfE on specific elements of the White Paper. As part of this, input has been provided on proposed Key Stage 4 performance measures, including highlighting the limitations of existing measures such as Progress 8 for non-standard provision such as studio schools.	
3.13.3	It was further noted that the policy direction includes a move towards broader curriculum expectations, with increased emphasis on creative subjects, alongside potential implications for assessment models, examination structures and curriculum design. This is already informing preparatory work within the Trust, including curriculum planning and development activity. There are wider system pressures arising from these reforms, particularly for local authorities, who are facing significant demands in relation to SEND provision and place-based planning. The Trust is receiving multiple requests for support across the regions in which it operates.	
3.13.4	Questions from trustees	
3.13.5	Does the Trust have appropriate arrangements in place for handling "official sensitive" information?	
3.13.6	While sensitive information is handled carefully, there is not currently a specific Trust policy relating to the classification and handling of "official sensitive" data. This was identified as an area for further review, and an action was agreed to consider the development of clearer guidance to ensure compliance and best practice in managing classified information.	
3.13.7	ACTION: Consider the development of a trust policy or procedural guidance to ensure compliance in managing classified information.	ST LT
4	Any Other Business	
4.1	No further business was reported.	
4.2	The meeting closed at 6pm.	

Actions to take forward:

Date/action no:	Relates to:	Action	Progress
07.05.26 01	3.13.7	Consider the development of a trust policy or procedural guidance to ensure compliance in managing classified information. (ST LT)	