Effective board reporting

A core lever in improving governance

June
2025

Confederation
of School Trusts

The voice of school trusts

Effective board reporting: a core lever in improving governance

Introduction

Effective board reporting is a challenge in any organisation but particularly in the context of school trust governance, which is comprised entirely of individuals who are offering their time on a voluntary basis (often on top of day jobs) and who also may not have expertise in all areas of educational operations.

How do you provide accurate, thoughtful and insightful reports that contain enough information for your boards to hold you to account, without overwhelming them and making them feel they are 'drinking water from a firehose'?

To be effective, the design of board reporting cannot be done in isolation. It sits hand in glove with the design of your governance community, your scheme of delegation, and your annual governance cycle, to ensure the right people are receiving the right information at the right time.

Approaches to board reporting

For the reasons set out above, it is counterproductive to think in terms of a 'template' for board reporting. It will be unique and context-dependent at every trust, and attempting to 'copy and paste' an approach is unlikely to be optimal.

There are some key principles that underpin effective reporting, however:

- The design and delivery of board reporting **respects the board's time and capacity by being concise, timely, and insight-driven**. This means shorter, sharper reports that contain more insight rather than being overloaded with too much operational detail. It also means reports that are distributed in sufficient time (at least one week before the meeting) to allow board members to read and reflect on its contents.
- High-quality reporting **enables multiple levels of engagement**. Summary information offers a clear entry point for strategic discussion, while appendices or background materials provide depth for those who wish to explore further.
- The **act of preparing focused reports serves as a reflective process** for the executive. The discipline of clarifying key messages, insights and implications contributes to stronger executive thinking and decision-making.
- Board reports are **purposeful and intentional in what they ask** of the board. Effective reports go beyond sharing information: they clarify decisions, risks, or strategic considerations requiring board input or oversight. They explain the process that has been used to arrive at and challenge any proposals prior to presenting them to the board.
- The quality of board reporting is strengthened by **feedback and communication from across the governance structure**. Two-way flows of information between trustees, local committees and executive leaders ensure that reporting reflects the lived experience and needs of all stakeholders within the organisation.

- **Clarity around risk** is a core feature of effective reporting. Understanding which risks are being addressed—explicitly and in context—supports the board's role in oversight and assurance.
- **Progress on strategic priorities** is transparently and consistently communicated. Reports provide a clear view of what is on track, what is delayed, and where attention may be needed, enabling the board to maintain strategic focus over time.
- **Assurance provided is evidence-based**, supported by strong data, internal and external benchmarking, and triangulation.

The approach to reporting should not be static. As with other elements of government, the approach should be regularly reviewed to ensure it is working effectively for all stakeholders.

## Case study: Board reporting at Castle Phoenix Trust

In Next-gen governance, we argued that strong governance is based on assurance not reassurance. We noted that operating in a 'complex, fast-paced environment requires minimalist, forward-looking and solutions-focused reporting. These shorter reports should encourage more analysis and force greater insights (the crucial 'so what?').'

Castle Phoenix Trust was established in February 2013, and now has three secondary schools and five primary schools. The trust recognised that their existing governance structure and board reporting required an overhaul in order to accommodate the needs of their trust, their trustees, and to facilitate more strategic governance. The redesign of both their structure and reporting has been carefully considered and represents a great example of next-gen governance.

This does not mean it will be the right approach for every trust. It is presented here as only one of many potential approaches.

Circular model of governance

Castle Phoenix introduced a new 'circular' model of governance, eliminating all committees except the audit and risk committee required by the Academy Trust Handbook. Instead, they introduced 'portfolios' for each trustee linked to each area of operation and paired them up with their corresponding operational trust lead.
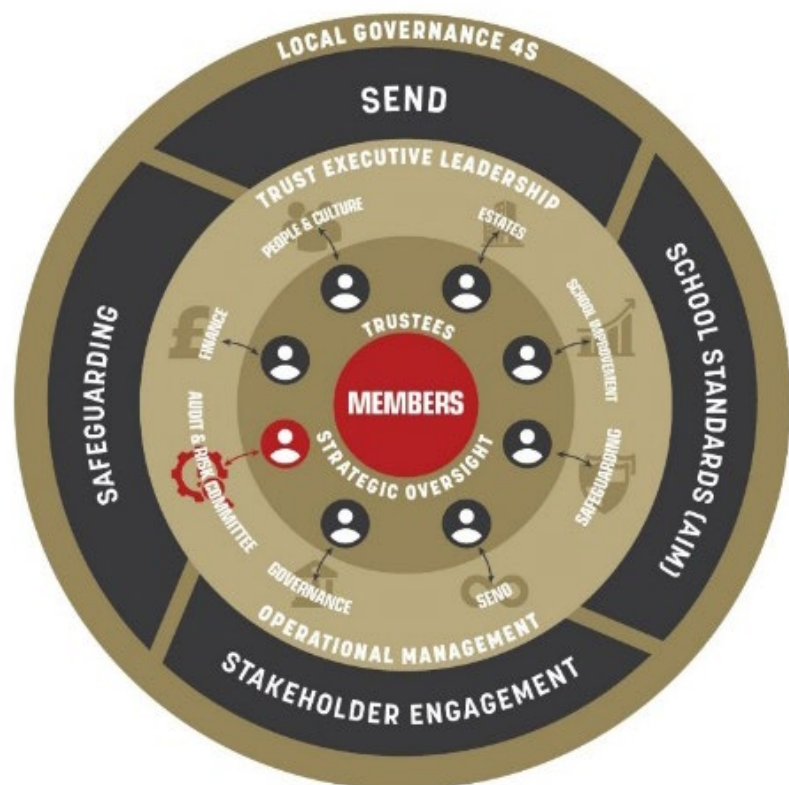
The board holds an in-person 2.5 hour meeting termly. This is supplemented by four 1-hour online meetings throughout the year. At termly meetings, link trustees meet separately with their operational lead for the first 30 minutes to delve deeper into the reporting and data in their area. The board then comes together as a whole and discusses each area of the report. Each link trustee provides insights and leads the board's strategic conversation about each operational area, based on their discussion with the operational lead. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and accountability among the operational leads and trustees.

This portfolio model ensures that each area receives deep scrutiny and link trustees can contribute effectively to the discussion of their area of responsibility, while the board conversation that follows ensures collective responsibility.

The new termly trust report

The termly trust reporting at Castle Phoenix Trust is a structured and comprehensive approach designed to ensure that trustees are well-informed and engaged with the trust's operations and strategic direction. Short, sharp and highly focused reporting eliminates 'fluffload' and provides assurance rather than reassurance for trustees. Meticulously crafted to provide trustees with varying levels of detail, the board reporting allows board members to retain collective responsibility and providing robust challenge while engaging with the material according to their availability and expertise.

Borrowing from strong practice in the private sector, the redesign of their board reporting came in response to a recognition that trustees simply did not have the capacity to read increasingly voluminous reports and that the reporting did not enable rich, strategic discussions to take place at board meetings. The purpose of the redesign was to allow trustees the flexibility to engage at the appropriate level (while still ensuring sufficient challenge) and enabling strategic discussions at the full board meetings.

Structure of reports

The termly trust report is a significant document comprised of six chapters covering different areas of operations – trust and school performance, people, finance, estates, IT and governance – each authored by an operational lead. The operational leads are responsible for writing their respective chapters and ensuring that the content is accurate and relevant.

Standing agenda items at each meeting act as a structure for each chapter, creating uniformity and ease of understanding:

- Looking back:
  - What has gone well? What has contributed to this success?
  - What hasn't gone so well? What are lessons learnt?
- Looking forward:
  - What are opportunities the trust is taking advance of? Are they the right ones?

- What are potential risks or concerns that need to be considered in the future and that all-important question, 'what's keeping you awake at night?' How will these risks be mitigated?
- Looking from above:
  - Taking the 'helicopter view', what is a high-level overview of how well the trust is doing as against its 28 'standards' (key performance indicators) and the evidence to support that?
  - Update on the strategic plan for the trust and any adjustments needed to operational plans, including major key performance indicators.
- Matters for approval or discussion: This section poses clear questions for approval or discussion at the trust board meeting.

Preparation and distribution

The trust report is distributed two weeks before the board meeting, giving trustees ample time to review the content. Accompanying documentation is sent out one week before the meeting. This advance distribution is crucial as it encourages trustees to engage with the material and come prepared for the discussions. Trustees are encouraged to pose questions and seek clarifications in advance through the shared online governance platform.

Content and format

The trust report is designed to be concise yet comprehensive. To facilitate engagement, the trust has implemented a colour-coded system:

- A **five-minute read** section with bullet points in red,
- A **half-hour read** section with more detailed explanations in gold, and
- A **one-hour read** including the appendices that provide data dashboards supporting the metrics associated with each operation; appendices are high-level and trust-based, avoiding excessive detail on individual schools.

All trustees are encouraged to read at least the five-minute summary to get the headlines of what is important. This ensures that even the busiest trustees can grasp the essential information needed for meaningful participation in the discussions. The half-hour read provides additional context and explanations, while the one-hour read offers a comprehensive understanding of the report's content.

During the board meetings, trustees are expected to engage initially with questions posted on the shared online governance platform. Meetings are dominated by strategic discussion rather than presentations, making them more efficient and productive. The standing item structure facilitates in-depth discussions on key issues, with a focus on strategic planning, risk considerations, and matters for approval or discussion.

Challenges and improvements

The trust continuously seeks to improve its reporting process. One challenge is ensuring that language used in the reports is clear and concise, avoiding jargon that might confuse trustees. The trust also aims to standardise the length of each chapter to no more than two pages. This goal is still a work in progress, but it reflects the trust's commitment to making the reports as accessible and user-friendly as possible.

Local governance and reporting

At the local governance level, the trust has adopted a similar approach to reporting. Each local board has a standard termly agenda that includes safeguarding, SEND, standards, and stakeholder voice. Additional 'academy improvement' meetings held with the headteacher, the chair of the local governing body and a peer headteacher from within the trust scrutinise KPIs, receive recommendations from a school improvement advisory panel, and discuss standards and other key issues, which are then fed back to the local board. This ensures that each local board is well-informed about its school and can provide effective oversight and support.

Conclusion

The well-structured and thoughtful board reporting process at Castle Phoenix Trust is a great example of next-gen governance, designed to ensure that trustees are well-informed and engaged, while still mindful of their time and acknowledging their capacity.

The tiered board report format and advance engagement through the shared online governance platform ensures board meetings are focused on meaningful discussions and strategic decision-making. The continuous efforts to improve the process reflect the trust's commitment to effective governance and accountability.

CEO REPORT FOR TRUSTEES

January 2025

CASTLE PHOENIX TRUST

Respect to all, from all

A positive attitude

Resilience and a determination to achieve our best

Passion for learning

Innovation

Collaboration

Leading Learning and Excelling Together

Matters arising from Trust Board Meeting 12 December 2024

Action 1 – All Trustees to declare any potential interests. This includes being the Director any other organisation, even if it is unlikely to be related to the Trust. ACTIONED

STANDING ITEMS
- **LOOKING BACK**
  What has gone well?
  What hasn't gone well?

- **LOOKING FORWARD**
  Opportunities, development activity and next steps
  Risk and Compliance Update

- **LOOKING FROM ABOVE**
  Update on Strategic Plan/ Operational Plan Implementation
  Major Key Performance Indicators

  MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR DISCUSSION

Key questions for Trustees to consider
Looking Back
- What has gone well during the Autumn term? What has contributed to this success?
- What has not gone so well? Why? What action are we taking? What are the resource implications? What lessons have we learnt?

Looking Forward
- What opportunities are we taking advantage of? Why? For what purpose? What are the benefits for us?
- What potentially could keep us awake at night? New risks? Potential concerns? How are we mitigating against the risks?

Looking from above
- How are we performing in terms of our 28 standards across our schools and our Trust?
- Do we need to adjust any of our operational plans? Why? Are we focussing on the right priorities
- How does school self evaluation against our standards link to our risk analysis and assurance process

CONTENTS

1. TRUST AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

LOOKING BACK - What's gone well?
- Our annual staff conference which brought all our staff together for the first time
- Development of inclusive classrooms within all our schools
- Continuing to improve attendance
- Appointment of new trainees to our schools
- Learning beyond the classroom

Our annual staff conference brought together all teaching, support, admin staff and leaders from across our Trust. This took place in October, focusing on the theme '**Driving Inclusive Excellence.**' The aim of the conference was to offer a) leadership development b) training to support developing inclusive classrooms and c) wellbeing activities to support team building and strategies to help staff flourish. Our wide range of keynotes speakers were well received, alongside providing opportunities to learn from each other through the many workshops provided by staff from our schools. A street style festival feel was created for lunch and staff felt very special.

Every school has a school priority to **develop inclusive classrooms** particularly for SEND and are actively promoting this through their professional development offer. **X was awarded leading status** following a very successful Challenge Partner review in November and inclusive classrooms featured strongly. *"The school's commitment to inclusive classrooms ensures equitable access to the curriculum. For example, in a biology lesson, two students with autism were given a task to help them self-regulate at the start of the lesson. Another student in a maths lesson was using an iPad with a pink overlay. "*

Attendance improved overall during the Autumn term across both primary and secondary schools compared to the same period the previous year. Persistent absence has also improved for the same period including for disadvantaged pupils. However, absence rates are still too high compared to national figures and all schools continue to set this as a target for further improvement. All schools individually improved except for X and as a result our Executive Lead for Attendance is supporting the school.

This year the Castle Phoenix Alliance has **seven trainee teachers** beginning their careers with us across four different schools in a variety of different departments. In addition to the standard training, these trainees have also been benefitting from extra sessions on planning, behaviour management and classroom presence and voice delivered by key members of our teaching team. All sessions have been well received and the learning is already being seen in their classrooms.

Recruitment for the 2025-2026 academic year is well underway with two trainees confirmed and a further three offers made. We look forward to building upon this number as the year progresses.

Through our focus on our **Aspiration Ambition**, children in our schools have experienced a rich diet of activities designed to broaden their horizons. X celebrated their 70th anniversary and invited ex pupils and teachers to mark the occasion. They also introduced an Eco team for pupils. X and Y have engaged with the 'Tech She Can' organisation which inspire girls with technology. Forest School has continued to thrive at Y and at Z, Year 8 students took part in an immersive STEM project. All our schools will be focusing on sustainability and are creating gardens within their school grounds.

LOOKING BACK – What hasn't gone so well?
- Whilst behaviour is good within all our schools, staff perception of this is a challenge in our secondary schools.

Whilst **behaviour** overall is good within our schools, The TEP (staff engagement survey) indicates that it remains a concern for some staff in our secondary schools so further exploration is needed in order to address perception.

Due Diligence is progressing for X and Y. Our primary specialists are supporting these schools. Applications to support academy conversion have been submitted, by the schools, to the DfE.

Risk Assurance Overview

	Trust Strategic Risks	Description	L	I	Score	Assurance	Status
1	Belonging	There is a risk that we do not create a culture of belonging	3	4	12		⬇
2	Growth and Expansion	There is a risk that we do not plan effectively for the growth and expansion of our Trust	2	4	8		⬇
3	Financial Sustainability	There is a risk that our schools cannot set a balanced budget	3	4	12		➔

There are operational risks which are linked to each of the above and managed at central team level.

Known risks that we monitor

4	Safeguarding	There is a risk that safeguarding in our schools is not effective	2	4	8		➔
5	Cyber Security	There is a risk that the Trust is subject to a major cyber security breach	2	4	8		➔

LOOKING FROM ABOVE

What are the implications following evaluation of our TRUST Strategic Plan and 28 standards? How well are we performing?

Trust Strategic Priority 1	All our schools are now deliberately crafting a culture of belonging through effective leadership and developing inclusive classrooms	STATUS Progressing Well
Trust Strategic Priority 2	Growth – Development of our Central Service Operations	STATUS Progressing Well
	Expansion - Academisation of 2 schools	STATUS Progressing Slowly
Trust Strategic Priority 3	Developing greater Financial Sustainability in schools	STATUS Progressing Slowly

Priority 1 - Each school is working with their staff to describe their current culture. We are using the following common levers to shape our school's culture with the aim of being more impactful.

Leadership capability
- How are leaders developing their skills **(leadership competencies**) to effectively meet the objectives they are responsible for?

Professional growth
- How are teachers are identifying what they need to develop **inclusive classrooms.**

The learning environment
- What does the physical school environment tell us about school culture?
- How are schools creating inclusive classrooms?

The implementation process
- How do schools effectively implement their school priority action plans?
- What behaviours are expected from Leaders?

The 5th strand of our **People Strategy- Create and Maintain** a Climate to thrive
- What are schools doing to promote the DfE Wellbeing Charter and workload reduction

Professional development
- Schools are expected to provide a CPD offer to meet their school priorities alongside individual training needs for ALL staff. Does this have impact?

Each school is identifying **marginal gains** for the above.

Priority 2 - Growth - Operational planning and organisation are complete and operational risk management is in place. There is a strong link between line managers and their teams to inspire and motivate staff to achieve objectives through the professional growth process. New systems have been implemented to track performance against planned objectives. Every half term, processes are now evaluated and areas of strength and for improvement are identified. New technologies have been used to enhance operations. Feedback from Trust SLT, Headteachers and Link Trustees will be incorporated to improve future operations. Every operation is currently producing data dashboards which will inform the termly Trustee report and next steps.

Priority 3 - New action has been taken to improve our Trust and Schools to be even more **Financially Sustainable.** This has included tracking salary variations and approval of all posts centrally. We are revisiting the key information that is required for headteachers and this will inform monthly budget conversations with our schools. Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning has been completed for all schools now. This is a strategic approach to managing resources in schools. It aims to align the curriculum, staffing and finances to achieve the best possible educational outcomes within the available budget. By analysing the relationship between these elements, ICFP helps ensure efficient use of resources and sustainable school management. Next Steps are to share findings with our headteachers.

UPDATE ON KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE AGAINST OUR 28 STANDARDS

	Score	Key area of development & resource focus if score is less than 3/5
LEADERSHIP	2.91	Development of leadership competencies
QUALITY OF EDUCATION	2.91	Development of inclusive classrooms Outcomes - Accelerating progress; Science; EM 5+
WELFARE	3.25	
COMMUNITY	3.12	
CULTURE	2.58	Development of culture of belonging, and professional growth
PEOPLE	2.83	Development to support recruitment and retention
COMPLIANCE AND OPERATIONS	2.87	Development of financial sustainability in targeted schools

OVERALL SCHOOLS' OUTCOME PERFORMANCE

- Primary- KS2 attainment continues to improve except for writing which is an area of focus

- Secondary- KS4 attainment 8 continues to improve. X attainment 8 is currently lower than their 2024 actual outcomes and autumn 23 data collection.
- Basics for both English and Maths 4+ and 5+ are ontrack to improve except for X 5+
- Science 4+ and 5+ are currently on track to improve except for X

- Attendance during the Autumn term is 91.9% compared to the National Average 93.5%.
- Secondary Attendance is 91.1% compared to the National Average 92.2%
- Primary Attendance is 94.1% compared to the National Average 94.8%

a) for the primary schools our focus is writing and accelerated progress and

b) for the secondary schools our focus is Science and improving level 5+ in both English & Maths

c) for attendance we continue to focus on improving attendance for diadvantaged pupil

MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR DISCUSSION

What strategies should be in place for addressing disparities in performance across schools within our Trust?

2. PEOPLE

LOOKING BACK - What's gone well?
- Improved use of EveryHR (HR Information System) across all Trust schools
- TEP Survey December 2024 Results and Wellbeing Benefits.
- CPT response to the Sexual Harassment Prevention Duty from October 2024.
- Improved employee engagement and communication supporting our 'Culture of Belonging' and retention strategy.

There has been **improved used of EveryHR (HR Information System)** across all schools for Absence and Workforce Census. Three Trust schools have rolled out the Absence module so far with all schools to be rolled out using the system for recording absence by the end of this academic year. Feedback from those schools who have rolled out the system has been positive and provides staff with transparency of requests and visibility of their own absence.

All schools successfully used EveryHR for the first time to complete the School Workforce Census in December 2024, the report was previously completed using Arbor.

The **TEP survey** which was completed in December 2024, showed that since the Summer 2024 survey results have stayed consistent with national levels of headline engagement. Strengths include Leadership and Line Management, an area to develop further is behaviour. Westfield Private Healthcare plan which was introduced from October 2024 has been well received by staff. From 01 October 2024 to 16 January 2025, 43 claims were made against various treatments such as optical, dental or therapy. This will continue to be promoted.

CPT have responded to the Sexual Harassment Prevention Duty which came into effect from 26 October 2024. The Worker Protection (Amendment of equality Act 2010) Act 2023 now puts the onus on UK employers to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace. As a result of this, we introduced mandatory training for all staff and leaders to complete; which will be added to our annual training program for all staff. We also created guidance documents for Headteachers and Line Managers, as well as informative posters for schools to display in staff areas.

In support of our **Culture of Belonging and Retention Strategy**, we have been working to **improve employee engagement and communication.** Since the start of the academic year, we have released two issues of the 'People Matter' newsletter. We have a commitment to publish an issue each half term to provide staff with updates and key information relating to pay, wellbeing and staff benefits.

The whole staff conference which took place prior to October half term was incredibly well received by staff. The theme for the conference was 'A Culture of Belonging'. It was a wonderful opportunity for staff to network and share knowledge, ideas and experiences, this in turn supports our employee engagement, retention and recruitment strategies.

LOOKING BACK – What hasn't gone so well?
- Recruitment – Teaching vacancies

Recruitment for teaching vacancies has been more challenging during the Autumn Term. There have been a number of teaching roles which have not been filled for a January start (Teacher of English/Maths/Music, Teacher of Art and Technology and Classroom Teacher across the Trust. These roles remain advertised for an Easter start date. We have been working with E-Teach (our Recruitment platform) to establish if there are changes, we can make to our recruitment methods to encourage applications and this has resulted in standardisation of job titles for advertising purposes as well as advert longevity to maximise the time period for candidates to apply prior to teaching resignation dates.

As part of the **TUPE Process,** for the conversation of two primary schools joining Castle Phoenix Trust we will commence consultation with staff and Unions. The Trust are not proposing any measures for the conversion which we hope will ensure a smooth transaction from an employee relations perspective with the new schools onboarding. Following the conversion, we will complete statutory and compliance checks to ensure all staff who have been transferred have the correct documentation in place. We will also endeavour to rollout our HR Information system to these schools so that employee data and information is accurate and secure.

The **Gender Pay Gap Report** is based on a snapshot date of 31 March 2024 and has been prepared for review see Appendix 3. The data shows that since the previous report in 2023, that there has been an increase in male employees of 5%, the proportion of female employees still continues to be significantly higher at 75.3% which is typical for the education sector. The mean pay gap has reduced by 0.19% from 18.39% last year to 18.2% this year. The median pay gap has reduced to 28.8% which is 5.09% lower than last year (33.89%).

RISKS OR CONCERNS
- There is a risk that the data held in the HR Information system is not updated, leading to reduced confidence in the system. Any risks are being mitigated against.

With regard to the accuracy of the data within the HR system, this is regularly being audited to ensure that records are kept up to date by the People Team and School Based HR Support.

LOOKING FROM ABOVE
UPDATE ON OUR PEOPLE OPERATIONAL PLAN
What are the implications following evaluation of our People Operational Plan and KPI? How well are we performing?

- Overall, the People Operational Plan is **Progressing Well.**

MAJOR KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
- From reviewing the data, we are performing better in all areas of Staff attendance, Absence and Turnover.
- Attendance and Absence levels for the Autumn Term 2024 compared with Autumn Term 2023 have also improved with overall Attendance up in every school across the Trust.
- Employee Turnover levels for the Autumn Term has improved by 2.45% compared with the same period last year.
- We are commencing a program of HR policy renewals this academic year and will be following a more consultative model approach.

Staff Attendance and **Absence Levels** have improved across the Trust by 0.15% compared with the same period last year, we achieved a Trust average of 97.18% attendance for the Autumn Term 2024. See Appendix 4.

Sickness absence levels were improved in 5 out of 6 Trust schools and General Absence is also improved in all schools by 0.1%. Factors such as EveryHR Absence module rollout and improved access to wellbeing support via Westfield and Vivup (Employee Assistance Program) may be contributing factors. We are continuing to drive our 'Thrive at Work' program to support wellbeing initiatives across the Trust.

Employee Turnover - In Autumn Term 2023 turnover was 7.12% the employee turnover for Autumn Term 2024 was 4.67 which is a reduction of 2.45%. See Appendix 4.

We have a number of **HR Policies** (Capability/Disciplinary/Absence) which are due for renewal this academic year and we will be taking a more consultative approach to the renewals which offers all staff the opportunity to offer comments for any proposed policy changes. All comments are then collated, reviewed and responded to by the Head of People and are then published following the consultation period. Castle Phoenix Trust does not currently have a formalised agreement in place for policy changes with recognised Trade Unions, however a more unified approach will encourage improved employee relations with all staff and recognised Trade Unions.

MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR DISCUSSION

Approval required for: Gender Pay Gap Report for Approval

To Discuss: Gender pay gap

3. FINANCE

Following the **Finance Team structure change** the new academic year 2024/25 enabled all agreed processes to be implemented within the Trust central finance team. This has proven to be successful in that the team are all working in the same way and any staff absence can be covered within the Team so no school loses any service.

The **Appointment of the Deputy CFO** has added capacity and has not only strengthened the finance team but added a level of assurance to forecasting and reporting. Processes have been put in place for month end which has brought efficiencies with the finance team. This also enabled the external reporting to be moved in house along with ICFP. The Deputy CFO is in the first year of CIPFA

Trustee reports and ICFP are now being prepared in house. The Deputy CFO has put a month end package together which checks the trial balance, balance sheet and postings are all correct. The fixed asset register, SCA, monthly accruals and depreciation all feed into the report which provides more accurate data and inhouse communication has enhanced the procedures. Attendance at Trustee meetings will enable questions to be directed to the Deputy CFO regarding forecasting/future spend/turn out.

A clean **Audit for 2023/24** was recorded and accounts have been submitted to the ESFA and Companies House and are available on the Trust website. Whilst the audit had its challenges due to delayed information from the external accountancy company and inaccurate postings, the Trust are now in a position where moving forward all balances agree with the PSF finance system and year end accounts. Feedback from Bishop Fleming was received that even though the amount of work was more than expected, overall, the process would be quicker in the future now inaccuracies were corrected.

Salary reconciliations within IMP have not been completed. This was due to timing and staffing salary information input when the tool was built, differing to the agreed 2024/25 set budget. Therefore, contracts for all staff members had to be amended so contract dates agreed with the financial year.

IMP Budgeting tool to be updated with change in NI as the NI threshold will change in April 2025 however as this is part way through the Academy financial year, this will need to be reflected for an accurate forecast. The 1.2% increase will be government funded for the 2024/25 year but will impact on staffing costs for 2025/26. A number of support staff not currently paying NI will now be brought into the earning over £5k threshold.

ICFP outcomes and KPIs will be presented to headteachers at the monthly meetings to enable discussions re staffing levels and budgets for 2025/26. KPIs will include Kreston bench marking information along with percentage of curriculum spend and will also be included in the Trustees monthly reports.

RISKS OR CONCERNS
• ICFP disregarded by Headteachers
• Lower pupil numbers
• 2025/26 sustainable budgets

ICFP not being used by Headteachers is a concern. Headteachers have been included in providing information required for ICFP. This along with the discussions of outcomes will help them value and recognise the benefit.

Lower pupil numbers at an average of £5k per student the loss of 10 students i.e. £50k is the cost of an average classroom teacher whilst still having the need for the teacher.

2025/26 sustainable budgets discussions will start at the monthly Headteacher meetings in January 2025 to emphasise setting a sustainable budget whilst enhancing education provision.

LOOKING FROM ABOVE
UPDATE ON OUR FINANCE OPERATIONAL PLAN
What are the implications following evaluation of our Finance Operational Plan and KPI? How well are we performing?
• Two of the objectives are **On Track** and the other two are **Progressing Slowly.**

The finance team structure change has improved productivity, added value to the team without additional costs and improved productivity. Automated ordering has eliminated paperwork.

A 3-year financial strategy is in place. Management accounts and KPIs are all being finalised to ensure contents cover all required elements. Policies and processes are reviewed annually following Academy Handbook, legal and audit requirements. Returns are filed on time.

Information is being input/updated on IMP and ASOT to provide the required information and fulfil audit recommendations.

Forecasting is progressing slowly due to external support handover challenges which included aligning the end of year audit figures with the PSF financial system.

A range of new reports are being designed along with a refined month end procedure. The following reports are examples of those currently being revisited:
- Management Account Reports
- A monthly summary report of central Trust costs
- A data dashboard for the Trust Board and Finance Link
- A financial dashboard for Headteachers

MAJOR KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS			
Trust Overview – December 2024			
Reserves	Budgeted income	Budgeted expenditure	Budgeted Deficit/Surplus Balanc
Cumulative free reserves as a % of total income	Forecast based on actual income to date	Forecast based on actual expenditure to date	Forecast Deficit/Surplu Balance
Primary pupil number variances	Secondary pupil number variances	Staff costs as a % of income (BFR July 2024)	Expenditure as a % of income (BFR July 2024)

- Reserves at the end of 2022/23 were 21%. 2023/24 reserves were X% as a result of planned expenditure.
- December 2024 end of year forecast shows a decrease on the budgeted deficit.
- The reduction in pupil numbers is mainly sixth form and will affect sixth form income for 2025/26 in the region of £X
- The staff cost ratio from the BRF (Budget Forecast Return) is slightly above the national benchmarking for similar Trusts. Four of our six schools have a staff cost ratio of above X%.
- Our budgeted expenditure for 2024/25 is more than our income. This means that Trust reserves are being used to support setting a balanced budget. This was intended.

MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR DISCUSSION

Approval required for investment policy

Discussion: What action should we take if a school is not able to produce a sustainable budget?

4. ESTATES

LOOKING BACK - What's gone well?
- SRP Programme is moving forward
- The agreed SCA capital projects are moving forward to tender stage
- Changes made to improve Estates compliance are working well

X School SRP Programme is moving forward. The DfE have now confirmed the target blocks and areas of the school site that will form part of the SRP programme. Now that the school knows what existing buildings will remain, they are able to continue with their planned premises development works to the remaining areas of the school site. The school/Trust will continue to work with the DfE team to develop the School Specific Brief in preparation of the DfE procuring a main contractor to undertake the building works.

The agreed SCA capital projects are moving forward to tender stage. The design stages of the agreed SCA projects are progressing well. Gleeds are aiming for the tender documentation for the X Fire Alarm Project to go out to contractors at the end of January. Gleeds are also currently finalising the scope of works and the tender documentation for the Academy Expansion Project and the Leisure Centre Project, the aim is for these tender documents to be issued to contractors at the end of February.

We are hoping that the tender analysis reports for each project will be available after the Easter break. We are aiming to appoint principal contractors in May so that the projects all go live at the start of the 2025 summer break (or earlier if possible).

Changes made to improve Estates compliance are working well. During the autumn term we made a number of changes on Every Compliance to allow us to centrally monitor our servicing and inspections, ensuring that service visits are not missed by contractors. The changes that have been made to the system now allow us to centrally file our compliance paperwork.

LOOKING BACK – What hasn't gone so well?
- A number of unexpected repairs have had budget implications for a number of schools.

During the autumn term, a number of unforeseen repairs have had to be undertaken/actioned at a number of schools, this in turn has resulted in the depletion of the repairs and maintenance budgets. We are closely monitoring any further required works that need to be undertaken at these schools.

LOOKING FORWARD – Opportunities, Development activity, Risks, Next Steps
- Compiling Annual Building Condition Reports and Three-Year Premises & Lifecycle Plans
- Procurement of Cleaning Contract

We are currently obtaining all of the required information to produce the **Annual Building Condition Reports and Three-Year Premises & Lifecycle Plans** for all schools within the Trust.

Schools have been asked to highlight any premises works that may be required over the next three years in relation to changes to their school curriculum.

Procurement of Cleaning Contract at X Academy is being investigated looking at the possibility of outsourcing their current in-house cleaning services. Over the coming months, a tender exercise will be undertaken to see if this is viable and what the overall contract cost would be to the school.

RISKS OR CONCERNS

- School Repairs and Maintenance Budgets

During the autumn term, a number of repairs and maintenance budgets across the Trust have gone over budget due to unforeseen repairs that were required. Going forward, this will have an impact on what repair works can be funded over the remainder of this school year, without compromising Health and Safety.

LOOKING FROM ABOVE
UPDATE ON OUR ESTATES OPERATIONAL PLAN
What are the implications following evaluation of our ESTATES Operational Plan and KPI? How well are we performing?

During the last term, the below objectives have been completed.
- Disaster recovery plans updated and issued to each school
- Premises assets at Hill Farm have now been asset tagged and added to Every Compliance
- X,Y have planted a number of trees and hedge saplings
- Compliance PPM's have been created on Every Compliance

- Overall, the Estates Operational Plan is **Progressing Well.**

MAJOR KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
- None at present.

MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR DISCUSSION

Discussion matter: What changes should be made to our Annual Building Condition Reports and Premises Development & Lifecycle Plans to ensure that we are maintaining our building/assets to the highest standards.

No items for approval.

5. IT

LOOKING BACK - What's gone well?
- Stable hardware infrastructure with all systems being robust, functional and fit for purpose.
- All IT network leads learning how to plan for renewals of key infrastructure projects.
- All schools closer to the overall aim of between a 1:1-1:2 iPad ratios for learners.
- Cyber review was completed with updated requirements from the DfE confirming that the Trust is in a good position to deal with threats.
- The Cyber security roll out of MDR (managed detection and response) system has been successful with no impact on core functions.
- The IT Network Leads have been leading a programme to get staff and learners back into school within 48 hours after a major cyber incident.

Hardware infrastructure this year has been very stable for the first time in the last 5 years with all systems being robust, functional and fit for purpose. We have invested heavily in the last 5 years in core infrastructure across the Trust, specifically servers, core switches, Wi-Fi and UPS. This has meant that we are now in a stable position with regards to infrastructure.

All IT network leads have begun the process of learning how to plan for renewals of key infrastructure projects. Whilst we are not in a position where robust financial planning can be completed from the plans, we are in a position for the first time as a Trust having reference documents for discussion around the IT needs across each of the schools from a Network manager perspective. This enables more discussions around large cost infrastructure projects which need to be budgeted.

We have moved all schools closer to the overall aim of between a 1:1-1:2 iPad ratios for learners. We have also ensured that all TA's have access to a school device (see appendix). For the first time we have a school which is above 1:1 for iPad provision for leaners and now is on a renewal rather than expansion programme. All schools have moved forward in ratio provision, albeit some faster than others. Foxford has moved forward the most with a large investment over the summer. The Trust has also funded the remaining TAs in primary schools (Around 38 devices) to ensure all staff have the tools and skills to support learners.

Cyber review was completed with updated requirements from the DfE and this confirmed that whilst the risk is high, we are in a good position to deal with these threats. This audit once again highlighted that the Trust is in a strong position with regards to cyber security with almost all areas achieving a green. The audit highlighted that hardware management is strong and the phishing training and simulations which have been running for two years have worked as the number of individuals repeatedly caught has decreased significantly.

The Cyber security roll out of MDR (managed detection and response) system has been successful with no impact on core functions. The MDR system purchased in the summer term has been rolled out over the autumn term. It has required a range of checking processes to ensure that our systems be configured to use the MDR process to its full extent. The process has also raised that our hardware systems are very robust with us achieving 100% compliance which is apparently rare.

The IT Network Leads have been leading a programme to get staff and learners back into school within 48 hours after a major cyber incident. The IT Network Leads have been instrumental in planning a system which will allow the Trust to be back functioning within 48 hours in response to a major cyber-attack. This is a significant development as we are moving towards a position of the Trust IT Network Leads taking a more proactive approach to cyber security management.

LOOKING BACK – What hasn't gone so well?
- Wi-fi connectivity issues at X.
- Disconnect between Network managers and the Headteachers when IT finance planning.

- 3-tier system in terms of access to iPads for learners which needs to be closed over the next 18 months.
- The systems used for IT induction across the schools needs to be improved

X had issues with Wi-Fi connectivity for several classrooms at the beginning of the Autumn term. This has led to a review of internet usage, and we have upgraded HFP. X was experiencing issues with Wi-Fi connectivity in several rooms at the beginning of the autumn term. We resolved this very quickly and had a new line installed within a week. However, this was part of a wider issue of not having accurate data on Wi-Fi data usage against thresholds. This has now been rectified, and we are running monthly reports to check so that changes in capacity can be made in a timely fashion.

There is still a disconnect between the Network managers and the Headteachers when IT finance planning which needs to be addressed before next academic year. Finance planning is still happening in isolation between the Network managers and Headteachers. This provides a disconnect where headteachers are not sufficiently planning for maintaining of core hardware and upgrades to user devices. This has led to schools requiring funding from the Trust to support these projects rather than the schools budgeting for them. Meetings are to take place with both parties so that a robust plan can be created for September 2025.

There is still a 3-tier system in terms of access to iPads for learners which needs to be closed over the next 18 months. (see appendix). Whilst there has been a continued progress towards a consistent Trust offer of access to technology there is still a significant disparity between the schools. One school has 1:1, a middle tier has between 1:2-1:3 and the final tier are 1:3-1:5. X will be working with Headteachers particularly in the final tier to move all schools to a minimum of 1:2.

The systems used for IT induction across the schools needs to be improved so that new staff feel confident about the use of iPad technology from their first week. There are several schools where the staff induction for new staff around having enough knowledge of their iPads, is not as robust as it should be. This means staff are not always able to use their devices to their full potential. Y has already addressed this with the Network Leads and will be auditing this after Easter to allow for more training to talk place where needed.

LOOKING FORWARD – Opportunities, Development activity, Risks, Next Steps
- We will be creating an audit/ renewals of infrastructure system across the whole Trust. We already have this in place informally, but we will be moving towards centralised management.
- Further training on IT financial planning will be provided for Network Leads.
- A meeting between Headteachers and Network leads to discuss financial planning will take place in all schools.
- A plan for further iPad development will take place at X to move their ratio forward.
- We will be tendering for another Pen Test to commence in the summer/ autumn term.

RISKS OR CONCERNS
- **There are no major risks or concerns currently.**

LOOKING FROM ABOVE
UPDATE ON OUR IT OPERATIONAL PLAN
What are the implications following evaluation of our IT Operational Plan and KPI? How well are we performing?

Overall, the IT operational plan is **ON TRACK.**

MAJOR KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- 3 out of our 6 schools have a 1:1 or 1:2 iPad to pupil ratio. All staff and teaching assistants now have iPads.
- We are recommending that schools budget a minimum of 1% of their GAG income on IT development including funding to support a refresh strategy. 5 out of our 6 schools are spending at least 1%.

MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR DISCUSSION

None.

6. GOVERNANCE

LOOKING BACK - What's gone well?
- Election of new Chair of Trust Board
- Role of the Local Governing Bodies

David Coaché was elected as Chair of the Trust Board. He has significant experience in primary education and is currently CEO of a Primary Trust.

The role of the Local Governing Bodies was adapted to have a greater focus on the 4Ss – Safeguarding, SEND, Stakeholder Engagement and Standards. This has now had time to be properly embedded and is now working well following adaptation of the template documents. The separate Academy Improvement Meetings are valued, not only by the Academy Headteacher but also by the peer Headteachers that attend to act as a critical friend.

LOOKING BACK – What hasn't gone so well?
- Trustee Membership
- Link between Trust Board and Local Governing Bodies

Trustee Membership has been a challenge including recruitment of Trustees with particular skillsets including finance and audit. The recent resignations received has meant a full review of the current Governance Structure has taken place. An advert has been placed on LinkedIn for Trustees with this particular skillset.

Further work needs to take place in terms of the **relationship between the Trust Board and Local Governing Bodies.** The Chair of the Board will continue to attend the termly Chairs and Vice Chairs of LGBs briefings to ensure that communication is bridged as appropriate.

LOOKING FORWARD – Opportunities, Development activity, Risks, Next Steps
- Circle Model of Governance
- External Review of Governance
- Updated reporting templates for LGBs
- Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023

The **Circle Model of Governance** has been adopted following extensive research taking place. All Governance documentation has been reviewed and amended to reflect this structure. Headteachers, the Central Team and Chairs of Local Governing Bodies have been briefed around this. The model now needs to be fully implemented and embedded across the Trust, allowing Trustees to have strategic oversight of the Trust, and the Trust Executive Team to manage the day-to-day operational activity across the Trust.

An **External Review of Governance** has been commissioned to take place during the Spring Term. As part of this review a number of interviews will be arranged, including with the Chair of the Board, CEO, Head of People etc. A number of surveys will also be distributed for completion by Trustees, Governors and members of the Executive Team. It is hoped that the review will support in the implementation of the circle model of governance.

Following a review of documentation shared at LGBs during the Autumn Term, **reporting templates for SEND and Safeguarding** to the LGBs have been updated. These have been shared with the Chairs and Headteachers to ensure completion takes place on a termly basis.

Under the **Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023** all Trustees (Directors) will be required to verify their identity with Companies House. For existing Trustees, there will be a transition period to

allow this to take place. New Trustees (or persons with significant control PSCs) will be required to undertake the check within 14 days of appointment. This is expected to be mandatory by Autumn 2025. Currently, this is a voluntary process and Trustees will be contacted directly with further information as it is available.

RISKS OR CONCERNS
- There is a risk that the new Governance structure at Trust level does not enable Trustee obligations to be fulfilled.

This risk can be mitigated by ensuring that a Scheme of Delegation is in place and adhered to. The Link trustee roles are an important factor in ensuring the success of the new model, allowing the role of the Trustee to remain strategic, whilst receiving assurance from the operational lead they are linked to.

Attendance at **Local Governing Bodies** at one school in particular is a concern. Work to strengthen recruitment at parent, staff and community governors is planned, looking to target each of the appropriate audiences.

LOOKING FROM ABOVE
UPDATE ON OUR GOVERNANCE OPERATIONAL PLAN
What are the implications following evaluation of our GOVERNANCE Operational Plan and KPI? How well are we performing?
- The Operational Plan for Governance has been amended to reflect the changes to the circle model of governance. This will be reviewed after February half term to allow for a cycle of meetings to take place.

- Overall, the Governance Operational Plan is **Progressing Well**

MAJOR KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
The Governance Dashboard at Appendix 8 shows that there is a need for additional recruitment at all levels of Governance across the Trust. Recruitment continues to be a challenge but there are plans in place to support with this.

Attendance at all meetings last year for Trustees and Local Governors was 83%.

- Training for Trustees and Governors is an area for improvement.

Trust Board attendance was the second lowest overall at 78%. Last year **X**'s LGB had the lowest attendance for the LGBs at 77%. There is an improving picture so far this year for **X** with attendance currently at 86%, however it is worth noting that only one cycle of meetings has taken place so far this academic year. Attendance at **X** this year at 50% is a concern which will be monitored. **X** has 100% attendance at LGB level for last academic year and this year.

100% of Trustees have completed the statutory safeguarding training. Only 55% have completed statutory cyber security and GDPR training. No additional training has been accessed in the last 12 months for Trustees, via either the National College, NGA or The Key.

MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR DISCUSSION

Discussion: What is the relationship between our Trustees and our local governors?

No Items for Approval