

**LIFE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
HELD ON THE 9TH DECEMBER, 2024 AT 5.00PM**

NON CONFIDENTIAL

COMPOSITION OF THE BOARD

NAME		END DATE OF OFFICE	DESIGNATED ROLE	ATTENDANCE
Liz Warren (LWA)	Trustee	10.01.2025	Chair	Y
Chris Parkinson (CPA)	Trustee		CEO	Y
David Gordon (DGO)	Trustee	28.01.2028		Y – joined at 5.23pm
David Maitland (DMA)	Trustee (Coopted)	03.03.2028		Y
Sue Dunford (SDU)	Trustee	05.09.2025		Y
Liam McDonagh (LMcD)	Trustee	10.01.2025		Y – joined at 6.00pm
Andy Smith (ASM)	Trustee	19.09.2026		Y
Anil Majithia (AMI)	Trustee (Coopted)	03.03.2028	Vice Chair	Y
Ja Kim (JKI)	Trustee (Coopted)	03.03.2028		Y
Rose Harvey (RHA)	Trustee (Coopted)	03.03.2028		Y
IN ATTENDANCE				
Gareth Williams (GWI)			COO	
Nicola Koncarevic (NKO)			Director of Education	
Paul Maddox (PMA)			Executive CFO	
Sarah Mayes (SMA)			CFO	
Sian Griffiths (SGR)			Head of Governance	
Anne Shipton			Observer	Left at 6.00pm

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed all present and Dr Anne Shipton who was attending as an observer and a potential Trustee. The Chair introduced all present.

2. DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY INTEREST

The Trustees were asked to declare any potential pecuniary interest or conflict of interest between an individual and the Trust Board as a whole with the business to be discussed during the meeting. No additional declarations were made.

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The non-confidential minutes of the Board meeting held on the 23rd September, 2024 were approved and confirmed as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Trustees reviewed and updated the action log from previous meetings.

DATE	NO	ACTION	WHO	WHEN	UPDATES
20.05.2024	9b	Annual Conversations - LWA to contact Trustees to arrange	LWA	June, 2024	COMPLETED

01.07.2024	13d	Parent Code of Conduct - NKO/LHA/SGR to progress the work and bring a document to the trust board in September.	NKO/ LHA/ SGR	Autumn	COMPLETED see agenda item 12a
23.09.2024	4	Lanyards for Trustees - SGR to chase IT Help Desk for a progress update.	SG+R	ASAP	COMPLETED
	6d	School Improvement, terms of reference - a. SGR to draft a form of words relating to safeguarding for approval by SDU and inclusion in the terms of reference. b. SDU/LWA to discuss whether any further areas of responsibility should be included in the terms of reference and, if so, provide a narrative for review and approval by Trustees at the December meeting.	SGR SDU/LWA	ASAP	COMPLETED COMPLETED
	6e	SGR to place Community Engagement – role of the executive on the December Board agenda. CPA/LWA to agree who will lead on this item	SGR CPA/LWA		COMPLETED see agenda item ONGOING
	6h	Completion of declarations & confirmations - SGR to upload a message onto Governor Hub, Trustees to complete by the 18th October, 2024. Trustees to complete	SGR Trustees	ASAP 18.10.2024	COMPLETED
	6j	Articles of Association - SGR to place review of the Articles on the agenda for December.	SGR	ASAP	COMPLETED see agenda item 5b
	8	SGR to place LiFE MAT Services as an agenda item for the December board meeting and would also reshare the report from the July meeting with Trustees.	SGR	12.2024	COMPLETED see agenda item 5c

5. GOVERNANCE & COMPLIANCE

- a.
 - i. The Trustees (Member appointed only Trustees) considered and agreed to appoint Liz Warren as a Coopted Trustees during the period 11th January – 20th January, 2025 at which point the Members would be asked to reappoint for a further 4 year term.
 - ii. The Trustees (Member appointed only Trustees) considered and agreed to appoint Liam McDonagh as a Coopted Trustees during the period 11th January – 20th January, 2025 at which point the Members would be asked to reappoint for a further 4 year term.
- b. Trustee Recruitment - to receive an update and to take recommendations for appointment of new Trustees, to be considered under the confidential business
- c. Articles of Association
The Trustees considered the revised Articles of Association a copy of which had been shared prior to the meeting. DMA had raised a query regarding the wording of the secondary objectives – to promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Leicester and the surrounding area, should this be Leicestershire and surrounding areas. SGR explained the objective was unchanged from the current articles. The solicitor at Anthony Collins had advised that there may be issues with the Charity Commission should the wording change to Leicestershire and the surrounding areas as this would encompass a number of other local authorities. SGR had agreed to confirm with the Solicitors that Leicester and surrounding areas covered all the areas that fell within the NFH Schools catchment. NKO confirmed that some of the NFH feeder primaries were in the Derbyshire locality and had over the years asked to be feeder primaries to the 3 National Forest hub schools. Some of the children did have Derbyshire postcodes, even though they were in the catchment for Leicestershire schools.

Q: (LWA) So are we saying that we're providing education in Leicestershire, if so that's true, as all our schools are in Leicestershire it doesn't say we're providing education for children who live in Leicestershire?

A: (NKO) Yes, and then if we have further need. So, for example, if a child has a Derbyshire postcode, and they have SEND, then we receive funding from Derbyshire County Council.

LWA asked Trustees if they were happy to recommend the proposed articles to the Members. The main reasons for the change was to increase the number of Trustees to 12 which would support the additional committees but also ensure the Trust would align with the DFE model articles.

ACTION: SGR to share Solicitor's confirmation email with Trustees.

RESOLVED: Trustees approved the proposed articles for submission to the DFE and Charity Commission and approval by the Members, subject to receipt of the confirmation above.

d. External Review of Governance

The Trustees received an overview, it was good practice to commission an external review of governance every 3 years. The last one had taken place in 2022 and over the past 3 years work had taken place to address the recommendations/outcomes from that report. The recommendation to Trustees was to start the process to commission an external governance review to take place during the Summer of 2025 and to confirm that Trustees were happy for the NGA to provide the names and details of 3 potential reviewers, if so, CPA, SGR and LWA would take this as an action. Trustees were asked to confirm they were happy with the process and next steps, would they prefer to see the shortlist of names. The Trustees agreed LWA/CPA/SGR could decide on the reviewer following meetings with the NGA.

RESOLVED: the Trustees agreed to the action and next steps as outlined above.

e. Admissions 2026 – 2027.

The Trustees noted the details of the consultation which would take place during the period December, 2024 – January, 2025. SGR explained the consultation related to the 2026 – 2027 Admission Policy, all 3 Schools in the NFH had requested changes. One change related to all 3 Schools, the local authority only retained a waiting list for the year 7 cycle up to the 31st of December, currently the 3 Schools retained a waiting list after the 31st December this was quite difficult and complex, the proposal was to remove the waiting list. A discussion had already taken place with the LA who had not raised an objection. The other proposal was to reduce the PAN at Ivanhoe. There were also 2 other proposals for the Trustees to note but as these related to an increase in PAN there was no requirement to consult, the Trust as the admission authority would just need to notify the LA and publish the changes on the Trust and School website.

NKO provided further details of the rationale to reduce the PAN at Ivanhoe whilst increasing at Ashby. A decision had been made in the interests of cost effectiveness in terms of the delivery of the curriculum. When the Schools went through the age range change process the children were not necessarily split into a cost effective number of classes, and so by increasing Ashby's PAN there would be no need to have an extra class however the number of children within each class would increase, whereas Ivanhoe would be able to reduce their class by one.

SGR explained at the end of the consultation process the Trustees would receive a report including an overview of any responses, objections etc, Trustees would then be asked to approve the amendments/proposals.

f. LGB assurance to the Trust Board

The report was created to provide the Trust Board with assurances that the LGB's were compliant and had completed the following actions –

- i. Reviewed the draft pupil premium strategy statement (where applicable)
- ii. Reviewed the PE and sport premium spending and impact report (where applicable)

- iii. Evaluated pupil outcomes using relevant performance data from the previous academic year
- iv. Reviewed and approved SEND (Special Education Needs) information report ahead of publication

Following the approval of reports by the LGB's the Schools were required to publish the above information on the School Websites.

RESOLVED: the Trustees noted the report and assurances from the LGB's.

- g. The Trustees noted that all declaration of pecuniary interest and confirmations including KCSIE, 2024 via Governor Hub had been confirmed and completed.

6. TRUSTEE WORK IN ADDITION TO COMMITTEES & COMMUNICATION WITH THE LGB'S

The Trustees received and noted verbal updates from individual Trustees who had undertaken visits since the last board meeting.

- a. DMA had visited Ivanhoe on the 30th September and attended the Ivanhoe LGB on the 3rd October as part of his induction. DMA felt the visits were helpful to see the different issues between the 2 Ashby schools.
- b. AMA had attended an introductory meeting with Peter Crowe, Co Vice Chair at Bosworth.
- c. LWA had attend the LGB at Desford and felt reassured to hear that all the points highlighted by CPA were taking place, the LGB provided the reassurance as a triangulation.
- d. JKI had attended a call with the Chair at Ibstock but was yet to arrange a visit to the School. LWA was due to meet with NKO at Ibstock to cover areas relating to a possible up and coming Ofsted and suggested JKI also attended.

ACTION: NKO agreed to ask her PA to make contact with LWA/JKI to arrange a meeting.

7. CEO REPORT

CPA presented his overview, a copy of which had been shared with Trustees. The report was multi layered and included the CEO's introduction, statements from each School and then the overall spreadsheet which included the data. The Trustees received a summary -

Open Schools project – the Trust had been invited by Professor Mick Waters to take part in a national project which he was leading called Open Schools. The idea being that many educationalists were realising that for a significant number of children the standard model of education post pandemic was not fit for purpose and one of the underlying reasons why Schools were seeing issues with attendance, persistent absence and those rarely present. The projects objectives was to provide children with a national network of curriculum opportunities that were beyond the standard set of the curriculum offer of the school. The children would be able to opt into this initiative which would be delivered in School not online from home, potentially with tutor facilitators rather than needing to be in a room with 30 children studying individual subjects, this would form an element of their curriculum that would then motivate them as they would be educated more effectively. The initiative would attract around £10,000,000 of government grant funding in January, the Trust had been invited with 2 trusts in Bristol and the local authority around Cardiff to be part of the initial 3 pilot centres across the country. This could be quite significant in terms of its potential for actually promoting our model to a wider audience. The reason the Trust had been chosen was as a result of Mick Waters attending our Life MAT Conference last summer and hearing our values, ethos and vision, our beliefs and what the Trust was trying to do, as well as seeing the immediate fit with our curriculum model, particularly the real life in terms of how our curriculum model would create the space for this immediately. If this came to fruition it would be a significant development for the Trust.

Q: (LWA) Can we look at how we report the data and how it links up e.g. I was looking at behaviour and it said there was no suspensions this year. It's hard to compare with last year, because the data covers the whole year so could we

include termly comparators which would make it easier to track progress . Could we have a look at smarter working for the Headteachers Reports then perhaps we can look at running this alongside some training for Governors. Some LGB's have feedback that they have too much information.

A: (CPA) The length of the Headteacher reports is significantly different across the 10 Schools although we are trying to standardise the format. Amelia and Simon are helping to lead on this in particular looking at the self evaluation against the strategic plan and how that feeds into the LiFE MAT Charter and the 5 pillars, they will also look at how that alignment feeds into the quality assurance processes.

Q: (LWA) Would there be any scope in the review process, perhaps for a Chair of Governors or a Trustee to join in? And just I'd listen.

A: (CPA) Yes more than happy to invite a couple of Trustees to a meeting to provide their perspective.

Priorities – the current priorities were attendance, suspensions and end of key stage outcomes. Attendance across the Schools within the Trust were higher than the national average and in 3 schools alongside suspensions we have recognised there was an issue. At every Headteachers meeting we would be working on the Rexo project, which was raising end of key stage outcomes, this was a primary and secondary specific area. The project would ensure Schools were sharing the very best practice with regard to delivery of those end of key stage qualifications.

The Trustees asked the CEO to pass on their thanks to the Headteachers for the time and work they put into their reports.

8. FINANCE

a. CFO's Report & Management Accounts

The Trustees received the CFOs Report and Management Accounts. ASM, Chair of Finance felt the new format for the Period 1 report was looking good and thanked everyone for their work and input. The cash flow forecast was positive, one issue to raise was the red on the Teachers' salaries. Whilst it was appreciated this was only Period 1 the actual values were better than budgeted values but then the forecast at the end of the year was a negative. The report however did include a commentary and notes for each line, the report was easy to read and very informative.

PMA provided some further details, as this was Period 1, all the pay rise accruals for every School had not been available and therefore not included. This made the figures look more favourable against the budget because the pay rises were still coming in, and next year there was also the increase in national insurance from April, 2025. There was an expectation that Staff costs would be adverse to the budget. However, the Trust would be receiving grants in relation to those costs which was a further reason why income was above expenditure. It was during the second half of the year that the detail in the forecast should show more income, there would be grants available to cover the pay awards and rises in national insurance. The other points for note were there was far less volatility than last year. The finance team have made significant efforts to complete the accruals although the prepayments were slightly high, £460,000, but broken down across the 10 Schools equated to circa £40,000. Income relating to SEND and additional needs had increased and payroll costs were lower. The management accounts were more relevant as this time the trip income and expenditure had been included. Last year this had been included in the profit and loss although a comment had been included to explain the £70,000 of income. The finance pack provided to the Trustees would continue to evolve and would include a page of key metrics financial and non financial to provide context behind the numbers.

Q: (AMA) The catering costs had almost doubled was there a reason for this?

A: (PMA) On the catering at the year end we do an accrual which cover the frozen food costs, there's quite a large stock of frozen food, which over the 1st, 2nd and 3rd months will be utilised, so the overspend was expected. A meeting had taken place with the Catering Manager, and we've looked at a forecast until December for all of the Schools. So I think it's a bit of an abnormal high in month one which will even out over the next 2 to 3 months.

Q: (LWA) The extra funding that's come into the budget will that be on a separate line?

A: (SMA) I think there'll be a separate line, so for the national insurance we will receive a grant, we're expecting to receive about 80% of what our actual costs will be. So if it's more than that, it'll be positive, we're erring on the side of caution because we don't usually get 100% funding. Of the £2.4 billion announced we think £1 billion will fund the SEND deficits accrued by the local authorities. The remaining monies and how they will be used was yet to be announced.

- b. To approve the Trustee Report & Annual Accounts for submission to the ESFA, including the reconciliation of funds, upon recommendation from the Audit & Risk.

The Trustees noted the papers had been considered and reviewed by the Audit & Risk committee on the 27th November, 2024, the committee had also met with the External Auditors. The Audit & Risk Committee recommended the Trust Board accept the Trustee Report and Annual Accounts for submission to the ESFA by the 31st December, 2024.

DMA, Chair, Audit & Risk provided a brief summary following the meeting with and feedback from the External Auditors. The accounts this year seemed to be far better prepared, and the process went much more smoothly than in previous years.

SMA pointed out that there was an error in the narrative relating to the top slice contribution to the central fund; the calculation was based on the old format rather than the current format.

ACTION: SMA to amend the report with the correct narrative and send over the form of words to SGR for these minutes.

Addendum to the minutes email 10.12.2024 from SMA to SGR correct wording should be - Top Slice contributions are 6% of GAG.

RESOLVED: The Trustees approved the Annual Accounts & Trustees Report for the period ending 31st August, 2024 subject to the amendment from SMA (see addendum below) for submission to the ESFA by the 31st December, 2024.

Addendum to the minutes email 10.12.2024 from SMA to SGR correct wording should be - Top Slice contributions are 6% of GAG

ACTION: amended accounts to be electronically signed by the Chair and CEO as Accounting Officer and submitted to the ESFA by the 31st December, 2024.

- c. To review the External Auditors Report including any feedback, issues raised by the Audit & Risk Committee.

DMA, Chair, Audit & Risk provided an overview, this year's report had been much improved on last year, there were a couple of issues relating to late invoices coming through and not being picked up but as the new purchase order system was embedded this should improve. A couple of issues had also been identified regarding VAT which PMA/SMA were addressing to ensure VAT returns were checked prior to submission.

Q: (LWA) Is Audit & Risk tracking progress at each meeting on the actions/recommendations?

Q: (SDU) What assets are covered under fixed assets?

A: (DMA) Fixed assets run from anything to do with buildings. plan, equipment right down to IT equipment. I'm not certain what the capitalisation threshold is, but it can get extremely complicated when you get into the detail.

A: (ASM) We do have a fixed asset list which is quite high level. Then there are the inventory lists which would include all computers etc, there is a fixed asset register but not an inventory.

9. DEVELOPMENT PLANS

- a. Trust Strategic Plan update

LWA asked if a mechanism needed to be put in place to review specific areas of the plan e.g. vulnerable children and children with SEND to monitor progress as well as the risk. CPA felt this would fall under the remit of the School Improvement Committee as he understood that the 2 Directors of Schol Improvement who attended the committee and would be in the best position to provide feedback. SDU confirmed that was the case and further discussions would take place at the January meeting. Trustees were content that the report on the Strategic Plan would come to the board via the School Improvement Committee.

- b. Board Development Plan update (LWA)

LWA provided an overview and confirmed an updated plan had been uploaded earlier this afternoon and covered the following areas –

- DGO as the Focus Trustee for the Central Team would liaise with SWI.
- Check in to ensure the Trustee update meetings for this term, despite being slightly less frequent continued to provide opportunities for Trustees to have meaningful discussions with the CEO and where needed additional Trust Board meetings could be arranged
- Explore what might indicate success in Students' Agency, this would be covered by the School Improvement through looking at transitions and how certain children manage transition from one stage of education to another.
- Trustee recruitment to be covered under the confidential business.
- Succession planning - identify a potential new Chair, this work has started.
- Trust Volunteer Policy – a piece of work which was ongoing but must include how the Trust values our volunteers.

c. Governance VOST DRAFT

A copy had been shared with Trustees prior to the meeting. SGR provided an overview, the VOST linked in with the external review of governance (ERG) considered under agenda item 5d. The previous ERG took place in 2022 and covered governance, finance, oversight, and vision ethos and strategic direction. The VOST covered governance as the other areas fell within other plans. Of the 65 action points in the previous ERG only one was outstanding which was to consider the adoption of the DFE model articles, this was included in tonight's agenda. The VOST included the areas identified on LWA's plan under the areas to improve and actions and how we progress those actions to improve the health of governance within the Trust.

It would be helpful and provide Trustees with reassurance if the Vost and updated action plan from the previous ERG were included in the scoping exercise for the next ERG. LWA commented that these actions also fit with the 5 pillars of strong trusts and would build on progress to date as well as looking at the health of governance generally across the MAT.

10. LIFE MAT SERVICES - considered under the confidential part of the meeting

11. COMMITTEES & LGBS

The Trustees received the following committee minutes and noted the Pay and People minutes would follow shortly –

- a. Infrastructure Committee 01.10.2024 Draft Minutes
- b. School Improvement 09.10.24 Draft Minutes
- c. Finance Committee 15.10.2024 Draft Minutes
- d. Audit & Risk Committee 27.11.2024 Draft Minutes

SDU provided an update on safeguarding the Trust had adopted the "Safeguarding at Scale" model used by Confederation of Schools Trusts, with a big focus on external auditing and training. The external audits were on track in line with the calendar (schools would also receive a local authority audit once every two year unless there was a need to do this more frequently). This would support a greater breadth of consistency which was a positive.

LWA asked if the workload and capacity of the School Improvement Committee needed to be reviewed, was the work too much for one committee or would an option be to separate the work across secondary and primary. SDU felt there were so many areas of commonality e.g. transition, attendance, safeguarding etc it would be preferable to remain unchanged.

- e. To receive assurances from the LGB's included in the agenda planner
LWA provided an overview of the document which had been shared with Trustees. The Trustees were reliant on LGB's to provide reassurances to the board. Specific areas of assurance had been shared with the LGB's for monitoring and reporting. The main issue was to have a simple process in place to accommodate the feedback, having looked at the

document LWA was of the view that this may need some further work. LWA and SGR would take this as an action to review and report back to the Trustees and perhaps involve a couple of the Governance Professionals and Chairs.

ACTION: LWA/SGR to review the process to receive assurance from the LGB's.

12. POLICIES

The Trustees reviewed the following policies/documents copies of which had been share prior to the meeting for comment -

a. Parent Code of Conduct

LMcD queried how this would work in practice, was it a requirement that parents would need to sign the code. SGR explained the document would be shared with parents but there was no requirement for them to sign the document, a copy would also be shared and published on the School Website. CPA confirmed the code formed part of the framework which parents were expected to adhere to and work alongside the schools in terms of their behaviour. The code covered the potential actions which the School could instigate where a parents behaviour/code was deemed to be unacceptable.

LWA asked if the code could make reference in the first paragraph to the home school agreement and would cover the mutual expectations of both parties.

ACTION: SGR to ask Schools to include the link to the home school agreement in the code.

RESOLVED: the Trustees approved the code subject to the inclusion of the link to the home school agreement.

b. Health & Safety Policy (amended)

RESOLVED: the Trustees approved the policy.

c. Trustee & Governance Allowance Policy (no changes)

RESOLVED: the Trustees approved the policy.

d. Equality Policy – unchanged to agree extension of review date to 30.04.2025 for further work to be undertaken.

RESOLVED: the Trustees agreed to extend the review date to the 30th April, 2025.

e. Accessibility Policy - – unchanged to agree extension of review date to 30.04.2025 for further work to be undertaken.

RESOLVED: the Trustees agreed to extend the review date to the 30th April, 2025.

f. Modern Slavery

RESOLVED: the Trustees approved the policy

13. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETINGS

The Trustees noted the date and time of the next Board meeting to be held of the 20th January, 2025 at 7.00pm following the AGM. LWA explained that whilst Trustees were not required to attend the AGM but their attendance would be much appreciated.

MEETING DATES 2024 – 2025

DATE	MEETING	START TIME	ONLINE/IN PERSON
CHRISTMAS - 23.12.2024 - 03.01.2025			
Tue 14 Jan 2025	Chairs Group	6.00 pm	Online - zoom

Wed 15 Jan 2025	School Improvement	4.00 pm	Online - zoom
Mon 20 Jan 2025	Members - AGM	5.30 pm	Online - zoom
Mon 20 Jan 2025	Trust Board (extra, one item)	7.00pm	Online - zoom
Mon 20 Jan 2025	CEO call with Trustees	7.15pm	Online - zoom
Tues 4 Feb 2025	Infrastructure	5.00 pm	Online - zoom
Tues 11 Feb 2025	Finance	5.00 pm	Online - zoom
SPRING HALF TERM - 17.02.2025 - 21.02.2025			
Mon 3 Mar 2025	CEO call with Trustees	4.30pm	Online - googlemeet
Wed 5 Mar 2025	Audit & Risk	4.00 pm	Online - zoom
Thu 13 Mar 2025	Chairs Group	6.00 pm	Online - zoom
Wed 19 Mar 2025	Pay & People	1.00pm	Online - zoom
Wed 19 Mar 2025	School Improvement	4.00 pm	Online - zoom
Mon 31 Mar 2025	Trust Board	5.00pm	Online - zoom
EASTER - 14.04.2025 - 25.04.2025			
Wed 30 Apr 2025	CEO call with Trustees	4.30pm	Online - googlemeet
Tues 6 May 2025	Infrastructure	5.00pm	Online - zoom
Thu 8 May 2025	Chairs Group	6.00 pm	Online - zoom
Tue 20 May 2025	School Improvement	4.00 pm	Online - zoom
HALF TERM 26.05.2025 - 30.05.2025			
TBC - June	Trust Strategy Day	All Day	In person
Wed 11 Jun 2025	Audit & Risk	4.00 pm	Online - zoom
Wed 18 Jun 2025	School Improvement	4.00 pm	Online - zoom
Wed 25 Jun 2025	Pay & People	1.00pm	Online - zoom
Tues 1 Jul 2025	Finance	5.00pm	Online - zoom
Mon 7 Jul 2025	Trust Board	5.00 pm	In person
SUMMER - 11.07.2025			

The meeting closed at 7.15pm following the conclusion of the confidential business.