



## **Notes of Meeting: East of England and North East London Advisory Board**

**Date of meeting – 18 November 2021**

### **Attendance**

Attendance data is published annually on the GOV.UK website.

AB members who sent their apologies for the meeting have, where possible, been consulted on all projects before the meeting. Their views are reflected in the discussion at the meeting (where appropriate). This excludes items where that member declared a conflict of interest.

### **Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) chair**

- Sue Baldwin (RSC)

### **Advisory Board (AB) members**

- Tom Canning (AB)
- Caroline Derbyshire (AB)
- Diane Rochford (AB)
- Al Kingsley (AB)
- Karen Kerridge (AB)

### **Apologies**

- Duncan Ramsey (AB)
- Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne (AB)
- Brian Conway (AB)

### **DfE senior civil servants**

- ESFA representative
- Alan Parnum (Deputy Director)

## **Representations received**

- No representations were made for any items discussed at this meeting.

## **General Discussion Points**

### **AB member reflections**

- The Note of Meeting for the October AB meeting were discussed and agreed.
- The RSC and Board took time for reflections on the Advisory Board elections and plans for the transition between existing members and future members, the new RSC for the region due to start in March and the Trust School Improvement (TSI) offer.

## Converter Academy Orders

Points discussed in relation to school conversion.

**Project:** Alburgh with Denton Church of England Primary School, Tacolneston Church of England Primary School and Morley Church of England Primary School, **South Norfolk, Norfolk** – to convert and join The Diocese of Norwich St Benet's Multi-Academy Trust.

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard how the three small schools in South Norfolk wanted to join St Benet's to benefit from the expertise, opportunities and school improvement support that the trust could offer. The trust also believes that the additional expertise and capability from the schools would be mutually beneficial and allow them to increase their capacity.
- The Board expressed concerns on the absence of sufficient evidence to show that the trust has a robust track record of school improvement. It was noted that this was due to the lack of performance results and Ofsted inspections caused by the effects of the pandemic.
- The Board questioned whether the timing was right for the trust to take on more schools given the lack of quantitative evidence and as they are currently undergoing a recruitment drive to fill in roles to strengthen their school improvement model.
- While the RSC agreed that the schools would build capacity within the trust, more assurances was required so decided it was best to defer this project for now. The AB supported the RSC's decision.

**RSC decision:** Defer.

**Conflicts:** Brian Conway was absent from this meeting and did not receive the papers.

**Further actions required:** Project Lead to inform trust of RSC's decision and secure further assurances from the trust.

## Sponsor Application

Points discussed in relation to applications for sponsor application.

**Project:** Hampton Academies Trust, **Peterborough**, to become a sponsor.

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard about the background of this application to become a sponsor including that this is linked to their application for a free school presumption and their future plans to support schools in the local area.
- The lack of quantitative evidence due to the pause of Ofsted activity and performance data was brought up again as a concern for this project. The Board heard that despite the lack of empirical evidence the trust is well-regarded in the area due to its strong governance and leadership and the trust have a rigorous monitoring and evaluation process in place to address identified underperformance issues.
- The Board also heard of the trust's wider contributions to the system based on their membership in several network groups, the trust's finances were stable, and the trust had the capacity and expertise to provide school improvement support.
- Following on from the qualitative data gathered and shared, and that approval would result in extra MAT capacity in the area to support struggling schools, the Board fully supported the RSC's decision to approve the application.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** Al Kingsley did not receive the papers and was not part of this discussion.

**Further actions required:** Project Lead to inform trust of RSC's decision.

## Trust Change

Points discussed in relation to academies moving to a new trust.

**Project:** Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (MAT), **Cambridge, Cambridgeshire**, to merge with Cambridge Primary Education Trust (MAT), **Cambridge, Cambridgeshire**.

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard about the voluntary transfer of the five Cambridge Primary Education Trust (CPET) schools to Cambridge Meridian Academy Trust (CMAT) including that the two trusts had a long-standing collaborative relationship and that this was the most logical way to share resources, expertise, governance skills, and build on capacity.
- The Board also heard that this would be a mutually beneficial outcome as this would bring in the Teaching School Hub from CPET, resulting in strengthened primary expertise, and would bring in operational expertise from CMAT which would develop a better offer for staff and pupils.
- The AB initially expressed concerns that there was a small number of negative responses following from the public consultation which had not yet finalised. The project lead shared that the negative responses were mainly community based and concerned the merger process, identity, and values. The Board were assured that the trusts planned to address these concerns and questions in follow-up live community events and FAQs on their websites.
- The Board and RSC agreed that this was a logical and mutually beneficial merger, and the RSC approved this project.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** Diane Rochford declared that she had previously undertaken consultancy work for CMAT, however, is not connected with this application. Diane received papers and the RSC allowed her to be part of the discussion.

**Further actions required:** RSC office to inform trusts of the RSC's decision and will continue to have ongoing conversations with the two trusts through the merger process.

## Significant Changes

Points discussed in relation to significant changes applications.

**Project:** Key Co-operative Academy Trust to relocate North East Essex Co-operative Academy, **Colchester, Essex**, into a new building to allow for full-time school places.

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard about the request from the trust to expand North East Co-operative Academy into a new building in a different site to allow for full-time onsite provision, including that the existing site is overcrowded and not fit for purpose.
- The AB also heard that the LA supported and is funding this project, with the trust fully committed to continue investment. The new site will have the facilities required, which will allow for better outcomes for pupils.
- Any concerns brought up in the consultation were responded to and mitigated by the trust.
- The AB and RSC expressed no concerns, and the AB fully supported the RSC's decision to approve the application.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** The trust is to be informed of the outcome.

**Project:** South Essex Academy Trust to increase the age range from 5-7 years old to 3-7 years old in Kents Hill Infant Academy, **Castle Point, Essex**, to add a nursery provision.

### **AB discussion:**

- The AB heard about the request from South Essex Academy Trust to extend the age range of Kents Hill Infant Academy to accommodate an existing nursery provision on the school site. This application is following on from the LA's sufficiency data which demonstrated there was a deficit of places for pre-school age children in the area.
- The AB also heard that the trust's financial position was stable and any concerns from the consultation have been addressed and mitigated.
- The AB and RSC expressed no concerns, and the AB fully supported the RSC's decision to approve the application.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** The trust is to be informed of the outcome.

**Project:** Assisi Catholic Trust should be allowed to increase the age range from 5-11 to 2-11 in Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, **Southend-on-Sea**, to incorporate an existing private nursery on site.

**AB discussion:**

- The AB heard about the request from Assisi Catholic Trust to extend the age range of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School to accommodate an existing nursery provision on the school site. To facilitate an existing nursery provision on the site.
- The consultation received no objections and was hugely positive.
- The AB and RSC expressed no concerns, and the AB fully supported the RSC's decision to approve the application.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions required:** Trust to be informed.

## Decisions taken between AB meetings

List of decisions taken by RSC outside of AB meetings.

**Project:** Alburgh with Denton Church of England Primary School, Tacolneston Church of England Primary School and Morley Church of England Primary School, **South Norfolk, Norfolk** – to convert and join The Diocese of Norwich St Benet's Multi-Academy Trust.

**Update:**

- The RSC met with the trust CEO, Director of School Improvement and COO to seek assurances in the absence of a track record, and timing of the recruitment drive.
- The trust provided assurances by demonstrating the school improvement investment made in its current schools and the progress made; and confirming the January 2022 start date of a new School Improvement (SI) Officer. The SI Officer was previously a director of primary for a strong MAT. The replacement for the Head of Standards is underway with an expected start date in April 2022.
- The RSC sought and was provided with assurance that the trust's plans for growth are steady and measured, including its use of trust-to-trust support and the MAT development framework to support its strategy.
- In light of these updates, the RSC was assured that the trust would have the capacity to take on the three schools and decided to approve.

**RSC decision:** Approve.

**Conflicts:** None.

**Further actions: required:** RSC office to send out Academy order to governing body, Director of Children's Services and Director of Education.