



Heartwood Learning Trust Board of Trustees

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 21st May 2025 at 6.00pm Via Google Meet

Present: Jane Lewis (Chair of Trustees) Karen Osborne
Joe McKeogh Patrick Looker

In Attendance: Helen Winn (CEO, HLT)
Wendy Munro (COO, HLT) [to 8.03pm]
Mandy Watson (HR Director, HLT) [from 6.07pm to 6.38pm]
Georgina Holman (Governance Advisor, Clerk)

		Action
1.	<u>Welcome & Opening Prayer, Apologies for Absence, Any Other Business and Declarations of Interest</u> The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting which opened with a prayer. Apologies were received, with consent, from Andrew Simpkin. There were two items of AOB to add to the agenda. In relation to discussions regarding City of York Council (CYC), Patrick Looker declared an interest as CYC employee.	
2.	<u>Minutes of the previous meeting, action plan and matters arising</u> – previously distributed A Trustee requested a clarification in the minutes to reflect which school had been inspected. On the basis of this amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26th March 2025 were agreed to be a true and accurate record and were duly approved. With reference to the action plan: - Updated Uniform Policy to be circulated to Trustees via email for approval. Completed. - Clerk and Chair to look at cycle of meetings and where best scheduled. In progress. Clerk to share draft with Chair, COO & CEO. A Trustee strategy day to be included. - COO to confirm clerking contract with CYC. Completed. - RAG rate Gender Pay Gap Strategy Action Plan and re-circulate to Trustees. Completed, on this agenda, item 5. - HR Director to attend next Board meeting. Completed, on this agenda, item 5. - Recruitment and retention of Principals to be added as a risk on the risk register. Carried forward. - Clerk to send updated information on Trustee safeguarding training to Compliance Officer. Clerk to reshare declaration with all Trustees to complete.	Clerk CEO Clerk

	8. Chair of Trustees to meet with COO regarding allegations against staff. The Chair confirmed that this was now scheduled. 9. Chair to circulate applicant's CV to Trustees. The Chair updated Trustees on the proposed appointment for ASA LGC. 10. Policy Tracker to be shared with Audit and Risk Committee. Completed.	
5.	<u>Gender Pay Gap Update (taken out of order)</u> – previously distributed *Gender Pay Gap Action Plan The Trust's HR Director, Mandy Watson, had been invited to share an update on the actions stemming from the Trust's Gender Pay Gap Strategy. Mandy acknowledged that there were a number of actions that remained incomplete or yet to commence. A Trustee questioned whether there were any initial plans for unaddressed actions and whether it was a question of capacity. Mandy advised that capacity issues had hampered further progress with the actions, but there was a good understanding of the work required and the intent. A Trustee asked for an example of work in progress on an action. Mandy outlined the work to improve workplace flexibility, which had been identified as a key barrier for women progressing in their career. A new flexible working policy was being developed which would see all requests reviewed centrally in order to monitor the decisions and challenge these, where appropriate, to ensure that leaders were taking requests into consideration equitably across the Trust. This would apply to flexible working arrangements for those currently working within the organisation or those coming back to work following leave. Mandy went on to advise that further research was underway to look at what other organisations, including other trusts, were doing and how best practice could be implemented at Heartwood. The COO highlighted that over the past 12 months all flexible working requests from staff returning from maternity leave had been accepted. Mandy advised that there was a need to challenge the established mindset and culture regarding part time work and to consider how roles could be undertaken on reduced hours and encourage this. Job adverts were now stating that part-time and flexible working would be considered. A Trustee welcomed these developments and asked whether there were any examples of this resulting in staff joining the organisation on part-time or flexible working arrangements. Mandy advised that this had been the case for two recent Vice Principal appointments. The CEO pointed out that there were also senior leaders in the Trust working part-time. The CEO went on to note that this was a cultural shift which might be more challenging for some families where children had two class teachers for example and further work would be needed to look at this. A Trustee asked whether there was any data to show whether the pay gap was reducing. The CEO advised that the Trust had a number of female principals, however, higher paid colleagues were disproportionately male. The CEO acknowledged that there was disparity in the upper quartiles among secondary school staff and the executive team. Mandy advised that 75% of the Trust staff were female compared to 68% of staff in the upper quartile. A Trustee surmised that there was most likely a higher proportion of female staff in the lowest paid quartile and work was needed to encourage women into the higher paid roles whilst also encouraging men into the lower quartile. Mandy explained that the lower paid roles were mostly term time and part time hours which were traditionally largely filled by women due to cultural norms. The Trust's approach was to try to facilitate career progression for female staff. Already, feedback from the Women in Leadership programme was reflecting the benefits of this with more women gaining in confidence to apply for positions as a result of the work to reduce barriers. A Trustee asked whether a more focussed approach was required, given the size of the organisation, and looking at pay for example, rather than flexible working arrangements. The CEO advised that the flexible working provisions were now in place but there was still work to do to shift	

	the culture. The Women in Leadership programme had been very successful, seeing female staff progress internally and externally over the last few years and with members of the current cohort already applying for more senior positions. The CEO concluded that this was a proven area of success on which the Trust should continue to focus. <i>The Chair questioned whether other type of carer roles impacted upon staff and were understood and considered.</i> The CEO explained that the flexible working policy covered all such scenarios. Mandy gave the example of the persisting belief that female teaching staff should progress their careers before having a family and how this was exactly what was now being challenged. The CEO highlighted that another known barrier for women was the menopause and the impact this could have upon women's confidence. Mandy advised that a Menopause policy had been introduced and 'Menopause Cafes' had recently commenced to encourage staff to share experiences, resources and understanding. Mandy described the impact and benefit of this initiative so far with a view to this reducing people leaving the organisation. <i>With reference to encouraging people to return to work, the Chair asked about the time frame for actions.</i> Mandy explained that work was underway to look at various teaching and support career pathways and this would continue over the summer. The intention was to develop a return to work programme and grant to encourage people back to the sector after a career break. The COO noted that the Trust had approximately 1200 employees and the HR team did not currently have the desired capacity to drive work forward, due to the priority need to respond to school issues. Consequently, the Trust was seeking to recruit a new HR officer which would release Mandy to focus on more strategic projects. <i>A Trustee suggested that priority work be identified within the action plan, given the volume of work outstanding.</i> It was noted that the scope and ambition of the plan were to be commended. The COO advised that Mandy was developing a GANTT chart to reflect the actions. Mandy explained that the plan was ambitious and would therefore take longer to realise. Trustees discussed when an update on the Gender Pay Gap work should be brought back to the Board. It was agreed that this would be helpful to have as part of the Trustee strategy day. <i>A Trustee asked when Gender Pay Gap data would be available for the current year.</i> Mandy advised that the data would be submitted over the summer and could be reported back to Trustees at the December meeting or in the spring term alongside the Trust's own data. Trustees agreed that the data and update on actions should be shared at the strategy day. Trustees thanked Mandy for all her work and the helpful oversight of actions underway. <i>Mandy Watson left the meeting at 6.38pm</i>	
3.	<u>CEO Report</u> – documents previously distributed *Leadership Principles The CEO explained the rationale for developing a series of principles to codify the Trust's values and gave an overview of how these had been developed collaboratively with input from a range of staff and pupils. The CEO invited feedback from Trustees before progressing further with a view to launching the principles at the start of the new academic year. Trustees welcomed the values in practice. There was a discussion about individual interpretations of treating others as you would like to be treated. The CEO explained that fairness and kindness were the focus rather than any literal meaning but advised that this would be fed back and discussed further. It was also noted that consistency was required in listing the values in a specific order. The CEO agreed that this would need to be addressed in the formatting.	

	*CEO Report May 25 With reference to the report, the CEO gave a summary of key points to note, beginning with the work underway at ASA where the team continued to make good progress, despite the complexities. The work of the Trust's Executive Principal and the Interim Principal had made a significant impact upon behaviour, ensuing systems were embedded and strong interventions in place. <i>The following discussion has been recorded separately in confidential minutes.</i> With respect to the RISE advisor, the CEO informed Trustees that visits had been carried out to ASA, Graham and George Pindar schools and the advisor would take back findings to help identify a comparable MAT with a similar demographic to match with Heartwood. This would be a successful MAT that had managed to make substantial improvements in attendance and outcomes. The CEO explained that the advisor had taken a pragmatic approach and had seen all the systems and structures in place within Heartwood. The Trust was very much ready to adopt any recommended practices that would be of benefit. Turning to Barlby High School, the CEO advised that the school keenly awaited its next Ofsted visit. Work at George Pindar School continued to be embedded, although this was impacted by attendance issues which affected both George Pindar and Graham schools. However, improvements in attendance for SEN-K and FSM cohorts had been evidenced at Graham which was very positive. Trustee Karen Osborne gave a verbal update on her Trustee visit to Graham School with two LGC governors and the Trust's Director of Education. The visit had observed good progress in classrooms with strong adherence to strategies and behaviour had generally been good. Subject leaders were passionate and committed to improving standards and this was evidenced in the departments visited. Pupil voice feedback had been gathered and this reflected greater confidence and feelings of safety amongst older pupils. The Principal would be revisiting a buddying scheme to better support younger year groups. All pupils knew how to report concerns and had confidence in being listened to and that concerns would be acted upon. The CEO updated Trustees on the new Principal appointment at the school and the role of a Trust Vice Principal to support with the transition process.	
4.	Attendance –previously distributed *DfE Attendance Data - Primary *DfE Attendance Data – Secondary The CEO advised that the reports from the DfE were a helpful new insight into attendance data. The implementation of Power BI across all schools had been well received and the platform was used effectively, resulting in access to much more data. Work was still required on attendance at primary schools but the secondary data was more concerning, showing that the Trust's secondaries had lower attendance than other secondaries with similar contexts. This had led to a meeting with the DfE to discuss strategies and a letter summarising the outcome of this meeting had been included on the agenda. <i>This has been recorded in the separate confidential minutes.</i> In terms of immediate next steps, colleagues had attended the DfE conference where strong practice was shared. Investment into rewards schemes was also allocated for schools to encourage attendance over the summer term, when this would historically decline. The Trust was developing a playbook for attendance based on best practice which would set out standard operating procedures. The Trust's Executive Principal and the CEO would be attending the next DfE conference which would focus on a strategic perspective and monitoring of attendance. The CEO advised that work would now focus on strategies that were shown to have an impact and there was confidence in this approach as a result of the initial signs of improvement in attendance at ASA, Graham and Barlby schools.	

	The CEO went on to advise that the next academic year would see schools adapt their strategic plans to incorporate a greater attendance focus. The Executive Principal would be setting individual targets for schools over the next half term and these would be shared with the Trust Board alongside progress. The Chair noted that attendance was critical in terms of children accessing their education and attendance could also be a safeguarding issue for vulnerable children. This would remain a standing agenda item for the Trust Board over the next year as well as being scrutinised at sub-committee level. The CEO added that attendance was also planned as a topic for the governor conference. The COO highlighted the importance of behaviour and attendance and the benefit of additional director positions within the Trust to lead on Behaviour and Attendance. The COO suggested that this was something to consider in the near future to support with attendance and behaviour strategies. The CEO agreed that there was a need for a lead worker to model and monitor the strategy and provide greater leadership capacity. A Director of Attendance would be the highest priority. <i>With reference to attendance targets for schools, a Trustee queried whether this was helpful, given there were so many aspects beyond a school's control, and asked what the consequences would be for school's not meeting targets.</i> The CEO acknowledged that it was difficult but explained that the level of data now allowed a more forensic analysis of attendance issues, looking at each day of the week for example. This allowed more realistic and achievable targets to be set. The CEO highlighted the improvement in attendance at Vale of York <i>A Trustee reflected on the pupil voice feedback gathered at Graham School in relation to attendance.</i> One of the main reasons students gave for not wanting to come to school was good weather. <i>The Trustee pointed out that schools needed to create a sense of belonging so that pupils wanted to attend regardless of the weather. This was a difficult cultural issue to overcome.</i> The CEO agreed that improvements would be seen alongside a cultural shift. <i>The following discussion has been recorded in separate confidential minutes.</i>	
6.	<u>Risk Register</u> – previously distributed *May 2025 Risk Register <i>The Chair queried the risk for attendance.</i> The CEO explained that this was separated into secondary attendance risk and was RAG rated red. <i>The Chair pointed out that each school was in a different position with respect to attendance and grouping them all together would make it difficult to consider the mitigating factors for each setting and to reduce the overall risk.</i> The CEO advised that the register had grouped risks in order to avoid splitting risks into individual schools and creating a much more complex document. The CEO proposed grouping risks in bandings which would allow the register to show a greater level of mitigation and improvement without separating out lists of risks. <i>A Trustee suggested that overall responsibility for attendance should sit with the Trust Board rather than a sub-committee. The Chair agreed that this would reflect the understanding that attendance was a very important strategic issue for the Trust.</i> <i>A Trustee questioned the risk associated with the primary phase financial stability.</i> The COO explained the challenges for primary budgeting which was reflected nationally. The COO pointed out that the Alternative Provisions had been added back to the Risk Register due to the impact of staffing issues within the local authority. <i>A Trustee suggested the Trust look at the contractual arrangements with the local authority.</i> The COO advised that there was a risk but the current relationship with the Assistant Director for Learning and Skills at Hull City Council was good.	
7.	<u>Appointment of Internal Auditors</u> – previously distributed	

	*Internal Audit – Central Team Report The COO outlined the tendering process for appointing internal auditors. Trustee Joe McKeogh had participated in the process and highlighted the strengths of the recommended provider. A Trustee questioned the scoring methodology which had given the preferred provider a very low score on price and asked whether this was within budget. The COO advised that the preferred provider's quote was in line with the Trust's current internal audit fees. A Trustee queried the weighting accorded to non-price considerations. The COO explained that the recommended provider had shown a far greater degree of professionalism in the presentation of their bid. Trustees approved the appointment of WBG as internal auditors for a three year period with extension options.	
8.	<u>Safeguarding</u> *Central Team report to the Trust Board May 25 The Chair asked when the next external audits would take place. The COO advised that the Trust was going out to tender for this provision so these had not yet been scheduled. Part of the audit process required schools to conduct a self-audit. The Chair requested that thanks be passed on to the Trust's Director of Safeguarding for all the work he had undertaken.	
9.	<u>Budget Management Update</u> – – documents previously distributed *Executive Summary Period 7 * Management Accounts Period 7 The COO advised that this information was for information and would be shared at the next Resources Committee meeting. A Trustee observed that finances looked more positive and asked to what extent this was a recurring trend or a result of one-off unexpected payments such as the Falling Rolls Grant. The COO advised that two North Yorkshire schools had benefited from this funding which put the Trust in a more comfortable position as a result. The COO assured Trustees that the financial systems were now far more open and transparent but there were some ad hoc payments that could not be foreseen. A Trustee queried the deficit at one secondary school. The COO advised that this was being addressed with the Principal and had arisen in relation to recruitment challenges.	
10.	<u>Committee minutes/updates</u> *Resources Committee minutes 28/04/2025 With reference to the minutes, a Trustee highlighted the issues with budget assumptions and questioned what Trustees wanted the budget to look like and whether there was a need to prioritise resources for key strategic plans. The COO explained that budgeting was very tight and fast moving but new leadership within the finance team was overseeing a very thorough and transparent process. Clarity from Trustees regarding strategic goals was required. Trustees discussed whether determining longer term priorities for investment could form part of the next Trustee Strategy day and when this would be best scheduled. It was agreed that earlier in the academic year would be more useful. Trustees agreed to look at the draft schedule of meeting dates for the next academic year at the next Board meeting in July and decide on a date for a strategy day to coordinate. ACTION: Draft meeting schedule to be brought back to next Board meeting to agree a strategy day. The CEO reflected on the enormous volume of work that had been undertaken to develop stronger reporting structures and greater accuracy, alongside the persistent challenges resulting from pay increases and government funding decisions. The CEO advised that financial reporting was now very strong and would continue to grow in strength each year which was a significant cultural shift across the organisation.	Clerk

	On behalf of the Board, the Chair acknowledged the challenges for the finance team and how these had been successfully addressed. The Chair requested Trustees' thanks be passed on to the wider team. Verbal update from DPD meeting on 13/05/25 The Chair advised that there had been a Stakeholder Engagement action arising from a previous meeting and this would be one of the themes for the governor conference in June. The Trust had now moved to a new provider for stakeholder surveys and this information would be shared with governors alongside discussions on the inconsistency of reporting across schools. The Chair went on to advise that work on a Chaplaincy strategy continued and future updates would be shared with the Board after further scrutiny by the DPD Committee. <i>A Trustee noted that the needs of non-church schools had to be considered with respect to chaplaincy.</i> The CEO agreed and explained that the Trust's church schools, particularly the two Hull primary schools, remained a priority for chaplaincy resource. <i>Wendy Munro left the meeting at 8.03pm</i>	
11.	<u>Policy Review</u> *HLT SEND Information Report The CEO advised that this had been updated to reflect statutory changes. Trustees approved the SEND Information Report.	
12.	<u>Updates from LGCs</u> - documents <i>previously distributed</i> *Vacancies and Appointments May 2025 Trustees noted the vacancies and approved the appointment of the following Trust Appointed governors: Dianne Binns at Vale of York, Tom Craven at Poppleton Ousebank, and John Hyndman at Compass Academy.	
13.	<u>Summary of items to report to LGCs</u> The CEO advised that there would be an update at the governor conference and key strategy information would be communicated to all governors. The Chair highlighted the ongoing challenges with wider stakeholder engagement and recruitment. The Trust was working with Nurole to seek additional Board members. The Chair would be meeting with an individual recommended by the Diocese and there was another prospective appointment to follow up before the end of the summer term.	
14.	<u>Any Other Business</u> – documents <i>previously distributed</i> Governor Conference. The Chair updated Trustees on the structure for the event and advised that there had been a low response rate so far. Approval for capital spend – May 25 SCA report The Chair advised that the COO had requested approval for capital spend on three projects that had been shared with members of the Resource Committee (including the Chair who was on the Resource Committee temporarily in place of Trustee Andrew Simpkin). Trustees on the Resources Committee approved the capital spend requested in the report.	

15.	<u>Confidential items</u> – documents previously distributed *Confidential Minutes from the Trust Board meeting on the 26th March 2025 Trustees approved the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meeting.	
15.1	<u>Project Daisy Update</u> <i>This item is recorded as a separate confidential minute</i>	
16.	<u>Dates and times of next meetings</u> The next meeting was brought forward to Tuesday 8th July 2025, 6pm	

The meeting closed at 8.20pm

These minutes were approved by the Heartwood Learning Trust Board of Trustees at their meeting on 8th July 2025.

**Action Points from the Heartwood Learning Trust Board meeting
held on 21st May 2025**

	ACTION	ITEM	WHO	WHEN
1.	Clerk to share draft meeting schedule for 25-26 with CEO, COO & Chair, & Laura Swan. To be brought back to next Board meeting to agree a strategy day.	2 & 10	Clerk	08/07/2025
2.	Recruitment and retention of Principals to be added as a risk on the risk register.	2	Wendy Munro	08/07/2025
3.	Clerk to reshare safeguarding declaration for all Trustees to complete.	2	Clerk	08/07/2025

Items for future meetings:

Trust Self Review

Non teaching staff career development case studies.

Risk Management Training

Gender Pay Gap data and update on actions (Strategy day).

Investment priorities