

## EDUCATION SOUTH WEST TRUST BOARD

Minutes of the meeting of the **Education South West Trust Board** held virtually and at Coombeshead Academy at **6.30pm** on **Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025**.

Name	Role	Present/Absent
Graham Austin GA	Trustee, Chair	<b>Present</b>
Bethany Brooks BB	Trustee	Absent
Gail Brown GB	Trustee	<b>Present via Teams</b>
Annelie Fearon AF	Trustee	<b>Present via Teams</b>
Adrian Hines AH	Trustee, Vice-Chair	<b>Present</b>
David Potter DP	Trustee	<b>Present via Teams</b>
Paul Sampson PS	Trustee	<b>Present</b>
Matthew Shanks MS	Executive Principal and Trust Leader	<b>Present</b>
Jenny Sutton JS	Trustee	<b>Present via Teams</b>
<b>Executive Board</b>		
Rob Coles RCO	Deputy CEO	<b>Present</b>
Jayne Keller JKE	Director of Education	<b>Present</b>
Suzannah Wharf SLW	Director of Education	<b>Present</b>
Stuart White SW	Chief Financial and Operating Officer	<b>Present</b>
<b>Invitees</b>		
Jackie Ridding	Governance Professional	<b>Present via Teams</b>

<b>1</b>	<b><u>WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u></b>	
1.1	Apologies for absence were received from Beth Brooks.	
1.2	Trustees consented to these absences.	
<b>2</b>	<b><u>PECUNIARY AND OTHER INTERESTS</u></b>	
2.1	No declarations of pecuniary or other interests regarding items on the agenda were made.	
2.2	No declarations of gifts or hospitality had been received or given since the last meeting.	
<b>3</b>	<b><u>CHAIR'S UPDATE</u></b>	
	GA reported he had a call with Lucy Livings who was the Regional Director for the South West.	
<b>4</b>	<b><u>ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS</u></b>	
	There was no other urgent business.	
<b>5</b>	<b><u>MINUTES</u></b>	

5.1	The minutes of the meeting held on <b>Friday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2025</b> (copy shared on GovernorHub), having previously been circulated, were <b>confirmed</b> and signed by the Chair.	
5.2	<b><u>Matters arising from the minutes</u></b>	
	There were no matters arising from the minutes.	
<b>6</b>	<b><u>CEO Report</u></b>	
	<p>MS reported funding was a concern, particularly for SEND. He said the trust had been working with Devon for the last 2 years trying to get children back into school rather than alternative provisions.</p> <p>MS reported KEVICC would be opening a SEND unit which would impact their outcomes. He said there were meetings happening to discuss how this would work moving forward. MS said Mark Vickers would be working with Devon as an advisor.</p> <p>MS said the executive team were continuing to engage with schools and trusts outside of ESW and SLW and JKE were trustees of other trusts. He said this work was very important to see what was happening elsewhere.</p> <p>MS reported Newhaven had engaged with the trust and had entered into a full management partnership which would benefit both. He said ESW had set up a formal partnership with South Farnham Educational Trust.</p> <p>MS noted ESW ran the Devon Research School which also worked in Wales and there was lots of outreach work happening. He said the trust had 2 teaching schools working together to deliver qualifications and develop teachers. MS said they had been approached by a Cornwall teaching school about working together.</p> <p><b>Trustees asked how the research school was funded.</b> MS said the funding came from the research school and they would receive approximately £10,000 from the work with Cumbria.</p> <p><b>Trustees asked if the research school was doing any work with the SEND unit.</b> MS said they were and had led on reading, literacy and oracy. SLW explained Jon Eaton had done some work with literacy but not specifically for SEND.</p>	
<b>7</b>	<b><u>TRUST IMPROVEMENT</u></b>	
7.1	<b><u>Education Improvement Plan 2025/26</u></b>	
	<p>The Deputy CEO report was shared on GovernorHub prior to the meeting which included the 5-year Education Improvement Plan and the updated state of the nation which demonstrated school improvement. RCO said they were currently analysing the data which would be presented at the Performance and Standards Committee meeting in January 2026.</p> <p><b>Trustees asked if South Devon UTC was expected to move out of the stabilise category.</b> RCO said the school had received a good Ofsted grade in 2021 and had improved since then. He said they were stronger in all they were doing but there were more challenges. SLW said the children who attended South Devon UTC needed the highest quality teaching and had the most barriers to their learning. RCO reported the</p>	

	<p>school had lots of upper pay scale teachers who were also receiving coaching. He said they were due an Ofsted inspection and if they got through that, the school could move into the repair category.</p> <p>Trustees noted the issues at South Devon UTC were similar to those at other university technical colleges (UTC). They asked if the data from South Devon UTC could be compared to other UTCs. MS said it was difficult to compare because all UTCs were very different but they did compare the data with other similar UTCs. He said it was important not to make excuses. RCO explained they had done lots of work on the context of the school and had noted the improvement in attendance and children returning to the school from elective home education. He said the children were receiving qualifications in healthcare and engineering and they were also teaching maths and English.</p> <p>Trustees noted a local school had closed due to the number of flu cases and asked if there was expected to be a similar situation within ESW. SLW explained headteachers had been asked to ensure the remote learning plans were up to date to allow for closure due to illness and weather. She said there had been some staff absence but not as severe as in some other schools. MS noted there could be some impact on attendance.</p> <p>RCO reported KCC were continuing with the smartphone ban and said there had been a stage 3 complaints hearing on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2025 relating to this.</p> <p>Trustees asked when they would have data from the smartphone ban. MS explained KCC was much calmer without phones being allowed in the school. He said there was a soft launch of the policy at the school because parents wanted to have the ability to track their children. SLW noted children were at greater risk having their phones and accessing the internet.</p> <p>Trustees discussed the technology parents could use in place of smartphones to track their children.</p>	
7.2	<b><u>Primary Outcomes 2025 and RSL Strategy 2025/26</u></b>	
	The primary data would be discussed at the next Performance and Standards Committee meeting once it had been analysed.	
7.3	<b><u>Secondary Outcomes 2025 and RSL Strategy 2025/26</u></b>	
	The secondary data would be discussed at the next Performance and Standards Committee meeting once it had been analysed.	
7.4	<b><u>Early Destinations Data 2025</u></b>	
	This item was not discussed.	
7.5	<b><u>People Strategy – leadership and development / CPD</u></b>	
	This item was not discussed.	
8	<b><u>FINANCE REPORTS AND SHARED SERVICES UPDATE</u></b>	
8.1	<b><u>Shared Services Verbal Report</u></b>	

	<p>SW reported the building work in the summer holiday had included extensive refurbishment, an all-weather pitch at KCC, an upgrade to the pre-school facilities at Blackawton and the toilet facilities and fitness studio were upgraded at Coombeshead. He said the IT department had replaced lots of laptops and iPads.</p> <p>SW reported Devon had approved the work for the SEND unit at KEVICC and a contractor had been appointed. He said the work should be finished before Christmas 2025 which was funded by Devon County Council.</p> <p>SW said the HR system was in the data capture phase and the core payroll and core HR systems would be built with the unassisted testing planned for after Christmas. He said they would start with the back-office systems before they moved to the front office.</p> <p>SW reported there were delays with Homelands joining the trust due to a lack of action from the Torbay legal team. He said an external legal team had been employed but the DfE had pushed the joining date back to April 2026.</p> <p>SW reported the first year of the new catering model had been largely successful and sustainable. He said they had started the year by training the kitchen leaders.</p> <p>SW said there had been continued work on the data warehouse and educational tools. He said a school on a page (SOAP) had been shared with leaders.</p> <p>SW reported the app-based alert to warn of intruders was live and had been tested in all schools.</p>	
8.6	<b><u>Digital and technology standards</u></b>	
	<p>SW reported the trust were almost 100% compliant with the DfE issued digital and technology standards and the report was shared on GovernorHub prior to the meeting. He said they were still waiting for full fibre internet in some of the schools.</p> <p><b>Trustees asked about the physical security standard relating to the servers and related storage and asked how they could meet it.</b> SW said they could possibly meet this standard by not having servers in primary schools.</p> <p><b>Trustees asked if there was any concern with continuity and the risk of a major digital outage.</b> SW explained this was listed on the new risk register and said they had a well-developed strategy with the network resilience. He said this had been enhanced to provide resilience with recovery and backup. SW explained they had looked at the internet connectivity and where they had core hubs, they had 2 internet connections. He said the strategic planning was in place for the internal network and external connectivity.</p> <p><b>Trustees asked if there was a plan if the internet went down in all schools and if the schools would still be able to run effectively.</b> SW explained in most classrooms, they would be able to plug the computers into the wall. He said his had recently happened at KCC and they were able to keep everything working. SW said they were trying to mitigate any outage as much as possible and was confident they had a high level of resilience.</p>	
8.5	<b><u>Sustainability</u></b>	

	<p>SW shared information on the climate action plan on GovernorHub prior to the meeting. He noted the zero-carbon fund had been withdrawn which had an impact on the work the trust would be able to do.</p> <p>SW reported if capital works needed doing, they would use sustainable resources but were not changing anything unless it was needed. He said Tom Pether was leading on the climate action plan with classroom activities with the children.</p> <p>SW said they were making progress on building the energy data.</p> <p>Trustees noted the trust was making lots of progress on the climate action plan even without the funding. They suggested the trust should publicise the work they were doing.</p>	
8.2	<b><u>Remuneration Committee Report</u></b>	
	<p>Trustees noted the Remuneration Committee met on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and the increases were confirmed by email.</p> <p>Trustees had noted a member of staff had moved up 2 points. They asked if the trust was recognising the great things the staff were doing. MS explained the system was quite formulaic but the unions had agreed they could have a 1-year gap instead of 2 with the upper pay scale.</p>	
8.3	<b><u>Finance Committee and Audit and Risk Committee Reports</u></b>	
	The Finance Committee and Audit and Risk Committee met prior to the Trust Board meeting. GA noted the trust had achieved another clean audit.	
8.4	<b><u>Annual Report and Financial Statements</u></b>	
	Trustees <b>approved</b> the annual report and financial statements. They noted the audit completion report.	
<b>9</b>	<b><u>SAFEGUARDING</u></b>	
	MS said there was nothing to report.	
<b>10</b>	<b><u>GOVERNANCE</u></b>	
10.1	Trustees confirmed they had all completed the ID verification with Companies House.	
10.2	<p>Trustees <b>approved</b> the local governing body appointments of new governors, reappointments and chairs.</p> <p>RCO reported the Wynstream LGB was very community based and the LGB was developing. GA noted at the Chairs' Forum some chairs reported they were struggling to recruit new governors.</p>	
10.3	Trustees noted the feedback from the local governing body meetings. They noted Christow Primary School had developed a Hedge Hub which was a calm space at lunchtime.	

10.4	RCO reported more training sessions had been held. He said there had been fewer resignations so the attendance at the induction training was lower.  RCO reported the primary and secondary curriculum training had been very popular.	
<b>11</b>	<b><u>POLICIES</u></b>	
	Trustees reviewed and <b>approved</b> the following policies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pay Policy</li> <li>• Sexual Harassment Policy</li> <li>• Support Staff Appraisal Policy</li> </ul> Trustees noted there had been an amendment to the pay policy about executive pay. RCO agreed to add a summary of changes to the policy.	<b>AP1</b>
<b>12</b>	<b><u>MATTERS BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE CHAIR OR CEO</u></b>	
	GA said he would review the areas of responsibility for the trustees.  MS thanked the staff and trustees for their work.	<b>AP2</b>
<b>13</b>	<b><u>DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></b>	
	Trustees confirmed that the next meeting would be held at <b>KEVICC</b> at <b>6.30pm</b> on <b>Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 following the AGM.</b>  Trustees agreed the programme of meeting dates for the remainder of the 2025/2026 academic year as follows:  <b>Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at 6.00pm</b> <b>Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2026 at 6.00pm</b> <b>Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> July 2026 at 6.00pm</b>	

The meeting closed at 7.47pm.

Signed

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Dated

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#### Action log

Action point	Agenda item	Action	By whom	By when	Status
AP1	11	RCO to update the summary of changes to the pay policy.	RCO	Next meeting	
AP2	12	GA to review the trustee areas of responsibility.	GA	Next meeting	