MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CMAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES
HELD ON MICROSOFT TEAMS
ON 8TH OCTOBER 2025 at 17.30

Name	Designated Role	Attendance
Ann Kowalska	Chair of Trustees	Present
Maria Stelmach	Vice Chair of Trustees	Present
Louise Gohr	Trustee & CEO	Present
Chris Bell	Trustee	Present
Ros Caulfield	Trustee	Present
Louise Gibson	Trustee	Present
Amanda Mellor	Trustee	Apologies
Paul Tomkow	Trustee	Present
Simon Varo	Trustee	Present
Kerry Hulson	Associate Member	Present
Katy Jodrell	CFO	Present
Jenny Whiston	Governance & Compliance Lead	Present
Sue Lambeth	Clerk	Present

PART ONE – NON-CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

	Item
1.	**Welcome, Apologies and Any Other Business** The meeting was quorate and started at 17.31. Apologies received from Amanda Mellor were accepted. The Clerk welcomed CMAT Trustees and Adrian Veale and Karen Fuller, potential new trustees, to the meeting. The prospective trustees introduced themselves. Kerry Hulson joined the meeting at 17.33. Items of Part One business requested: • Reaseheath College collaboration
2.	**Declarations of Interest and Code of Conduct** Trustees declared no interests or conflicts with the business to be discussed in the meeting. A updated list of outstanding compliance actions was available in the meeting pack, and trustees would be contacted with instructions for updating as necessary. The Company House ID task had an approaching deadline and

	trustees were requested to send codes to the Governance and Compliance Lead (GCL) as soon as possible. Any issues with passwords to the Every system for the signing of the Code of Conduct should be directed to the GCL.
3.	**Election of Chair** **Ann Kowalska**, nominated by Ros Caulfield and seconded by Louise Gibson, was duly elected as Chair of the Chancery Board of Trustees for 2025/26 and chaired the meeting from this point.
4.	**Election of Vice Chair** **Maria Stelmach**, nominated by Ann Kowalska and seconded by Louise Gibson, was duly elected as Vice Chair of Chancery Board of Trustees for 2025/26.
5.	**Chair's Action** The Board of Trustees agreed to delegate the power to act on behalf of the Trust Board to the Chair and, in the absence of the Chair, to the Vice Chair. No actions had been taken on behalf of the board since the previous meeting.

6.	**Membership**
	The membership of the Board was confirmed to be as shown on this document, and Adrian Veale and Karen Fuller, prospective trustees, were welcomed to the meeting by the Chair. Introductions were made.
	
	<u>New appointments</u>
	Natasha Waters had joined The Berkeley Academy (TBA) LGB and there was currently a prospective governor at Elworth Hall School (EH).
	
	<u>Committee structure and membership</u>
	The Finance and Audit Committee would comprise Amanda Mellor (Chair), Ann Kowalska, Chris Bell, Simon Varo and Kerry Hulson.
	
	<u>Link</u> trustees for
	• SEND – Louise Gibson
	• Safeguarding - Louise Gibson with Kerry Hulson
	• H&S / Sustainability - Chris Bell
	• LGBs
	  ○ Elworth Hall School – Paul Tomkow
	  ○ Excalibur School – Simon Varo
	  ○ Pikemere School– Chris Bell
	  ○ The Berkeley Academy - Amanda Mellor
	  ○ Willaston Academy – Lou Gibson
	
	TASK: To investigate whether an Associate Member can take on the role of a link trustee. (GCL)

	The CEO PM Panel comprised Ros Caulfield (Chair), Gill Barker (TBA Chair of Governors, Helen Scott (School Improvement Partner) and Ann Kowalska to sign off.
7.	**CEO Report – Part One** Maria Stelmach joined the meeting at 17.51. The new data tracking system, Insight, had made the gathering of data across the schools easier and considerably less time consuming. Headline data As discussed in the summer term, Chancery had much to celebrate and the information was being used to shape development points. Some priorities would be funded centrally for the first time in 25/26 and the Finance & Audit committee had explored ways of using reserves for school improvement work across Chancery, e.g. on the priority need for work on writing at Greater Depth Standard (GDS). A funded project was in place with a consultant working with schools and subject leaders having released time to access the training and delivery. The impact would be to enable momentum to gather. Feedback to date had been extremely positive. Practice was being discussed and shared across the schools. Annual school categorisation visits had been carried out at the end of the summer term to evaluate the effectiveness of schools in terms of performance, the accurate evaluation of the school's position by leaders and key priorities. The information had led to the deployment of trust resources to allow each school to maximise its potential. A summary of school's positions had been included in the meeting pack for trustees. School vulnerability update Elworth Hall and Willaston Academy had been identified as the most vulnerable schools based on data. The demographics of Willaston, with its newly appointed substantive Head and Deputy Head, indicated it should be performing above national figures. Leadership skills were being developed and leaders were aware of the changes required. Additional support had been put in place with the CEO visiting on a termly basis and regular collaborative peer work. Elworth Hall, judged as Requires Improvement (RI) when joining Chancery, had been inspected in 2024/25; however, data headlines at end of summer term were not as predicted. External SIP support was in place half termly and another HT from a Chancery school was providing peer to peer support for the HT with a focus on improvement of lessons against the School Development Plan (SDP). Excalibur School, The Berkeley Academy (TBA) and Pikemere were in a positive position in the improved category of the updated school categorisation framework. The pilot Ofsted inspection at TBA had revealed the upward shift in expectation in the new inspection framework which could render schools more vulnerable. A health check would be carried out by the

	CEO based on the Ofsted approach and learning from the TBA pilot inspection to ensure confidence in the schools' judgments. The three schools were all very similar including pupil demographics, and the challenge was to ensure school data was not dissimilar. The aim was for all schools to achieve well above national each year. The Trust Development Plan now comprised three objectives over a 3-years period since the achievement of some targets, due to their nature, was not possible within one academic year, e.g. SEND. Objectives, broken into key strands, had been driven by data and central leadership team meetings. **Q: What is the reason for the increase in persistent absences?** A: The report shows 2024 -25 full year figures and also 2025-26 year to date figures. Given fewer days are being counted this is why the figures look different. **Q: Has there been a large change in Pupil Premium (PP) numbers?** A: There was an issue with SIMS (MIS system) which was reported after the report had been produced. Correct figures will be shared at the next meeting. **Q: What are the plans for Pikemere and The Berkeley in light of the multiplication tables and phonics screening check outcomes?** A: Both issues have been discussed in categorisation meetings with the HTs. Schools are revisiting how clearly times tables are taught in earlier year groups. The phonics outcome of 77% is cohort specific, and there are no issues with the quality of teaching.
8.	**MAT Development Plan** The MAT development plan had been devised by the Heads. Trustees agreed the format and identified no omissions. Objective 1 – Curriculum In the new framework, the curriculum focus was around impact and whether the school's curriculum delivered for every pupil in every year group in all subjects. Clarity about what pupils needed to learn was essential and an overloaded curriculum was to be avoided. Objective 2 – systems and operational processes The new data tracking system had received positive feedback from HTs. Onboarding, sustainability and the enhancement and effectiveness of financial systems and reporting through the role of the CFO were other foci. Objective 3 – IT strategy and DfE digital standards including Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI use was managed by HTs and trust-wide AI training would be put in place. Trustees shared details and experiences of potential AI software and were assured that required links into Data Protection and the Code of Conduct would be a focus.

	Q: In what areas will artificial intelligence (AI) be trialled? A: At TBA AI is being examined to explore how it can support a teacher to enhance their learning for children. Teachers have continued to write their reports without AI. The SEND group is looking at use of AI to help support teachers e.g. the writing of a social story for a pupil to assist with a particular need. AI can be positive for staff wellbeing if appropriately used. Work with AI is at an early stage and appropriate INSET for staff will be explored. TASK: To share details of a potential AI expert with the CEO. (KF) The Chancery SEND network of school SENCOs continued to meet half termly and would be looking at the inclusion strand of the SEND toolkit to analyse where the schools sat within the framework. Trustees agreed the layout of the Trust Development Plan was clear and should be continued. **Trustees approved the MAT Development Plan**
9.	**Finance matters** Trustees received the latest set of Management Accounts for July 2025. No changes had been made to the format for 2024/25. Going forwards a summary page would be created to highlight the positions of the schools. Management accounts had been received monthly. From September 2025, Chancery would be working on a pre-payment and accrual basis. The result would be less variability in income and expenditure during the year, and the change would highlight true variances. The CFO confirmed that all Chancery schools and Chancery Trust were in a positive position relative to their set budgets in July and August 2025. From September 2025, excel cashflow schedules for each school were to be produced, and presented to trustees. The trust had moved to deposit accounts to invest schools' money. Currently deposits amounted to £600k. in accounts currently yielding 4% interest which would go back into school improvement. **Q: What are the future plans for schools which had been in budget deficits? Is there a penalty for withdrawing money?** A: There is no penalty for withdrawing money. The majority is on instant access with a small amount on 30 days deposit. A considerable amount remains in current accounts to support schools within 24 hours. The trust will receive adequate warning in cases such as the replacement of Willaston's heating system.

	Many of the deficit budgets set for the current year had not come to fruition due to the payment of government grants. Schools had all been prudent and had trimmed staffing where possible. A move towards a change in wording in the finance manual to be more in line with reserves policy was underway. **Q: What is the meaning of the comment on the July management accounts that the trust centrally was in deficit due to staffing?** A: This related to some inter academy charges between schools. The MAT is positive against its budget for the end of the year. **Q: Will schools continue to manage their reserves locally?** A: Currently they remain at school level, and monies are being invested on behalf of the schools. The contribution of each school to the funds on deposit is clearly visible to all schools. Interest will be shared, e.g. to fund the release of teachers for trust initiatives, and the whole trust will benefit. **Support staff pay scales and teacher pay scales were approved.** **Confirmation of insurance coverage was given, and trustees confirmed sight of the Academy Trust Handbook.** Trustees were requested to pay particular attention to the sections relating to trustees' responsibilities, and all trustees were required to complete cyber training on an annual basis to ensure the Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) insurance cover remained in force. TASK: To send a link to the required Cyber Security training to those trustees needing to complete it. (JW) Trustees were advised there were no letters from the Accounting Officer for discussion.
10.	**Board Reports** The Chair thanked trustees for their time for the one-to-one meetings. Skills, interests and areas for training had been identified. The outcomes had been discussed with the CEO and JW, and meetings would be repeated in the spring term. Links to all requested and outstanding mandatory training would be shared with relevant trustees and assistance on the use of Every and GVO would be provided by the GCL.
11.	**Board Impact** • An in depth discussion of AI had taken place at the meeting. • Trustees understanding of data and finance had been increased. **Q: Should governors be observing teaching and learning and making judgements on the quality of education during governor visits?**

	A: Such judgements are operational not strategic, and governors should not make them. Training for governors has taken place around operational and strategic roles, and this is revisited on an ad hoc basis. This will be addressed again with the relevant Chair and governors. It was agreed that complex decisions around the quality of the curriculum was not the remit of governors. The signing off of annual governor impact statements could be undertaken by the CEO. Trustees were assured that the CMAT Governor Visits Policy was clear about governors making judgements. ACTION: To discuss the content of LGB governor visit reports and school annual impact statements with HTs and Chairs (JW/CEO)
12.	**Policies** The following Trust policies were approved subject to the comments made and changes included in final version: • Child Protection and Safeguarding statement • Teachers Pay • Central Team Pay • Financial Procedures • Health & Safety • Anti-Fraud and Corruption • Conflict of Interest
13.	**Cheshire East Director of Children's Services Report** The meeting confirmed receipt of the document and useful summary shared by the Chancery Governance and Compliance Lead. **Q: Should a trained panel be in place to handle suspensions / permanent exclusions?** A: There have been no permanent exclusions at Chancery schools for many years. The level of training currently valid across the trust will be ascertained to enable a panel to be formed if required. The need and availability of trained personnel across the trust to handle suspensions / permanent exclusions will be ascertained as and when required. Trustees were requested to discuss CE training with the GCL and to submit certificates on completion. **Q: Are complaints on the rise across the trust?** A: Complaints are tracked across the trust and no complaints are reaching the formal level. The Chair left the meeting at 18.45 and Lou Gibson took over.
14.	**Minutes of the previous meetings / matters arising and actions** The meeting **confirmed** that the Part One minutes of the meeting on 9th July 2025 on GVO were an accurate account and **approved** them.

	There were no matters arising and all tasks were complete.
15.	**Any Other Business** It was agreed that discussion around collaboration around classroom marking strategies with Reaseheath College would take place outside the meeting.
16.	**Meeting dates** The date of the next meeting of the Chancery Trust board for 2025/26 was confirmed to be 10th December 2025 on Microsoft Teams. The Finance & Audit Committee meeting was scheduled to meet on 26th November 2025. The Autumn Governance Forum scheduled on Teams on 15th October 2025 at 17.30 would replace some link meetings during the year. The CEO would present a Chancery update and the MAT Development Plan, following which governors and trustees would have the opportunity to network in link groups. Trustees would be welcome to represent the board and were requested to mark their attendance / apologies on GVO.

Adrian Veale and Karen Fuller were thanked for their attendance and left. The Part One meeting closed at 18.49.