

Attendees: Ilona Bond (IB), Nafia Baust (NB), Alan Lee (AL), Maggie Farrar (MF), Akhtar Ahamed (AA), Alison Wilshaw (AW), Kim Rowe (KR) and Mark Liddiard (ML)

Apologies: Tony Sanderson (TS) and David Morgan (DM)

Chair: Ilona Bond

Governance Professional: Yvonne Humphries

Procedural

Notification of any perceived conflicts of interest: None

Previous Minutes (Trustees 27/1/2026): Previous minutes reviewed and unanimously approved for signature (subject to the removal of the word 'present'). Previous actions reviewed and completed.

Confidential: [REDACTED]

Matters Arising

Safeguarding: Safeguarding Audits were externally completed by Victoria Blackmore during the Spring term – reports and feedback have been positive and shared with the schools and nurseries. Policy changes to reflect KCSIE updates to be reviewed as a later agenda item.

GDPR: No GDPR breaches since the last Trustees' meeting. Guidance updated and trust-wide training has taken place.

Sustainability: Our schools are still working with 'Let's go zero'. PBA have undertaken a value match audit looking and consumables and the supply chain sustainability.

Health & Safety: No Riddor reportable incidents since the last Trustees' meeting. The internal scrutiny Health and Safety report summary review is not quite ready. Small risks identified, mainly around fire safety, £150,000 of SCA funding will be allocated to upgrade electrical.

Action: ML to share H&S internal Scrutiny Summary Report with trustees, once available.

Performance and Wellbeing Committee Update

Pre-read: Performance and Wellbeing Committee meeting minutes (10/3/26) distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for more detail.

Pre-read: Director of Education's Nursery Report distributed prior to the meeting – see report for more detail.

In TS' absence, IB provided trustees with an overview summary from the Performance and Wellbeing Committee:

- Excellent presentation with high levels of enthusiasm from JB, BEST Director of Science
- Very good Director of Education Report that complimented the views shared within the external SIA reports
- Positive external SIA and Safeguarding Reports
- No changes to the educational Risk Register
- PBA will be completing their first set of GCSE exams this Summer – incremental improvements have been seen and there's a lot of intervention work taking place
- CNS English has improved
- LSA are showing pleasing results and are open to suggestions and take feedback on board. The school will complete their first set of SATs in May. The school of one Year 6 class with four pupils who have high SEN
- MH and TC at SCA have been welcoming to the SI team and incremental changes have been seen
- RBA have completed some recommendations but not at the required level. Laser meetings, meetings with HoD and the LCB Chair have taken place to create maximum impact from now until May
- AW has no KS5 concerns

Finance and Audit Committee (FAC) Update

Pre-read: FAC meeting minutes (10/3/26) distributed prior to the meeting – see minutes for more detail

Pre-read: SRMSA Submission document shared prior to the meeting for info purposes – see document for more detail

In DM's absence, KR provided trustees with an overview summary from the Finance and Audit Committee meeting:

- Reviewed 2026/27 assumptions i.e. Staff Pay Award at 2.5% and 2% thereafter; Support staff Pay award at 3%
- Awaiting PBA GAG statement, this has been chased – should be received by the end of the month. GAG statements received are in line with expectations
- Completed budgets are due by Friday
- Post 16 allocations not yet received (received 26/3/25 last year) – calculator can be used to obtain a rough guide
- FAC members approved reducing the bank account limit to £10,000; this is in line with other trusts
- Budget monitoring reviewed and looks positive
- Trading accounts show a surplus and look positive
- Three FAC Chair approvals for transactions exceeding £100,000 (less than £250,000) reviewed
- No benchmarking indicators out of line with other trusts
- SRMSA includes a new question around technology – BEST is currently around 75% compliant and have until 2030 to be 100% compliant; most trusts are similar or worse. This will be picked up by the ICT board to ensure compliance
- Internal payroll audit report is good, with only three low risk actions identified
- Bedford Borough HR and Payroll three year contract has expired with an option for renewal for a further year. The contract has been renewed; expiry has been brought in line with the end of the tax year
- No Financial Risk Register changes were recommended or made

Question: Why have the nurseries funding reduced?

Answer: Relates to the 30 hours of free funding from the local authority, after term one budgeting is clearer.

Monthly Cashflow and Management Accounts

Finance and Audit Committee members i.e. DM, AL, IB, NB and AA receive the cashflow and management accounts reports on behalf of the board of trustees, all of whom were present, agreed they are happy with the accounts and are satisfied the trust is financially sound.

Auditor Tendering Decision

Pre-read: Email and documents shared with BEST Members distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more details.

Four bids received, two shortlisted. Tender presentations were held and presented to a panel made up of FAC Committee members: AL as Accounting Officer, KR as CFO, DM as Chair of FAC and NB as Vice Chair to the Board of Trustees.

A decision and recommendation shared with BEST Members who approved re-appointment of Bishop Fleming. Trustees were able to view all supporting papers used to aid the decision.

Request: Trustees to approve the financial element of the Auditors appointment i.e. £56,575 per year, for three years.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the appointment of Bishop Fleming at a cost of £56,575 per year.

Finance, and Audit & Risk Committee Split Recommendation

Pre-read: 'Draft' terms of reference shared prior to the meeting – see proposed ToRs for more details

In line with the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH), as a MAT with revenue in excess of £50 million, BEST is required to split their Finance and Audit Committee in two: 1. BEST Finance Committee and 2. BEST Audit and Risk Committee.

Draft ToRs shared. ATH sets out much of the guidance i.e. Chair of the Board is unable to sit on the Audit and Risk Committee and each committee must have at least three members. Trustees are happy with the ToRs but these will require further consideration as trustee succession planning/recruitments gets underway in the Summer term.

IB advised BEST are looking to recruit new trustees and would welcome any recommendations. Looking for various skill sets in readiness for a September 2026 start.

PBA 3G Pitch

Pre-read: PBA 3G Pitch Report distributed prior to the meeting – see document for more details

Bedfordshire FA approached Pix Brook Academy (PBA) about a potential opportunity to develop a new floodlit 3G football pitch on the school site. PBA have been working with the Football Foundation in this regard. Upfront costs for design are up to £35,000, PBA are liable to repay the funds if they fail to deliver the project/decline the offer. PBA are working with a bid consultant to submit a bid to the football association.

BEST/PBA would need to pay £150,000 in partnership funding. **Question:** Trustees queried if this was the maximum?

Answer: ML is confident looking at the documentation that £150,000 would be the maximum contribution.

Question: Looks a great opportunity – would this take revenue from Etonbury Academy?

Answer: No, a local football club (Stotfold FC) have 90 teams and are struggling with pitch capacity.

Question: Could costs go up?

Answer: ML advised costs are capped for Trusts.

ML advised the FA would have a legal charge on the land for 21 years – request to be submitted to DfE.

Decision Required: Approval to proceed with the Pix Brook Academy 3G Pitch project and associated Football Foundation agreements.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved support for the PBA 3G Pitch Project, subject to written acceptance from PBA that they are liable to cover the design costs up to £35,000 should they decide not to proceed with the project.

Policies

Pre-read: The following policies were distributed prior to the meeting for review and consideration:

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Sickness Absence Policy

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Leave of Absence Policy

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Family Related Leave Policy

Action: YH to check whether paternity leave should be replaced with 'non-birth partner' within the Family Related Leave policy.

The changes made to the abovementioned policies are required to align with the Employment Rights Act. Updates are mandatory and unions will be updated as a courtesy.

Decision: Trustees unanimously approved the Safeguarding Policy for immediate trust wide use. The policy was amended to align with guidance changes; a full review will take place in line with the annual KCSIE updates during the autumn term.

AOB

The BEST Operations Manager, AA, retires at the end of this week. AA has been a sterling ambassador for the BEST and trustees wanted their thanks and best wishes for the future noted.

Reminder: BEST Mission, Vision and Values Day will take place on 5 May 2026 and will mark 10 years of BEST. Schools will hold their own celebration events with cakes or ice-creams for each of the pupils paid for by the trust. Each school will also have a silver birch tree planted with a plaque marking the anniversary/celebration.

Next meeting: 10:30am on 19 May 2026 at BEST House.

J. Bond

Minutes approved and electronically signed on 19 May 2026.