# Members meeting
# Held on 24th September 2026 at 6 pm via Teams
# Draft Part I Minutes

**Present:** A Walmsley (Chair of trustees), C Mabin (EDEN), D Roberts (SDBE), and T Wilkes (BWDBE)

**In attendance:** P Walker (CEO), and I Candy (Lead governance professional)

**Quorum (2):** the meeting is quorate

**Circulation:** Directors, Members and Dioceses (through GovernorHub), public (Trust website)

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| | Decision | | Action due |

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| **1. Welcome and apologies** | |
| Apologies were received from Anna Mountford Zimdars (family commitment). | |
| **2. Prayer** | |
| Let by D Roberts. | |
| **3. Declaration of Business/Conflict of Interests and Code of Conduct** | |
| Declaration of interests were invited by the chair. None were made. Members were reminded of the code of conduct. | |
| **4. Election of chair for this meeting** | |
| A Walmsley was appointed as chair for this meeting by Members. | |
| **5. Minutes of the last Members meeting (AGM held on 22 Jan 2026)** | |
| ***5.1. To agree the minutes of the last meeting*** | |
| The minutes of the last Members meeting were agreed to be an accurate record of the meeting and marked as approved in GovernorHub following the meeting. | |
| ***5.2. To review matters arising not otherwise on the agenda*** | |
| There were no matters arising not otherwise on the agenda. | |
| **6. Review of the last academic year and plans for the current one** | |
| The Ofsted reports for the inspections at Aveton Gifford, Gatehouse, Brixington and Charmouth, the SIAMS reports for the inspection at Mrs Ethelston' and Portesham, and a summary of provisional 2026 pupil outcomes were circulated ahead of the meeting.<br>The CEO reported that:<br>• 2025-26 had been a positive year for the Trust.<br>• The Trust has expanded the year before [2024-25] which had had quite an impact because of challenging pupil and Ofsted outcomes, and financial issues. Therefore 2025-26 had been about bedding down and getting to know the joiner schools well. There were some issues that had not been found during the due diligence process because some information had not been shared.<br>• The Trust had taken a different approach for the past 12 months because of this, and also because of some existing FFT schools having low pupil outcomes too. The SI team had focussed on a group of schools called priority schools.<br>• That approach had proven to be impactful as most 2026 provisional pupil outcomes were near or at national average. Joiner schools had responded very well, and the different approach had significantly improved these | |

schools. For example, at Axminster the percentage of Year 6 attaining expected standards in Reading, Writing and Maths had increased from 17% to nearly 62%.

- The outcome of Ofsted inspections had all been a fair reflection of where the schools inspected were, and in some case slightly better, for example at Brixington
- The outcome of all SIAMS inspections was judgement 1 (the schools living up to their Christian foundation).
- Charmouth had initially improved but then a number of issues had quietly grown. For example, there was parental protest and pressure groups: the school received up to 25 emails in one day, all saying "I'm all about inclusion but" or "I am all about these pupils being in the school but not in my child's class". One of the teachers had had some significant ill health. The head was unwell and this had impacted his wellbeing. He had then left the Trust by mutual consent. The inspection was successfully deferred but rescheduled for the following week. This meant the inspection took place without a substantive head, with intensive support from the Trust. The outcome was not what the Trust would have initially wanted but was fair. A new head, whose strength was community relations, had now transferred from another school, Marshwood. Charmouth had now been identified as being supported by RISE.
- The Trust was continuing to support a school in Exmouth as the partner for RISE.
- The Trust had also made significant progress on finances, by changing the approach on financial planning, led by the new Director of Finance. The Trust was looking at building an "opportunity pot" as the financial situation improved.
- The Trust had a new Director of Operations who had joined in December and was working on all operations aspects at speed.
- The Trust had restructured the central team to save costs. The operations team now included a new head of IT and procurement, head of estates, and head of HR.
- The Trust was starting this year with a much better baseline for pupil outcomes. It was expecting a number of Ofsted inspections. There were some new heads in post.
- SEND and inclusion continued to be a challenge.
- Falling rolls had started to stabilise. Some schools had seen a slight rise in pupil numbers in year.
- The Trust had identified more priority schools for this year, but these were starting from a higher base line.
- The Trust was also working on good and great schools to help good schools continue to improve.
- The Trust had had a positive start of the year when last year had been a difficult year due to the need to significantly raise outcomes. For example, the Year 6 day held recently had drawn some positive feedback from teachers.

The chair echoed the CEO in his assessment that last year had been hard work, in particular for the executive team, and for some schools which were facing difficult circumstances. Furthermore, the chair echoed the CEO comments about outcomes having considerably improved, in particular the percentage of Year 6 pupils attaining expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths, although that measure was still just below national average.

***Members enquired about attendance.***

Attendance was roughly in line with national overall, although one pupil could cause it to vary significantly in smaller schools. The Trust had a strong system in place.

The chair highlighted that:

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| • The Trust had had some issues with contractors for the Sidmouth rebuild project. The Trust had been hoping the Manstone site would reopen in September but there were delays due to National Grid and the school was now expecting to move in the new build at half term. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to see the new building as this project had been 5 years in the making. There would be a formal opening and Members would be invited. The Trust was in contact with Exeter Diocese around handing back the site at Vicarage Road.<br>• There were also some ongoing building issues at Mrs Ethelston's which were being worked on. Whilst funds from the Bestic Trust were not sufficient to envisage building a new school in the near future, they had offered a contribution to repair costs.<br>• The outcome of the SIAMS inspection at Portesham was pleasing because trustees had had some concerns over time around it. The inspector had recognised the impact of the Trust and how the Trust had worked flexibly with the school to get to this positive outcome. The inspector was very positive in their feedback to chair and the outcome reflected well on the team who had worked with the school. The Trust was now getting better engagement from the school, together with an understanding that being part of a collective was useful.<br>***Members queried whether the Trust felt like getting to that result had been the key to starting a positive trend.***<br>The head had had a difficult Ofsted inspection in the past, and this had negatively affected her view and approach to inspection in general. Therefore the Trust had worked sensitively to help support the school and head around inspections. The Trust had taken part in several flourishing programme, including the SI officer for the school. The Church Schools SI officer had worked really effectively with the school. Pupil numbers had stabilised and the school may reopen the nursery. There had also been a change in clergy which would enable the school to start a new relationship with the local church. It also helped that there are more local schools close to Portesham within the Trust, for example Chickerell.<br>***Members enquired whether the Trust had a sense of their reputation in the Dorset area.***<br>The parents at the time at Charmouth were very opiniated that the school and Trust were at fault. The changes in leadership had been helpful, and the new head had been welcome. The Trust knew that school reputations could change fast. For example, there was now another Dorset school where the head had changed and a parent had created a WhatsApp group because they were unhappy with the school. This parent referred to redundancies and actions by another trust in the area, but other parents disagreed with this parent. The previous head of the school had been approached by some parents and had helped to address some of the misconceptions, which was helpful.<br>***Members probed around pupil numbers for the very small schools, and whether there were any concerns about their viability.***<br>The Trust smallest schools had not got any smaller and remained financially viable. Parents tended to like those because they felt they worked better for SEND and PP children. The Trust was keeping the situation under review and was determined to keep them open. However, the Trust had declined to take on another small school that another trust was consulting on closing. The Trust board had challenged the executive around small schools, not because of financial concerns, but because they wanted to make sure that these small schools provided a good education and were beneficial to the pupils attending those.<br>***Members asked whether any of the priority schools or previous priority schools are within the Ofsted window.*** | **CEO** |

The Trust was continuing to focus on schools that were priority schools last year but were no longer priority schools this year when they were coming to their Ofsted inspection window. The Trust had worked hard on pupils with high needs who were sometimes admitted in year, and whose challenging needs could at times negatively affect overall achievement.

***Members asked for more information about the restructure of the central team, in particular whether there had been any redundancies***.

The Trust had reduced part of the business team from six generalist business managers to four specialist "heads of" positions. It had also reduced the inclusion team. This was to have the right people for the needs of current pupils. There was now a new Trust attendance lead. The Trust had also combined the role of vulnerable and SEND pupil lead because they wanted schools to focus on meeting the needs of those pupils.

***Members probed about growth.***

The schools that transferred from the Acorn trust had settled in well. Exeter Road Community Primary School (Exmouth) was expected to join the Trust this year. The Trust growth strategy was due to be reviewed but the Trust approach to growth had not changed: it was not looking at growth but continued to be approached by interested schools.. There were still many schools in some of the Trust areas, for example in East Devon, that were not yet part of a multi-academy trust. The Trust was now in a better place in terms of central structures and codifying how the Trust worked. Pupil outcomes were key in terms of growth for the DfE, and the significant progress made in 2026 will be helpful. The deputy DfE regional director had visited the Trust a few times.

***Members asked what the three biggest risks were for the Trust.***

These were SEND, capital funding for estates (whilst the Trust was now better at planning in this area, there continued to be large projects that needed to be undertaken such as roofs) and the need to maintain high pupil outcomes within the poorly performing South West area. Pupil numbers would also need to continue to be carefully monitored, as would changes in government policy and their potential impact.

The chair reported that:

- The Trust board was in the process of commissioning an External Review of Governance (ERG) and was looking at three potential providers, CST, ImpactEd and Browne Jacobson.
- The board was looking at succession planning for trustees generally, succession planning for the chair because of his length of time in post, and also at the interactions with hub boards which were not consistent and, in some cases, had challenges because some hub board members were mostly interested in their school and not much interested in the other schools within their hub or the Trust.

The CEO added that:

- On the whole, the governance volunteers retained from Acorn had liked the Trust governance structure and were contributing efficiently.
- The ERG would help to ensure that governance structures continued to reflect the needs of the Trust.

***Members enquired whether a new date had been set for the governance conference.***

The Trust would consult with governance volunteers around which days and times would work best for them. The Trust wanted to engage stakeholders with the development of the new strategic plan and was looking at when to reschedule the conference to best contribute to that process. More generally, the Trust would be using an external provider for surveys of stakeholders, running them at the recommended time, to inform the plan. The surveys would also provide helpful benchmarks.

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| [The CEO left the meeting at this point due to an external commitment.]<br>The chair asked whether Members were happy with the engagement of the Trust with their diocese. The chair explained that he was conscious that, as the Trust board was relatively small and two trustees were CEOs of another MAT, this limited engagement during the day. There was also one trustee who had had health issues and has therefore had to limit his engagement. This had meant that the chair has had to do more and therefore has had to miss some meetings and events. He wanted to make sure that the Trust was not missing opportunities to engage with dioceses.<br>Bath & Wells were particularly appreciative of the attendance at meetings from the chair and LGP given the Trust only had one school in their diocese.<br>Other members concurred about the positive level of engagement from the Trust. They were aware that this could fluctuate because of having commitments across a number of partners.<br>***Members asked about the Trust engagement with LAs.***<br>The Trust had a strong working relationship with Devon, with both the CEO and chairs being particularly involved, and was challenging the LA where needed. Relationships with Dorset and Plymouth were less well established, however the Trust has fewer schools in those areas. There had been some engagement with the White Horse federation and some of the events they run, which was useful in terms of making local contacts in the Dorset area. The Trust was engaging with place planning led by the Ted Wragg Trust for both Plymouth and Devon. The changes in key personnel in Dorset had sometimes hampered the relationship building.<br>Members were conscious that engaging with the LAs was important, because small schools were an issue in both Dorset and Devon, and there was no strategy for small maintained schools. They wanted to encourage engagement with Dorset because they felt the Trust had lot to offer in terms of small schools as the LA was facing a challenge around those. It was suggested that the Trust may want to use other central staff than the CEO to engage with Dorset to spread the engagement.<br>***Members enquired which trust would lead the RISE involvement for Charmouth.***<br>It would be Cornerstone CEO as initial link, a trust that was a very IT based trust and used AI for lessons, and whose CEO had also done a really useful talk about AI for the Devon chairs network run by the chair.<br>The chair reported that:<br>• The Trust was looking at ways of changing the approach to complaints for example to expand the pool of people dealing with those.<br>• The candidate to the role of trustee had a professional role dealing with risk management and AI, which would be helpful.<br>• The board had engaged with PHP around recruitment and succession planning. PHP view was that the Trust should advertise nationally to recruit trustees. The board however felt that the Trust was relatively small in terms of pupil numbers, dioceses valued engagement with the school and church communities, and therefore felt the Trust should be rooted in its communities with the majority of trustees being embedded in community rather than having a fully virtual board.<br>Diocesan Members agreed with trustees needing to understand the Trust school context to engage meaningfully.<br>One Member explained that when they had been approached by an individual based in the South East about a governance opportunity, they had suggested to the individual that they should find a role nearer their geographical area.<br>Members suggested that an update around succession planning and growing the board at their next meeting.<br>A Member reported that they had been asked by an Ofsted inspector about another trust how that Trust monitored and evaluated the quality of education, | **CEO**<br><br>**Chair / LGP** |

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| and about how Members held the Trust board to account. This was as part of a 30 minute call with the inspector, which included 15 minutes on the effectiveness of governance and the role of the diocese in this. They wanted to share this because that may mean that governance was getting more scrutiny and having the ERG may be helpful in that regards.<br>The chair explained that:<br>• The board wanted the ERG to reflect the Trust context and challenges, and therefore wanted to choose a provider that could offer a bespoke approach rather than a set, rigid, template driven one.<br>• The Trust was aware that it would need to recruit several new trustees in the short to medium term, because of the age profile of current trustees.<br>• The Trust was in the process of recruiting a new trustee for the role of audit and risk committee and had identified a candidate who the board believed met the SDBE foundation criteria, to fill one of the two SDBE vacancies.<br>• The board had received some reassurance about the Trust SI model from the SI review undertaken by Challenge Partners about 18 months prior to this meeting.<br>• It could be difficult for trustees to balance the requirements to be strategic whilst at the same time there were some mandatory lead roles set by the DfE, for example proposed around food standards.<br>The meeting went into Part II to discuss confidential matters.<br>The meeting went back into Part I.<br>Members asked for the key headlines from the new estates return to be shared with them, because estates had been mentioned several times.<br>The chair confirmed that the Trust board kept oversight of key projects and repairs and was aware that the Trust had an aging Victorian estate. He pointed out that the return was more about strategy than the state of the estate and that, as the new Director of Operations approached matters in a strategic way, she was well equipped to deal with this. Her team had already started to collate estates issues and started to prioritise those to help plan against available funding. The Trust was hoping to be in a better place at the end of this year and be able to use reserves over 5% to focus on inclusion matters which in some cases would be estates related. A CEO strength was systems, structures and processes.<br>Members thanked the chair and LGP for their contribution to the Trust. The chair also thanked the LGP for her support and contribution. | **Chair / LGP** |

Meeting start: 6 pm, meeting close: 7.35 pm

Dated of next meeting: 28 Jan 2027 at 6 pm

**These minutes are agreed by those present as being a true record.**

**Signed:**…… **Date:**……..
Chair