

CHAIR APPROVED

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the meeting of the Academy Sponsorship Committee
held on 23 May 2023**

Present:

Chris Patterson (Chair)
Linda Wight
Andy Broadbent
Christine Warren
Davey Benson

Apologies:

Joyce Drummond-Hill

In attendance:

Karl Fairley
Caroline Winter
Peter Robson Head of Governance and Trust Secretary, NCDAT

Action

23/09 Chair's introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded attendees this was his first meeting as the Committee Chair. Members were reminded to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting.

The interests of committee members and attendees in New College Durham Academies Trust (NCDAT) are:

Christine Warren – Trustee, NCDAT
Linda Wight – Sponsor Member, NCDAT
Andy Broadbent – Trustee, NCDAT
Karl Fairley – Member NCDAT, Chair NCDAT and Trustee NCDAT
Peter Robson - Head of Governance and Trust Secretary, NCDAT

23/10 Apologies for absence were received from Joyce Drummond-Hill.

23/11 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2023 were **agreed** as accurate and signed by the Chair.

23/12 Matters arising

23/05 – the Articles of Association for NCDAT were considered by the Members and had been agreed and submitted to the Regional Department for Education.

23/06 – a report updating on the Committee's decision to approve the inclusion of Wellfield School into NCDAT was on the agenda for Corporation on 25 May 2023.

23/08 – the current Committee meeting was arranged to consider exploring further Trust growth opportunities.

23/13 Review of Sponsor Nominations (Paper B)

The Academy Sponsorship Committee is authorised to nominate, appoint and remove sponsor nominated Members (Guarantors) and Trustees of the Academies Trust Board (ATB) and Local Governing Body members.

Members noted that due to a forthcoming change in membership, there was a need to appoint a new member (guarantor) to the Academy Trust. The Committee reviewed the existing membership and considered the application and skills audit from Stephen King.

After careful consideration members nominated Stephen King to serve as Sponsor Member of New College Durham Academies Trust.

Members sought clarification on the proposed increase in the number of NCDAT members and in relation to representation of the Lead Sponsor and Co-sponsor at members' meetings. **It was agreed that Membership of NCDAT be reviewed and an update on the membership structure, Lead Sponsor and Co-sponsor representation be brought back to the next meeting.**

PR

23/14 Sustainable Trust Growth (Paper C)

Karl Fairley presented Paper C, which reported on the outcome of phase one due diligence on four primary schools: Catchgate Primary, Castleside Primary and Beamish and Pelton Federation.

Karl advised that NCDAT had been approached by a number of local primary schools to explore inclusion in the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). The four schools detailed in the paper had rejected approaches to join other MATs and all had been judged Good by Ofsted in recent inspections.

Members were reminded the NCDAT Development Plan outlined the vision to add local primaries to the Trust and that the primary driver for such growth was the 'cradle to employment' approach to education, driving schools forward through partnership and collaboration. Members noted that inclusion of the four additional schools would open up access to additional funding of £650,000 for NCDAT each year, which could be invested in schools' capital works. Karl advised that the paper proposed an application by NCDAT to the Regional Department for Education Director (RDfED) for the schools to join the MAT and to progress a stage two due diligence exercise. Members reviewed the summary of the desktop exercise outlined in the paper, which was undertaken as stage one due diligence for each school. Stage one considered: school characteristics, education outcomes and Ofsted rating, 3-

years of financial information, staffing overview and a RAG rated risk profile.

In response to a member's question about the relatively low pupil numbers at Castleside, Karl advised the numbers had fallen following an earlier 'Requires Improvement' inspection outcome and whilst pupil mobility within the local area remained an issue, the expectation was that numbers would grow, particularly following the more recent inspection grading of 'Good'. It was also noted that Castleside was a feeder school for Consett Academy.

Members asked about the Academy Trust Board discussion on the proposal and noted that it had been discussed at length, reviewing the key risks in the context of the MAT's vision to support growth and transition. The ATB were of the view that the schools were aligned with the vision and values of the MAT and had made their own decision to approach the Trust rather than this being at the request of the RDfED. Two of the Head Teachers had attended the recent strategy day held by the MAT. The ATB had concluded that the schools were a good fit with the MAT and were supportive that the proposal progressed to application to the RDfED and stage two due diligence. Karl advised that the ATB had discussed the risks in relation to the swimming pool and energy costs and members were assured these would be fully assessed as part of the second stage due diligence.

Members considered the capacity of the ATB and the central team to work with four new schools in addition to the recent inclusion of Wellfield, and highlighted the need for the sponsor to be satisfied there would be no detriment to the existing academies as a result of further expansion. Karl confirmed that staffing capacity was being reviewed but the central team were comfortable with the proposal and timetable for expansion. The HR team had had been substantially expanded, the finance function had recently recruited to strengthen the team and a strong IT team was in place. Existing staff from new schools would also be slotted in when they joined the MAT.

Members discussed the timeline set out in the report and noted the proposed date of transfer. Karl advised that whilst there may be benefits of transferring at the start of the financial year, the budget was already very complex and there had been a number of learning points from the process to transfer Wellfield. The proposed date had been discussed with the central team who felt this was the earliest opportunity to transfer with the process moving at a reasonable pace. Members agreed it was likely that a suitable timetable for transfer would be clarified through the due diligence exercise.

Members' asked that school demographics were considered as part of the due diligence exercise and Peter Robson confirmed this would be available from Durham County Council.

PR

Karl explained that the proposal provided an opportunity to review the MAT governance arrangements following the external governance review. This would include consideration of Local Governing Body (LGB) representation on the ATB, learning from the existing governance arrangements within the primary schools as well as the potential to draw strong and experienced governors from these LGBs and the importance of communication between bodies to ensure critical links into the respective communities were maintained. Karl advised that the final report of the National Governance Association following the external review of governance was still awaited and that a complaint was being submitted in light of the delay. It was expected that the MAT reporting structure would feature separate reporting routes into the NCDAT Chief Executive Officer but with a significant focus on transitional arrangements from primary to secondary.

Members asked about the impact of further growth beyond the four primary schools on the MAT's capacity and Karl advised that the proposed growth numbers were detailed in the Development Plan, which proposed growth in stages to prevent expansion too quickly. The RDEfD had indicated its confidence in the plan, regularly referring back to it as a guide in its communication with the MAT. Karl advised that the challenge for the next growth proposal was that it was likely to be at the request of the RDfED to support a poorly performing school, and that whilst the current proposal focused on four 'Good' schools, it was essential to maintain positive outcomes as the position could change relatively quickly.

Karl drew members' attention to the application process detailed in section 5 of the report and confirmed that any final decision about the schools' inclusion would come back to both the Committee (and be subject to the higher quorum requested by Corporation) and the ATB on the basis of the more detailed information emerging from stage two due diligence.

Members agreed:

- **to endorse the submission of a joint application to Regional Department for Education Director DfED from Castleside Primary School, Catchgate Primary School and Beamish and Pelton Federation; and**
- **that a Stage Two due diligence exercise be embarked on for the four schools.**

23/15 New College Durham Academies Trust - receipt of minutes of the Directors meetings (Paper D)

The minutes of the Directors meetings held on 24 January 2023 and 30 March 2023 were received and noted by the Committee.

23/16 Any other business

None.

23/17 Date of next meeting

To be scheduled for November 2023 to consider the Annual Report and the outcome of stage two due diligence. It was agreed to schedule the meeting shortly after the Academies Trust Board meeting.

**KF/
PR/
CW**

Signed.....**Date**.....