

**The Corporation of New College Durham**

**Minutes of the Academy Sponsorship Committee  
meeting held on 13 December 2022**

**Present:**

Linda Wight (Chair)  
Joyce Drummond-Hill  
Andy Broadbent  
Christine Warren  
Davey Benson  
Chris Patterson

**Apologies:**

None

**In attendance:**

Karl Fairley  
Caroline Winter

**Action**

**22/11 Chair's introduction**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded members 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 are:**

Christine Warren – Director, NCDAT  
Linda Wight – Sponsor Member, NCDAT  
Joyce Drummond-Hill – Sponsor Member, NCDAT  
Andy Broadbent – Director, NCDAT  
Karl Fairley – Member NCDAT, Chair NCDAT and Director, NCDAT

**22/12 Apologies for absence** – there were none.

**22/13 Minutes of previous meeting (Paper A)**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2022 were agreed as accurate and signed by the Chair.

**22/14 Matters arising**

22/06 & 22/07 – the recruitment pack was being progressed including revising the application form and this would be complete before the next meeting.

**KF/PR**

A new skills audit was in development and members requested that the full audit was circulated alongside future applications to provide the wider context alongside the individual's skills audit. Karl updated that a new Search, succession and recruitment committee was currently being established.

**KF/PR**

22/10 – the Committee had been scheduled after the meeting with the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).

## **22/15 Annual Report from the Chair of New College Durham Academies Trust (Paper B)**

Karl Fairley presented Paper B, which provided an overview of key issues/milestones within the Academies to allow the Committee to assess the reputational risks for the Lead Sponsor from continued Academy sponsorship.

On 21 June 2022 North Durham Academy (NDA) received a good Ofsted judgement, providing assurance to the Committee that the actions reported at the previous year's meeting were having an impact which had been recognised by Ofsted. Ofsted had also recognised that governance at the academies remained a strength and provided rigour and challenge where needed. The Trust had continued to invest in developing its senior leadership capacity and had embedded five individual Directors of Specialism with a primary focus on school improvement. It was anticipated that the impact of these changes would be seen in the academic results in summer 2023. The Trust's financial health remained strong in 2021/22 and members noted key activities in relation to the pay award, curriculum planning for 2023/24 and investment plans.

Members noted developments in relation to safeguarding and Karl updated that two anonymous safeguarding complaints had been received in October 2022. The Trust immediately referred the allegations to the police and the complaints were responded to in detail. The response from the ESFA had been circulated to the Committee noting the Trust's response to the complaint, the policies, procedures and training in place across the Trust and confirming that the case had been closed.

Members noted that following their previous discussions and consideration by Corporation that the Trust had explored the proposal for growth with Wellfield Community School and in discussions with the RSC. After receiving confirmation that the RSC would consider an application for growth, this was submitted on 8 December 2022. Members noted that the RSC had suggested any application should consider increasing the number of members from three to five, exploring a partnership agreement with interested schools and accepting that pursuing the inclusion of Delta Independent School was not realistic at the current time. Karl advised that if the RSC approved the proposal then due diligence would be undertaken before submitting a report to the Committee for final decision. It was noted that Corporation had specified a higher quorum level for the decision to approve and that the outcome would also be reported back to Corporation.

Members expressed concern at the high number of suspensions at NDA attributed to staff not adhering to the new behaviour policy and escalation procedure. In practice the response to behaviour

concerns had been escalated too quickly rather than using alternative strategies. It was noted that this had been addressed with the Principal, the relevant staff were being placed on performance plans and the number of suspensions had now reduced. Members sought assurance on the impact on the students affected and Karl confirmed that their studies were expected to continue at home and that if any of them reached the trigger point for further escalation a review would take place to ensure this was not progressed as a result of the earlier suspension. Karl advised that the issue had been implementation rather than the policy itself and having addressed the issue, the position would continue to be monitored including by the quality assurance committee and Academy Trust Board (ATB). Members noted that the behaviour policy was being effectively implemented at Consett Academy resulting in a decrease from 93 to 69 suspensions compared with the same period the previous year.

Members discussed the likely timing and outcome of an inspection of Consett Academy, noting that this was possible from March onwards but that the preferred timing would be in September after the summer exam results. Members noted the strong performance in mock exams, the quality and coherence of the personal development programme, good behaviour and attendance with improved student engagement and an overall atmosphere in the academy which was calm and purposeful. Quality of education had previously been a risk area but the specialists had made a significant difference, implementing changes to the curriculum which were having an impact. The timing of an inspection would therefore be an important factor in providing the data to evidence the impact and improvement. In the event of an early inspection in April, it was still anticipated that the that inspectors would see the changes made and significant potential for further improvement.

Members asked about the impact of an April inspection on the Trust growth proposals and were advised that the decision would have already been made by the RSC and if approved would still be progressed with the expectation that this would move forward in January/February. Whilst an adverse inspection outcome was not anticipated, the likelihood was that the RSC would want to discuss the outcome rather than alter the growth strategy.

Members commented that bringing a good or outstanding school within the Trust increased the capacity to improve and the proposal to progress Trust growth with Wellfield was a very positive opportunity. It was agreed that the Committee would be updated by email when feedback on the application had been received.

KF

**22/16 Board & Local Governing Body: update and discussion about succession planning and sponsor nominations (Paper C)**

Members noted the content of Paper C, which detailed the current membership position of the Academy Trust Board and the Local

Governing bodies of both Consett Academy and North Durham Academy.

Members discussed the position in relation to parent governors noting the importance of their involvement in local governing bodies as members of the local community, but that an alternative approach to their membership of the ATB was being explored in recognition of the additional demands this would place on them.

Members noted the earlier discussion point on the expectation from the RSC to increase the membership of the Trust from three to five and that this was also consistent with the Academies Handbook 2022.

Members noted the position with regard to membership of the Academy Trust Board and Local Governing Bodies.

## **22/17 Review of Sponsor nominations (Paper D)**

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

Members reviewed the existing Sponsor nominations and considered the respective applications, individual skills audits and feedback from the meetings with the Chair, Principal and Head of Governance and Trust Secretary. After careful consideration members nominated:

- Aimey Adamson to serve as Sponsor Member of Consett Academy LGB, subject to satisfactory references and DBS clearance
- Bernadette Atkinson to serve as Sponsor Member of Consett Academy LGB, subject to satisfactory references and DBS clearance
- Kate Henderson to serve as Sponsor Member of North Durham Academy LGB, subject to satisfactory references and DBS clearance
- David Johnson to serve as Sponsor Member of North Durham Academy LGB, subject to satisfactory references and DBS clearance.

Members noted that some of the applications had been discussed by the ATB in September and highlighted that the Committee was authorised to agree nominations via email between meetings. It was requested that any future applications were circulated to the Committee members for consideration as soon as possible to prevent any delay in making appointments.

**KF/PR**

Members noted the proposal to invite two further applications to the NDA LGB.

Linda Wight declared an interest in this item due to her husband's role as a Sponsor Member of NDA LGB. Christine Warren reiterated her interest as a Sponsor Director of the ATB.

Members emphasised the need for governors to be approached at an early opportunity to discuss an application for re-appointment to avoid the risk of individuals taking up alternative volunteer opportunities at the expiry of their term. Whilst recognising the value in seeking the re-appointment of established and valuable serving Governors, Members also requested that all applications were considered through a consistent appointments process.

**KF/PR**

In light of the time scales relating to expiry dates and the need to progress appointments, Members considered the feedback provided on their respective contributions as Governors and after careful consideration agreed to approve the following nominations subject to receipt of the applications and skills audit:

**PR**

- Barry Clark to serve as Sponsor Member of North Durham Academy LGB, subject to satisfactory references and DBS clearance.
- Mike Goodwin to serve as Sponsor Member of North Durham Academy LGB, subject to satisfactory references and DBS clearance.

In addition members requested confirmation of when the induction for each of the appointments would be completed.

**PR**

**22/18 New College Durham Academies Trust - receipt of minutes of the Directors meetings (Paper E)**

The minutes of the Directors meetings held on 12 May 2022, 13 July 2022 and 29 September 2022 were received and noted by the Committee.

**22/19 Any other business - none**

**22/20 Date of next meeting**

To be scheduled following feedback from the Regional Schools Commissioner and subject to the due diligence timetable.

**KF/  
CW**

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