

# Coppice Primary Partnership

## Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

Held on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022 at 6.30 pm  
At Loose Primary School

*Members present at the meeting held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023 approved these minutes as a true and accurate record, and signed on Governor Hub electronically*

### **Present:**

**Members:** Steve Knowles, Andrew Nursey, Paul Burbidge

**Trustees:** John Edgar, Andrew Maitland, Neil McDonald, Mark Chatley (Trust Leader)

**In attendance:** Andy Lacey (Trust Business Manager), Carina Cuddington (Trust CFO), Suzie Wenham (Governor CPS), Branwen Taylor (Trust T&L lead)

**Clerk:** Clare Nursey (Governor CPS)

### **Item 1 Welcome and introductions**

1.1 JE, vice Chair of Trustees, welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting of CPP and explained that Carole Hardy (Chair of Trustees) was unable to attend due to personal circumstances.  
1.2 JE confirmed that the purpose of the meeting was for Members formally to receive the Trust Annual Report and Audit Findings, which had been approved by trustees at their meeting earlier today, and to give Members the opportunity to ask questions. Although no representative from Kreston Reeves, the CPP auditors, was able to attend Carina Cuddington, who was currently acting in a consultancy capacity as the trust's Chief Financial Officer, was available to answer questions as was Mark Chatley, CPP Trust Leader.

### **Item 3 Appointment of Chair for the meeting**

Members unanimously agreed that Steve Knowles would chair this meeting.

### **Item 3 Resignations & appointments**

3.1 SK advised that a prospective new Member had been approached and the appointment would be followed up in the new year. He reminded the meeting that the Trust had been established with space for 3-5 Members.  
3.2 It was understood that it was still Carole Hardy's intention to resign as a Member in order to follow audit guidance on maintaining separation between the Member and Trustee boards.

### **Item 4 Apologies for absence**

Apologies received and accepted from Carole Hardy (Member and Chair of Trustees).

### **Item 5 Declaration of business interests**

5.1 SK advised he was still Chair of Governors at Maplesden Noakes School. For the sake of clarity, PB advised he was instructed as Legal representative to another trust but was not otherwise involved with that trust. AN advised he had no new business interests to declare.  
5.2 Trustees confirmed they had no new interests to declare relevant to the discussions.

### **Item 6 Minutes of the last meeting**

Members approved and SK signed the minutes of the last AGM meeting held 8 December 2021.

### **Strategic Overview of the Trust Operation (Chair of Trustees)**

7.1 JE provided the meeting with an overview of the Trust on behalf of trustees:

- It had been another busy and challenging year and the trust was fortunate to have such committed and professional teams both in the schools and in the central team.
- At Trust level, the board continued to work well as a group with a variety of backgrounds and experience coming together for the benefit of the trust, and discussions at board level were open, honest and often lively.

- The committee structure had been expanded this year and now included an Education and Curriculum Group (referred to as a Standards Committee in last year's minutes) as well as the Finance and Audit Committee. This new committee included representatives of local governing bodies, and local governors were now invited to attend 3 finance reviews at their school each year. Increased involvement of local governors was part of a strategy to leverage their knowledge for the benefit of the trust.
- During the year, the trust was successful with 3 bids for Capital Investment Funding (CiF) for projects at Loose and Coxheath schools, and further bids have been submitted today.
- During the year, CPP was in discussion with another local MAT with a view to merging but unfortunately this did not proceed, as while values were aligned, approaches for delivering the best for pupils were not. It was still CPP's intention to seek opportunities to grow.
- Staffing, both recruitment and retention, remained a challenge across the trust.

7.2 JE concluded by thanking all those involved in governance for the time and effort they put into the trust and the schools.

### **Item 8 School standards overview (Trust Leader)**

8.1 Members had received MC's written report. He drew attention to the following:

- It had been a busy year and although there had been no school closures, Covid had still caused disruption.
- Loose school had had their Ofsted. The outcome was positive and resulted in a clear understanding of the additional work needed to continue the strive for excellence within the schools, including further curriculum development and alignment across the trust, increased working together, and the introduction of a new Phonics scheme.
- SATs tests (the first since 2019) showed KS2 results above national average in Reading, Writing and Maths, and matching the national figure for the combined RWM result; Combined phonics data was 6% higher than National Average; KS1 SATs data was below National Average in all three subject areas.
- Successful growth of leaders was shown in the recruitment of internal candidates for DHT and AHT posts at Loose and Coxheath. Executive coaching is in place for HTs.
- Work continues on centralising functions to improve efficiencies.
- Internal and external reviews continue to be positive and help drive school improvement.
- Safeguarding remains effective in all 3 schools. There is now a nominated Safeguarding trustee as well as nominated local governors.
- Attendance last year was still lower than pre-pandemic levels but in line or above national averages.
- Behaviour remains a strength at all 3 schools.
- All three schools continue to develop their nurture provision to support children.
- Diversity and equality are well promoted at all 3 schools, and all curriculum opportunities are exploited to educate the children.
- Transition arrangements for starters and leavers went smoothly following the disruption caused by Covid in the previous two years.
- Both Loose and Coxheath are full and oversubscribed. St Kath's has a falling roll simply due to local demographics, and a consultation has been held to reduce the Pupil Admission Number (PAN).

8.2 MC concluded by summarising that opportunities for the trust were the potential to grow, though this was not being actively pursued; opportunities for further centralisation of HR and Finance

functions resulting in efficiencies; and scope for further collaboration within the trust. Threats for the trust were uncertainties around finances (rising utility costs, inflation, unfunded pay rises) but the trust had a strong finance team overseeing budgets; outcomes from Ofsted inspections (all 3 schools in the window as Loose to be revisited within 2 years); and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff (a further benefit has recently been added to the offer to make CPP more attractive as an employer).

#### **Item 9 Questions from Members**

*Could MC elaborate on the decision not to proceed with the merger with OAT MAT?*

MC explained that CPP employed a very collaborative style of working with many aligned practices and OAT did not wish to work in such an aligned way, perhaps as their 2 schools were not used to working in this way. He advised the meeting that OAT had approached CPP in the first place, as they had other drivers for their wish to merge, however both sides had agreed the decision not to proceed.

*With difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff, and reducing pupil numbers at St Kath's, was there a possibility of redundancies in the trust despite hopes for growth?*

MC advised there would be no need for redundancies as the reduced PAN at St Kath's had been forecast and natural wastage would cover posts lost. Short term solutions were being employed to cover current vacancies, with little impact on budgets as there was little difference in cost between supply and permanent staff.

#### **Item 10 Trust Annual Report and Audit**

10.1 CC introduced the Annual and Audit reports in the absence of a representative from the auditors. She explained that key audit findings had been very positive, with no weaknesses identified and only small adjustments made. Two low risk findings had come out of the Hacker Young audit, one relating to the Gifts policy, and the other to the issue of employment contracts (one mistake due to human error, no procedural weakness identified).

*Was there any risk of unspent restricted funds being clawed back?*

CC replied that the trust had made sure that all restricted funds (Covid catch up, tutoring and sports funding) had been spent.

*Would there be a benefit in changing auditors next year as costs may be lower and a new pair of eyes might see things differently?*

CC advised that the audit contract would be retendered next year, but on the basis of her experience at other schools she believed CPP was getting a very good deal from current auditors both in terms of cost and attention. KR's fees covered the teacher pension return and accounts return as well as the actual audit while Hacker Young's fees covered 3 audits per year (one for each of 3 areas agreed with the trust). Both companies were completely separate from the trust so provided validation of the sound financial operation of the trust.

#### **Item 11 Reappointment of Auditors**

Members unanimously **APPROVED** the reappointment of Kreston Reeves as CPP's auditors for 22/23.

#### **Item 12 Publication of minutes**

Approved draft minutes would be posted on the Trust website as soon as available (not due for signature until next year's AGM).

Signed: *Steve Knowles*

Date: 06 December 2023