

OLICAT Directors Meeting Minutes  
25<sup>th</sup> March 2026



Attendees

Directors: Christopher Donnellan, Joe Burns, Ilona Bond, Bill Nelson

Central Team: Asha Morjaria, Andrew Waterhouse, Catherine Burnham

Diocesan Representatives: Pauline Cuddihy, Catherine Casey

Apologies: Catherine Leong

Reflection: Ilona Bond

Agenda item	Actions
<p>1. Declaration of pecuniary interest/conflict of interest arising from agenda</p> <p>Introductions from all attendees made. Noted Diocese representatives have a standing invitation to attend any Directors' meeting.</p> <p>No items to declare.</p>	
<p>2. Minutes &amp; Matters arising</p> <p>CD noted an item from the prior minutes, that of the SFOA site sale. Each time an increased offer has been received the board has given it due consideration. Legal advice on the sale highlights a risk for the sale on land transfer and local authority interest. The Directors believe we have the best achievable deal without that underlying risk.</p> <p>PC explained from a Diocesan perspective we are dealing with something where there wasn't an established process. Trustees gave assurances without firm LA commitments. Agreements were made and conversations had by staff who are no longer here. Money was spent without any firm or definite guarantee of revenue to recuperate it. We've had to react and create processes. Trustees have confirmed money will go to OLICAT. It will need to be paid to the Diocese first before being transferred for legal reasons.</p> <p>AM queried the basis on which the money will be passed to OLICAT, whether as a gift or with restrictions on use. CD stressed we would like this as a gift without restriction. Paying out of largely SCA funds has left reserves restricted and limited spending on other schools. Unrestricted use will allow spending on all schools and a range of priorities.</p> <p>PC stated the assurance we're looking for is that the money will be used fairly across all schools. CD gave assurance this was the Directors' intent, and placing a restriction such as SCA replenishment would hamper that.</p> <p>CC noted when this issue arose a few weeks ago the Diocese struggled to find any documents. Did the original conversations place any restrictions. Directors did not believe there were any restrictions in the original conversations.</p>	

PC asked that Directors give and provide assurances there is no risk if given as unrestricted. Directors gave assurances that risks have been managed, and that money will be used fairly across all schools. The IT strategy is one particularly where this money will be used for all schools.

The Board thanked PC and CC for coming to meeting and their attendance has been very constructive and helpful.

No further matters arising. Minutes accepted as a fair record.

### 3. Finance

AM presented a finance update. Key points to note:

- December and January accounts distributed. AM also shared short term strategy document earlier with PC & CC.
- As context Trust is just exiting a period of close DFE scrutiny due to setting year on year deficit budgets. Last year posted a surplus of 230k, but do not expect we can repeat this.
- Our position remains highly volatile. Whilst the accounts may look favourable and the temptation may be there to use a projected surplus it is inadvisable at this time.
- Forecasts should be treated with caution and are subject to fluctuation. It will take a number of years for us to establish a reliable pattern.
- Next year has a large fall in roll year on year, and initial figures show a 1.1 million deficit.
- Important to note budget management at the two secondaries. STMS has worked hard to balance but has a significant fall in intake. TBCS has increased its intake, but has a deficit to repay where it has been propped up from central funds for a number of years. We proposed 150k per year to address and head is unhappy at that level. Further conversations to take place.
- CD noted we must not just balance but build up reserves.
- AM noted falling rolls are the biggest challenge. Sale money will help to secure reserves which should then allow us to grow and build capacity in advance and develop educational side.
- We and the Diocese can be assured our systems and processes are robust, and we have put all measures in place to settle position from 18 months ago. We want to keep DFE off our backs.
- BN noted we were able to fight our corner with the DFE due to the systems AM put in place, and the huge push to get schools on board with finances. We were able to evidence our position and the effectiveness of our culture.
- IB observed we only have to look at wider educational environment and how many school are in far worse states with worse falling rolls.
- IB queried if all GAG had been received for budget setting and what pay increments had been planned for. AM confirmed they were and we had planned for 2% for the teacher award and 3% for support staff.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We have an amount on investment on track to generate 120k in the year, but interest rates are falling.</li> </ul>	
<p>4. Health and Safety</p> <p>An annual update document was circulated identifying progress against items previously identified in audits.</p> <p>Directors noted significant reduction in outstanding items and progress against targets. The process shows items are being identified and subsequently addressed.</p> <p>Once H&amp;S audits have been completed this year a further presentation will come to Directors.</p>	
<p>5. Pupil Board</p> <p>CB introduced the Pupil Board to Directors: a board echoing that of the Trust Board made up of pupil representatives from each school discussing, feeding back and advising on areas in which the Trust can improve.</p> <p>The first meeting agenda consisted of three items: IT Strategy, Trust charity, and other areas they wanted to raise.</p> <p>All participants were excellent, engaged and insightful. They fed back on the teaching of IT in schools, how it was used in the wider curriculum, resource availability and what they felt would improve things. On the Trust charity they concluded they would have local events at similar times. On wider issues they raised clubs and enrichment, mental health support, school meals and elements of the curriculum.</p> <p>BN felt this was an important exercise and wonderful to read their views. We need to listen to them and act – they know what they are talking about.</p> <p>CB confirmed we are aiming to do next meeting online so they can all be there – a balance of round the table and a single community.</p>	
<p>6. Safeguarding</p> <p>No critical incidents were reported for the board. External audits are running but the external auditor can't continue due to ill health. We have engaged Bedfordshire's safeguarding advisor to do 4. CB will carry out the remainder with another head using the same framework.</p> <p>JB reported the online LAC chairs meeting focusing on safeguarding was a very useful session and expanding number of governor attendees very beneficial.</p> <p>CB reported another item for consideration is we do not have a Trust overview of reports from Myconcern and CPOMs. Both systems now do a</p>	

<p>trust dashboard which is something we're aiming to add, and we aim to align the two systems into one to give us that oversight.</p> <p>CD queried that the news in Northampton has reported lots of youngsters arrested. Are any connected to our schools. CB&amp;JB confirmed we do not believe so.</p>	<p><b>Action – to check</b></p>
<p>7. Policies IB will share edits and thoughts on complaints policy for update by email.</p> <p>Lettings – to adjust liability sections to reflect adequate cover for trust and advised level of cover for lettees.</p> <p>Lettings to adjust in event of a dispute we apply the principle of the complaints policy, and in reverse in complaint policy.</p> <p>Subject to changes AI policy, Lettings policy and Complaints policy approved.</p>	
<p>8. Governance JB noted push for new governors is having an impact. CD added we need to increase board numbers too.</p> <p>Noted minutes are minimal this half term as it is a short 5 week half term and meetings are still being held.</p>	
<p>9. AOB CD reported the Ofsted inspection at STE was a really lovely experience. The inspector seemed to respond to the atmosphere and overall was very positive. Feedback was very nice and supportive. Improvement seems to be headed in the right direction.</p> <p>AM flagged the budget for next year is worrying. What is our expectation from schools in terms of setting a balanced budget v setting a deficit. IB stated we need to be realistic and look at each individually. Each last year had a massive change in a very short period to action. CD queried can they take the same hit twice. AM stated the challenge is drop in numbers is drastic in some schools, and its not going to change unless numbers change. CD stated part of the solution is schools must actively address that. Directors agreed flexibility taken school by school, and to come back to next board with clearer picture on what can be done. Whilst we do not want to set deficits Directors asked to look at picture with no deficits and then review each school case by case looking for leeway.</p> <p>CB stated we also need a plan going forward assuming full schools, but also a plan B looking at what aren't full and are declining. We need to consider the point at which something becomes untenable.</p>	