

MEMBERS

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 2 December 2021 at 1pm

Present virtually: J Bloomfield N Wingfield-Digby
M Wagner S Howard

In Attendance: E D'Souza, Chair of the Trust Board
N Savvas, CEO
S Gales, Governance Professional

Apologies: None

1 Election of Chair and recognition of new Member

The Members recognised Sarah Howard as the sponsor's representative Member, in accordance with the Articles of Association.

The Members elected Sarah Howard to Chair the meeting.

2 Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence

ED'Souza, NSavvas and SHoward declared their roles as Governors of West Suffolk College. No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

There were no apologies for absence.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021 were **agreed** as an accurate record.

4 Matters Arising from meeting on 9 March 2021

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting.

5 Update on Trust's performance in 2020/21

Members received and considered the update report provided.

NSavvas summarised that in 2020/21, despite the pandemic, the Trust had performed outstandingly. The Trust opened ASFC's new building on time, despite Brexit and Covid-19 impacting both the availability of building materials and builders to complete the build. As we entered lockdown, staff quickly and effectively migrated teaching and learning and wrap-around student support online; and student attendance and engagement was proactively monitored to enable appropriate support to be implemented. We also conducted assessments of resources to ensure that both staff and students had the equipment they needed to effectively work / study online, and if not to provide the equipment needed. Following the cancellation of exams, the Trust developed and introduced exceptionally robust processes for awarding teacher-assessed grades which meant that students achieved fair grades and, unlike many other multi-academy trusts, the Trust did not have legal battles following appeals on the grading process. Throughout the year we continued to provide advice and guidance to students to support them to make decisions about progression. Overall, students achieved very strong results and we have a record number of students enrolling at both ASFC and OSFC.

Throughout the year, the Trust created Covid-19 testing centres and the central Trust teams kept pace with the latest Covid-19 guidance and put in place robust mitigation measures and provided training as well as regular updates and other communications with stakeholders, which resulted in safe community environments with no major local outbreaks. The Trust also significantly invested in upgrading both its physical and digital estates, installing new interactive whiteboards and Wi-Fi systems at OSFC and replacing hundreds of laptops; and through careful financial management achieved nearly £1m as a surplus, to reinvest in the Trust.

Action

The Trust also made significant changes to its governance structure to continue to improve governance.

The Trust was recognised by Baroness Berridge in her speech to the Sixth Form Colleges Association as the exemplar of a strong multi-academy trust.

Members queried the current enrolled student numbers for 2021/22. NSavvas noted that ASFC has 736 students and OSFC has 2,025 students. Members queried how this compared to the maximum capacity. NSavvas noted that for ASFC it is 1,700 and that OSFC is near capacity, based on its current allocation and timetabling. E'Souza added that the Trust has plans for how to increase capacity and grow, and summarised these plans. NSavvas noted that whilst growth is a key part of ensuring financial sustainability, our duty remains to provide the right education for our community; which is key strength of the Trust operating within a Group, as it has enabled ASFC to enrol students on the right course at the right level rather than trying to compete for students in order to fill its capacity / achieve its budget, to the detriment of student experience.

Members commended the tremendous work of staff operating to such a high level during the pandemic and queried what has been done to thank staff. NSavvas confirmed that we regularly communicate with all staff keeping them informed and thanking them for their contribution. Staff are also being rewarded with a gift day of holiday and received a pay rise last year.

Members queried if there is any resistance from schools local to ASFC. NSavvas confirmed that this is lessening as ASFC becomes established and its reputation is known; and that over 900 people attended the open event this term, from a range of schools showing the support from the community. NSavvas confirmed that we continue to work with schools to support progression; and to work with senior leaders to discuss how the Trust can support post-16 students enabling schools to close their financially unviable sixth form provision, thereby enhancing their resources available to their pre-16 provision.

Members queried if we have teachers working across the Trust / Group. NSavvas confirmed that we have teachers sharing best practice across the Trust and Group. We have expanded those in Group roles, these are in all manner of support services to enable depth of capacity and resilience in teams.

Members queried how the Trust's relationship is with King Edwards VI School (KEGS), as the primary feeder school for ASFC. NSavvas summarised the Trust's close and collaborative working relationship with KEGS.

6 Update on Trust Board's Governance

Members received and considered the report provided which included a detailed report outlining the Trust's governance structure and arrangements and a detailed report summarising the Trust Board's membership, skillset and areas for development, along with information on Trustee attendance in 2020/21 and anonymised EDI metrics.

SGales summarised that in 2020/21, the Trust completed its governance action plan resulting from the haysmcintyre report and implemented several fundamental changes to the governance of the Trust including: reviewing the Trust's local governance arrangements and, after a consultation process, wound down the LGB Committees and established a Trust-wide Educational Excellence Committee; achieving a majority of Trustees who are independent from the sponsor; we clarified and updated our governance documentation including adopting new Articles of Association, Funding Agreements, scheme of delegation and terms of reference; we clarified the role of the Trust's sponsor as enshrined in the Trust's Articles of Association; and improved communication between all layers of governance and the Executive.

In accordance with the Academy Trust Handbook, the Accounting Officer (the CEO) and the CFO are now employees of the Trust and a new OSFC Head of Centre was appointed, prior to which the CEO was also the interim Principal of OSFC.

The Trust carried out an internal review of its governance arrangements and as a result wound down its Related Party Transaction Committee, Appointments and Governance Committee and Property Committee, and established a Nominations and Governance Committee and a Resources; and clarified the role of the Executive Boards within the governance structure.

Members queried whether the Trust Board's EDI metrics are in line with the local population. NSavvas noted that we are in line with Suffolk overall, with OSFC being more diverse than Suffolk overall.

Members queried whether Trustees will be willing to serve additional terms or whether there will be need to undertake further Trustee recruitment. SGales noted there is no maximum term of office for Trustees, so Trustees can be re-appointed if willing to serve. ED'Souza added that succession planning is a key focus of the Nominations and Governance Committee, and SHoward is a member of this Committee in order to feedback to Members.

7 Update on Group strategy (Trust and its sponsor)

Members received and considered the report provided.

NSavvas noted that we have created a very successful Trust by working closely with our sponsor and, that we continue to work with a common strategy to both support 16-19 students and enhance our community. NSavvas advised that in January 2022, Covid-19 restrictions permitting, the Trust Board and its sponsor will convene a strategic conference to determine the 2021/24 strategic aims and NSavvas invited Members to the strategic conference.

ED'Souza noted that, through our working with the ESFA and DfE, we are moving ever closer to be more understood a Group operating as a civic structure, contributing to the civic leadership in our community.

8 Any Other Business

• Potential Royal visit to Suffolk

NWingfield-Digby informed that there may be a Royal visit in summer 2022 and questioned whether we would like to invite them to our colleges. NSavvas agreed that it would be wonderful to invite them to formally open ASFC and to invite them to see the work of our Group. NSavvas to liaise with NWingfield-Digby to agree the proposal.

The meeting closed at 2.00pm