Minutes - Board of Directors

Version:	Approved	
Meeting Date:	Thursday 9 July 2026	
Location:	Bristol Business School, UWE	
Time:	4.00pm	
Chairing this meeting	Amanda Coffey (AC)	Trustee
Vice Chair:	Rachel Mortlock (RM)	Trustee
Trustees:	Mark Davies (MD)	Trustee
	Orville Lynch (OL)	Trustee
	Bryony French (BF)	Trustee
	Yvonne Beach (YB)	Trustee
	Nicky McAllister (NM)	Trustee
	Jemma Griffiths (JG)	Trustee
	Nitin Parmar (NP)	Trustee
	Sunchi Chen (SC)	Trustee
Attendees:	Airlie Fife (Afi)	Member
	Sally Apps (SA)	Deputy CEO
	Sarah Lovell (SL)	COO
	Alison Fletcher (AFL)	Director, CLF Institute
	Helen Davis (HD)	Finance Director
	Andy Ling (AL)	Director of Technology and Information
	Rachel Mylrea (RM)	HR Director
	Martin Thomas (MT)	Director of Estates and Facilities
	Tony Searle (TS)	Education Director
	Kate Richardson (KR)	Education Director
	Liz Tincknell (LT)	Head of Governance
	Wendy Hellin (WH)	Clerk
Apologies:	Georgie Gough (GG)	Trustee
	Steve Taylor (ST)	CEO
	Susie Weaver (SW)	Education Director

Matters Arising

Action date and no	Item no	Action	Owner	Update
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)	LT	LT advised that the Information Governance Officer is leading on this and an update will be brought to the October meeting.
21.06.26 01	12.7.3	SL will consider the framework and presentation of risk registers to ensure trustees have greater clarity in the management of risk within the trust.	SL	This action is ongoing – risk framework is being drafted for 2026/27
21.06.26 02	15.2.2	The CLF Supporting Pupils with medical needs and Intimate Care Policy will be further reviewed and brought to the strategic board meeting in July for approval.	LT	Following feedback from the Board, the Head of H&S is working on this policy with some other colleagues in the Trust. The Policy is not yet ready for approval and will be brought to Board in October.

Minutes

Item	Description	Action
Part One	**Trustees meet in private**	
1.1	Trustees met in private to discuss the board papers and agree areas of focus before inviting Executive colleagues to join the meeting at 4.15pm.	
Part Two	**Trustees and Executive Team**	
2	**Introductions, Administration, Apologies**	
2.1	AC welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made.	
3	**Declarations of Interest**	
3.1	No verbal declarations were made.	
4	**Minutes of Previous Meetings**	
4.1	Minutes of the meeting of 18 June 2026 were approved.	
5	**Matters Arising**	
5.1	The action table has been updated above.	
6	**Strategic Review and Reports 2025-26**	
6.1	**Staff Voice and People Summary**	
6.1.1	AL highlighted the Trust's ongoing focus on the People strand of the CLF Core Strategy, which forms part of its wider commitment to achieving equity through education. The review considers staff voice through a framework built around four key areas and draws on two complementary approaches: the Trust-wide Pulse Survey and Summative Voice feedback. The Pulse Survey provides a consistent and quantifiable mechanism for gathering staff views directly across the Trust, although it can offer limited context and is affected by lower response rates. Of the 2,671 staff invited to participate, 794 responded, representing a 45% survey response rate (the report incorrectly states 50%, although the executive summary reflects the correct figure). Survey outcomes showed improvements compared with the April 2025 Edurio survey and, in many areas, results were above the 2026 Edurio benchmarks, while recognising the limitations associated with sample size and representation.	
6.1.2	The Summative Voice process was developed to provide broader engagement opportunities, particularly in academies that had not participated in the Pulse Survey. Working with Principals, the Trust gathered richer qualitative feedback from staff, although from a relatively small sample. Key themes emerging from this work included wellbeing and workload, behaviour, communication, relationships with leaders, organisational culture, financial sustainability, staff belonging, and support for vulnerable pupils.	
6.1.3	The review recognised positive progress made across a number of areas and highlighted the work being undertaken by leaders to engage meaningfully with staff. Leadership learning from the process identified several priorities for continued improvement, including strengthening communication, transparency and follow-through, recognising staff experiences, supporting wellbeing, ensuring greater consistency of standards, and addressing issues of capacity and long-term sustainability.	
6.2	**Questions from trustees**	
6.2.1	**There is a recurring theme throughout the year regarding the People agenda around why some staff remain reluctant to engage in Trust-wide surveys. While a 45% response rate is positive, there remains a significant proportion of staff whose views are not being captured. What more are you doing to understand and address this?**	
6.2.2	Considerable effort has been made to encourage participation, including targeted communications, support from Principals, and providing access to computer suites for staff. Despite this, engagement in staff surveys remains a challenge. The Trust is increasingly seeking to	

	gather staff voice through a range of methods, not solely through formal surveys. Greater emphasis is now being placed on conversations, real-time feedback and more meaningful engagement opportunities.	
6.2.3	We know that some staff groups may feel less comfortable completing surveys, particularly colleagues from minoritised groups who may have concerns about anonymity or how their responses will be used. These are also key groups that the Trust is seeking to engage through its strategic work. The summative voice approach was therefore introduced to provide a broader and deeper understanding of staff experiences beyond standard survey metrics. Looking ahead, we understand the importance of demonstrating the impact of staff feedback by ensuring colleagues can see what actions have been taken as a result of their contributions. The focus is now on moving from rhetoric to reality, using both quantitative and qualitative staff voice to inform meaningful actions and measure their effectiveness over time.	
6.2.4	**The importance of maintaining a continued focus on staff experience, particularly as recurring themes such as student behaviour, workload and communication continue to emerge year after year is recognised. Given the significant amount of work undertaken during a challenging year, including periods of union action, might there be an opportunity to reflect on the Trust's communication strategy to ensure staff have greater visibility of the progress being made and the initiatives already in place? Regularly highlighting successes and improvements could help staff recognise the positive changes occurring alongside the ongoing challenges.**	
6.2.5	Yes, staff voice work has provided a helpful summary of both achievements and areas requiring further attention. Many of the themes identified have directly informed priorities for the coming year, and the Trust has already evolved its thinking as a result of the learning gained through this process.	
6.2.6	End of Questions	
6.2.7	Trustees recognised that, despite the challenges faced during the year, it had been a highly successful year overall and recorded their thanks and appreciation for the work undertaken across the Trust.	
7	**Strategic Headlines 2026-27**	
7.1	SA presented the proposed strategic focus for 2026/27, the fifth year of the Trust's Equity Through Education strategy, under the theme "Thriving Together". Reflecting on the previous year, Inclusive Excellence, she noted that the Trust had maintained high expectations through its focus on culture, context and outcomes. During this period, the Trust achieved its strongest Ofsted outcomes to date. However, leaders also recognised that the external environment has become increasingly volatile and challenging, particularly since January, reinforcing the importance of ensuring that sustainable improvement is built not only on systems and structures but also on strong relationships and organisational culture.	
7.2	The proposed Year 5 focus does not represent a change in the Trust's long-term direction. The Trust remains committed to its 2030 strategy and the established strategic framework. While there had originally been an expectation that the next phase would move more explicitly towards the Partnerships agenda, leaders believe that continuing to prioritise People is the right strategic decision at this stage. The Trust will therefore continue to develop its work on partnerships and performance through the lens of people and relationships.	
7.3	A key concept within the presentation was the notion of "social soil"—the underlying conditions that enable success, including leadership, culture, structures, relationships and organisational narratives. SA emphasised that these foundations significantly influence both staff and pupil outcomes. The Trust's learning over the past year has demonstrated a fundamental connection between the experiences and wellbeing of adults and the outcomes achieved by children and young people.	
7.4	Success in 2026/27 will be measured through a combination of indicators, including pupil outcomes, Trust standards, compliance measures and broader organisational health. Staff voice and organisational feedback mechanisms will be used to test whether improvements in culture	

	and relationships are being felt across the Trust and to validate what leaders understand about the quality of the "social soil". Year 5 is therefore focused on turning these principles into practice and embedding a culture where colleagues and communities can truly thrive together.	
7.5	**Questions from trustees**	
7.5.1	**How will the Trust's strategic priorities and vision be communicated effectively to communities, parents and staff? Given the complexity of the strategy papers and the difficulty of identifying the key threads running throughout them, it may be helpful if there are opportunities such as the Strategic Review Day to convey the most important messages more clearly. How will you approach this?**	
7.5.2	Communicating the strategy in an accessible and meaningful way will be crucial. If the strategy is working well, many of its elements may not be immediately visible. The Trust's role is to create the foundations and conditions that enable children to flourish and have positive experiences. The intended impact is that families experience schools that are continually improving, while adults feel more engaged, valued, understood and empowered. Achieving this will require a greater focus on people and a reduction in competing priorities. A comprehensive communications plan will be developed for next year to support the launch of the strategy, beginning at the October conference and extending to wider stakeholder groups. The planned Parent Reference Group is almost ready to launch and it will be in place from September. The group will provide an opportunity to strengthen parental engagement and ensure parent perspectives help inform future developments.	
7.5.3	**How will the Trust measure success, particularly given that concepts such as organisational culture, belonging and experience can appear intangible and difficult to quantify?**	
7.5.4	Measuring organisational health and stakeholder experience presents challenges. While metrics such as staff retention and other performance indicators can provide useful information, she cautioned against establishing narrow measures too early, as these can quickly become targets in themselves and distract from the cultural change the Trust is seeking to achieve. Instead, the Trust intends to create space for the work to develop before determining the most meaningful indicators of success. The focus will be on understanding and demonstrating improvements in the experiences of children, families and staff, while recognising that culture and organisational health are not always fully captured through numerical measures alone. The intention is to allow the work to shape the culture first and then identify the most appropriate ways to evaluate its impact over time.	
7.5.5	**The 'tree and roots" analogy used to describe the strategy is helpful; both Trust-wide and school-level factors influence success. It will be important to achieve consistent, high-quality engagement at academy level, where staff and community experience the Trust most directly. What will your approach be there?**	
7.5.6	A key challenge will be resisting the temptation to add further initiatives and instead maintaining focus on the core strategic priorities. An important discipline of the strategy is ensuring that all improvement activity aligns back to the agreed priorities while avoiding additional workload for schools. Leadership capacity has been identified as a critical factor, with the strategy placing emphasis on ensuring the right people are focused on the right work. Feedback from leaders consistently highlighted the tension between their ambitions and their capacity to deliver them. Consequently, it will be important that we place greater emphasis on supporting leaders and maintaining a manageable pace of improvement.	
7.5.7	**The strategy talks about terms such as organisational health and organisational intelligence; these can be interpreted in different ways. How are you defining those terms? How will the Trust test its theory that improved staff experience leads to better outcomes for pupils? How have diverse stakeholder voices informed the strategy's development?**	
7.5.8	The strategy has been informed through extensive listening and engagement activities across the Trust, including work with Principals, staff voice exercises and ongoing stakeholder conversations. While the strategy had not been formally tested through dedicated focus groups,	

	it reflects the experiences, feedback and learning gathered during the year. The Trust's existing DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging) work is hugely important, and this will continue to act as a critical challenge function to ensure decisions are considered through an equality and inclusion lens.	
7.5.9	**It is clear that the strategic pillar, focusing on culture and people, will only succeed if the Trust's core enabling strategies remain strong and visible. These enablers should not be viewed separately from the main strategy but instead be woven throughout it. Has this been considered?**	
7.5 10	Yes, by way of an example, the environmental sustainability work will continue to focus on decarbonisation where appropriate, but will increasingly prioritise climate adaptation and resilience, including understanding classroom temperatures, expanding tree planting and outdoor learning spaces, creating cooling zones and reducing solar heat gain in buildings. Organisational sustainability will remain a major priority, particularly in response to falling pupil rolls, school capacity challenges and the need to review central service provision.	
7.6	The Board was supportive of the proposed direction of travel and formally endorsed the strategy for 2026/27.	
7.7	**ACTION: Trustees requested further consideration of how the success of the CLF strategy will be measured over time, updates on the development of the core enabling strategies, and a clear communications and engagement plan to ensure the strategy is understood and meaningful across all levels of the organisation.**	**SA AL**
8	**HR**	
8.1	**Executive Pay report**	
8.1.1	The Board received a paper summarising the ongoing review of executive pay arrangements within the Trust. Following detailed consideration by the Remuneration Committee, an independent consultant was commissioned to undertake benchmarking of the salaries for the CEO, Deputy CEO and COO roles, all of which are currently paid on spot salaries. The benchmarking exercise identified appropriate comparator organisations and concluded that current salaries are broadly in line with comparable trusts. Members noted that this provided assurance that the Trust's executive pay arrangements are subject to robust scrutiny and external benchmarking.	
8.1.2	Building on this work, a proposal was presented to replace spot salaries with a framework of salary zones for each executive role. The intention is to provide a clearer and more objective pay structure, supported by transparent criteria for determining placement within each zone. Members generally welcomed the direction of travel, recognising that a pay framework would provide greater flexibility and consistency than the current arrangements. In addition, a formal executive pay policy was presented to codify existing practice, strengthen governance arrangements and ensure alignment with Academy Trust Handbook expectations. It was also proposed that future executive pay recommendations should continue to be reviewed by the Remuneration Committee but ultimately approved by the full Board.	
8.1.3	A significant part of the discussion focused on recently published DfE guidance regarding executive pay and the wider national debate around academy trust leader remuneration. Members noted that any future framework would need to reflect the new guidance, including considerations around pay progression, affordability and any relevant salary thresholds. Concerns were raised about the timing of introducing a pay framework and the potential perception that the Trust was seeking to establish arrangements before the impact of the new guidance becomes clear. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring transparency, maintaining public confidence and avoiding any perception that the Trust was attempting to circumvent emerging expectations.	
8.1.4	The Board agreed that further work was required before any final decisions could be made. Members recognised the need to establish clear principles that balance transparency, equity, fairness, recruitment and retention of high-quality leaders, while also reflecting the evolving	

	national context. It was acknowledged that future recruitment decisions should not automatically assume existing salary levels but should be informed by the Trust's strategic needs, market conditions and regulatory requirements at the time.	
8.1.5	The overall direction of travel towards a structured pay framework was supported, with further proposals to be developed and returned through the Remuneration Committee for subsequent discussion and approval by the full Board. It was agreed that the framework should detail treatment of existing Executive Team members, as well as starting to consider principles to be applied should it be necessary to recruit into that space.	
8.1.6	**ACTION: RMY to continue to develop the Executive Pay framework and policy, in consideration of DfE guidance and the recommendations made by trustees.**	
8.1.7	**ACTION: LT to ensure that Executive Pay structure and policy is included on the next board meeting agenda as a discussion item.**	
8.2	**Executive Pay Policy**	
8.2.1	The Executive Pay Policy will be further developed in light of the DfE guidance.	
9	**Finance and Operations**	
9.1	**Finance Report including 2026/27 budget**	
9.1.1	The Board received the proposed 2026/27 budget, which had previously been scrutinised by the Finance Committee and was being presented for formal approval. Since the Committee meeting, a change to the Sports Premium grant had been announced by the DfE and had been incorporated into the budget, although this had no impact on the overall bottom line.	
9.1.2	HD advised that, subsequent to the publication of the paper, the DfE had announced additional funding linked to teachers' pay awards, support staff pay awards and teachers' pensions. These changes had not been incorporated into the budget figures presented for approval, although they were referenced within the risks and opportunities section. This was because the details had only recently been released, union agreements had not yet been finalised, and there had been insufficient time to determine how any additional funding should be allocated. Initial analysis indicated that the changes could result in a favourable financial position of approximately £1.2 million across the Trust.	
9.1.3	Despite this potentially improved position, SL recommended retaining the proposed breakeven budget, while further work is undertaken to assess the implications of the additional funding and determine how any surplus income should best be used. The Board noted that schools had made difficult savings decisions in recent years and that any additional funding would need to be carefully balanced between rebuilding capacity, supporting educational delivery and maintaining appropriate reserves. Leaders agreed to develop proposals over the summer and bring recommendations back through the Finance Committee and subsequently the Board.	
9.1.4	A further update was provided regarding Mitton Manor, which is not currently included within the proposed budget as formal DfE approval and a transfer date have not yet been confirmed. The Trust is working on the basis of a draft budget and a proposed transfer date of 1 February, with further planning and scenario modelling to take place ahead of an update in September.	
9.2	**Questions from trustees**	
9.2.1	**Given that additional DfE funding announcements have been made since the Finance Committee met, is the Board being asked to approve a budget that is subject to further change, and what is the likely impact on the bottom line?**	
9.2.2	The budget presented does not yet include the recently announced funding changes. Early analysis suggests these could improve the Trust's position by approximately £1.2 million, but the details are still being assessed and pay agreements have not yet been finalised. The recommendation is therefore to approve the budget as presented and review a revised position in the autumn.	
9.2.3	**If additional funding is confirmed, should some of it be directed towards reserves?**	
9.2.4	While it is important to maintain reserves, the Trust already remains above its 5% reserves	

	threshold. However, there would also be a strong case for reinvesting some funding into areas where capacity had previously been reduced and where there could be a direct impact on educational provision. Detailed proposals will be developed and brought back to the Board for consideration.	
9.2.5	**Does the proposed breakeven budget include Mitton Manor?**	
9.2.6	No. Mitton Manor has not been included within the budget because DfE approval and a confirmed transfer date have not yet been received. Work is underway to model the financial implications, with a further update to be provided in September.	
9.2.7	**Decision:** The Board approved the 2026/27 budget, noting that a revised financial position may be brought forward later in the year once the impact of the additional DfE funding and other developments has been fully assessed.	
10	**Governance**	
10.1	**Governance Report**	
10.1.1	The Governance Report is included at Flag E. There were no questions from trustees.	
10.2	**Proposed CLF Meeting Schedule 2026/27**	
10.2.1	The proposed CLF meeting calendar for the next academic year is included for information at Flag F.	
10.3	**CLF Strategic Briefing meeting (Board and AC)**	
10.3.1	The draft programme for the CLF Strategic Review meeting is included at Flag G.	
10.4	**Policies**	
10.4.1	The following policies were approved: • CLF Safeguarding Policy • Provider Access Legislation Statement	
10.4.2	LT advised that there are a number of policies that need to be reviewed out of cycle to ensure they are in place for September 2026, and asked that approval be delegated to two trustees. It was proposed that this is delegated to AC and NM; the board approved the proposal.	
10.5	**Sub-Committee Reports**	
10.5.1	**Finance** The report is included at Flag H1. No further updates were provided. BF thanked HD and the team for the work on preparing the budgets.	
10.5.2	**Remuneration** The report is included at Flag H2. No further updates were provided.	
10.5.3	**Academy Scrutiny** The report is included at Flag H3. SA advised that the meeting had been chaired by an external committee member and that some of the trust's higher risk academies, including QMPA, PPS and RPS attended.	
10.5.4	**People** The report is included at Flag H4. JG confirmed that at the meeting, a discussion had taken place around the People strand of the strategy continuing and how the People committee monitors progress of that strategy and whether the membership and terms of reference for that committee need to be further considered.	
11	**Education Updates – Primary results data - presentation**	
11.1	KR presented the available primary data, explaining that primary outcomes data is still emerging, with validated Key Stage 2 results not yet available due to delays from Pearson. These results are expected next week and will be shared once received. Current analysis is therefore focused on the available Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), phonics data and Year 4 multiplication check (MTCs).	
11.2	In terms of EYFS, attainment continues to be an area of focus, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. Nationally, the proportion of PP pupils achieving a Good Level of Development (GLD) is	

	around 51%. Within CLF, PP outcomes were 54% in 2025, compared with a DfE benchmark of 63%, and have dipped slightly to 49% in 2026. Contextual factors were noted, including the changing profile of pupils entering Reception, with many children now joining from external nurseries and pre-school settings rather than school-based provision. Further analysis will be undertaken once the full suite of primary outcomes data becomes available.	
11.3	The trust standards set for phonics is that 95% of pupils meet the expected standard overall, including 85% of Pupil Premium (PP) pupils. When reviewing performance data, comparisons are made against both the CLF cohort (all Trust academies) and the DfE cohort (academies included in MAT performance measures, which have been part of a trust for at least three years). Several newer academies are therefore not included within the DfE MAT comparison group. For 2026 it is an improving picture with phonics for PP pupils is 70%, and 83% for all. All 5 Looked After Children passed the phonics screener. Phonics for Year 2 is slightly below the national data with 78% of PP pupils passing and 90% for all pupils taking the test.	
11.4	For the Year 4 Multiplication check, the CLF PP average pass mark is 21.5, and 22.9 for all pupils; this includes children with SEND entered for the test.	
11.5	YB noted the strong results and thanked KR, the Executive team and staff teams, on behalf of the board, for the work being done across primary academies.	
12	**Any Other Business**	
12.1	The draft agenda for the board briefing of October 2026 is included for information at Flag	
12.2	In response to a question raised by a trustee, AL provided an update on the use of AI. The Trust has been exploring the use of artificial intelligence for several years. Initially, it decided not to introduce a standalone AI policy because the technology and its applications were evolving rapidly. Instead, references to AI and its associated risks were incorporated into existing policies, including information security and safeguarding policies. Alongside this, the Trust has delivered extensive training to staff to improve understanding of AI, raise awareness of potential risks, and enable colleagues to use AI tools safely and effectively.	
12.3	To support consistent practice, the Trust has identified Microsoft Copilot as its preferred AI tool due to the security safeguards it provides. Access to Copilot and Trust guidance on AI has been embedded within staff systems, and guidance has been developed on approved tools and safe usage, particularly around the handling of personal data. Looking ahead, the Trust intends to introduce a dedicated AI policy during the next academic year now that the technology landscape has begun to stabilise. There is also growing interest from schools and teachers in exploring how pupils may use AI appropriately in educational settings, which is likely to be an area of further development in the future.	
12.4	Trustees noted that this was Yvonne Beach's last meeting, following her resignation. Trustees joined ST in giving a heartfelt thanks to Yvonne, for her huge contribution to the success of the trust and wished her well for the future.	
12.5	The meeting closed at 19.00hrs.	

Actions to take forward

Action date and no	Item no	Action	Owner	Update
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)	LT	LT advised that the Information Governance Officer is leading on this and an update will be brought to the October meeting.
21.06.26 01	12.7.3	SL will consider the framework and presentation of risk registers to ensure	SL	This action is ongoing – risk framework is being drafted for 2026/27

		trustees have greater clarity in the management of risk within the trust.		
21.06.26 02	15.2.2	The CLF Supporting Pupils with medical needs and Intimate Care Policy will be further reviewed and brought to the strategic board meeting in July for approval.	LT	Following feedback from the Board, the Head of H&S is working on this policy with some other colleagues in the Trust. The Policy is not yet ready for approval and will be brought to Board in October.
09.07.26	7.7	Trustees requested further consideration of how the success of the CLF strategy will be measured over time, updates on the development of the core enabling strategies, and a clear communications and engagement plan to ensure the strategy is understood and meaningful across all levels of the organisation.	SA AL	
09.07.26	8.1.6	RMY to continue to develop the Executive Pay framework and policy, in consideration of DfE guidance and the recommendations made by trustees.	RMY	
09.07.26	8.1.7	LT to ensure that Executive Pay structure and policy is included on the next board meeting agenda as a discussion item.	LT	