

# Minutes

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## Meeting of the Oldham Learning Board

**Monday 22.11.2021**  
**Via Microsoft Teams**  
at 9.30am

**Present:**

James Kempton	Director and Chair	Richard Lynch	Director
Jane Acklam	Director and Vice-Chair	Councillor Shaid Mushtaq	Director
Helen Arya	Director	Anne Redmond	Director
Vicky Beer	Director	Helen Rowland	Director
Mary Garvey	Director	Nicola Underdown	Director DfE
Rob Higgins	Director	Ian Walsh	Director
Gerard Jones	Director		
Gillian Kay	Director		

**In attendance:**

Jackie Deffley	DfE
Sally Robson	Oldham Opportunity Area Programme Director
Tony Shepherd	Oldham Council

### 1. Welcome and Apologies – James Kempton (JK)

JK welcomed the members of the Board and formally reported Lucy Wood's resignation as CEO. He reported that the main purpose of today's meeting was to discuss the next steps for Oldham Learning (OL) and wanted to place on record his thanks to Richard Lynch (RL), Nicola Underdown (NU) and Sally Robson (SR) for their hard work in assessing where OL is at and the proposed next steps.

JK re-iterated that by the end of the meeting the Board needed to be clear about what decisions were being made about the current academic year and the next steps, and that he wanted everyone to have the opportunity to contribute their views.

JK had received apologies from Helen Arya (HA) that she would temporarily need to leave the meeting at 10.30.

Gerard Jones (GJ) took the opportunity to thank JK for his support at this hard time and was pleased that the unanimity of the Board to resolve the situation showed the strength of partnerships in Oldham and JK's leadership.

### 2. Declarations of Interest, and minutes and matters arising (JK)

No declarations of interest were made.  
The minutes of the last meeting were agreed.

Matters arising:

Ian Walsh (IW) raised a question about the Transition pilot, as to whether schools were sighted and had it been agreed. SR stated that discussions had taken place with the lead school, that the

project has been agreed, and that the procurement paperwork within the Council is underway. The lead school are aware that there will be a delay while paperwork is completed.

IW asked if the School Improvement Programme was going ahead as planned. Tony Shepherd (TS) stated that the intention was to continue, but that there is a requirement to rapidly increase OL's capacity.

### **3. Finance stocktake: academic year 2020/21 (NU)**

NU referred to paper 1 that had been issued with the Teams invite. A full and robust reconciliation has been made by the Opportunity Area (OA) team and the Oldham Council accountants against OL's cost centre code, and Nicola placed on record her thanks to the OA team for the support given.

The main thing to note was that some amounts remain outstanding; those amounts have been identified and any underspend is likely to be small scale. The small underspend will be transferred across to the 2021/22 budget. Most activity is now complete and there is a re-charge due from the LA against the CEO salary line, as the entire CEO salary has been charged to the OL cost centre.

### **4. Academic year 2021/22: currently commissioned activity (SR)**

SR introduced herself and highlighted the items in papers 2a and 2b. SR noted that the stocktake of commissioned work is still a work in progress, where a lot of documentation has had to be reviewed and discussions held with commissioning partners, but that there were still some partners to reach out to. SR stated that all partners were engaging positively and were appreciative of the situation of OL.

SR highlighted that the work that she was aware of actually takes OL over its budget for 2021/22, but that there was still a piece of work to reconcile this across to the LA budget.

She gave members of the Board the opportunity to feed in their views about the work commissioned and to highlight any activity that they are aware of, that was not captured on the papers. SR welcomed people's reflections on the questions posed within the paper and stated that key for today was to identify if the activity suits the purpose of OL and the needs of the sector.

Helen Rowland (HR) asked if the Peer-to-Peer support programme was the same as the Peer Review and stated that she was concerned that secondary schools had dis-engaged with this, and that 40 schools were not undertaking this. NU clarified that Peer-to-Peer support and Peer Review were in fact the same thing. HR stated that secondary Heads needed to get back on board with this and re-launch in Spring 2022. Rob Higgins (RH) stated there was a secondary Heads meeting on Thursday and would take this to the meeting.

JK asked if there was the capacity and budget for all the schools who wanted to be involved. SR stated 40 schools are on the service specification but unclear if 40 schools are signed up. Contract management is required.

HR has a list of Primary schools who are engaged and it does not come up to 40. Primaries who aren't involved cite things such as upcoming OFSTED visits.

TS asked who has responsibility to promote activity at meetings with the sector. JK stated this is a question around the capacity of OL and the role of Board members. Capacity is the people who are members of the Board and the most powerful advocates are the people who are part of the system.

Vicky Beer (VB) asked if the programme needed to be "re-tilted" to make it fit for purpose.

RH felt it was how it was originally communicated and will report back after the meeting this Thursday, and will link in with HR and SR.

**Action: RH to speak to HR regarding the promotion and communication of the Peer review programme, ensuring clear articulation of process and benefits can be shared**

**Action: RH to promote the programme at the upcoming meeting of secondary heads**

**Action: HR to share details of participants with SR**

**Action: RH, HR and SR to review participating schools to establish whether programme is being effectively tilted to local need, to be fed back into discussions about supporting vulnerable schools**

Discussion moved onto the theme of teacher CPD. Anne Redmond (AR) noted that delivery had started on the new Head induction, and that she had been in discussion with the former CEO to continue the Aspirant Leaders' CPD, but had been awaiting feedback on the course.

JK asked if AR's view was that this work was needed. AR stated yes, and that the previous issue had been with timing. TS asked the question if this CPD was the same as the Neil Jurd CPD. AR stated that she thought this was what LW was clarifying. RH noted that we should get feedback from the sector about what they want and shape the future CPD offer. JK asked the Board members to check this out in their field and assess the gaps.

NU refocused the Board on the questions asked in papers 2a and 2b, and reminded them of the fact that OL is currently profiled to overspend. She asked them if they felt OL had the balance right across OL's priorities and its recipients? The financial picture will be very different next year and the Board needs to balance the cost of for example setting up a network if it can only run for one year.

Shaid Mushtaq (SM) asked if there was a pattern to the schools involved in activity such as the peer review and stated that currently activity did not feel like a sector-led approach to school improvement. SR stated SM had clearly articulated her concerns and stated that we need to take stock of activity and ensure that commissioned activity is joined up. Regular reviewing and monitoring is required.

Anne Redmond (AR) stated OL needs to see the big picture, understand what the issues are, and the areas of need. She queried whether money is being spent in the right areas; OL needs clear evidence and rationale on what it does and why, with tracking of impact.

RL stated he felt content that the nature of the discussion showed how the Board was maturing, and that the current DfE consultation on School Improvement (SI) clearly puts the onus onto a sector-led model of SI. How we invest now is important, but even more so is the cultural change to ensure OL is the model of sector-led SI.

VB felt that as a Board we should step back and think about how we shape future behaviors. The focus needs to be a recognition of the evidence base and how we evaluate what is needed and target the most vulnerable. The focus should be on how the system works.

Jane Acklam pointed out that key to this cultural change is communication – how we communicate this to the sector is key to getting buy-in.

IW asked about the Communications consultant role. SR stated that this is targeted more at the operational side of comms rather than strategic. Mary Garvey (MG) said she felt that as Directors they should be clear on what OL is doing and promote this but has been unable to due to the lack of clarity. Lack of comms from previous CEO has led to skepticism of Heads.

## **5. Schools causing concern / vulnerable schools: OL role in process (RL, TS)**

RL stated that at the last OL meeting he had expressed concerns that the statutory duty of the LA to support vulnerable schools was not happening via OL, but has since been assured that the activity has been taking place. The paper provided to the Board (paper 3) is to provide clarity to the Board on what is happening, and that whilst OL has some capacity issues there is some good quality work taking place. RL articulated his view that there should not be a strict delineation

between the LA, OL and other partners, that a blended approach is required to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and schools.

TS covered key points from the paper and asked whether the paper provided gives the Board enough evidence for the members to understand the priorities for OL in respect of vulnerable schools.

IW asked about the changes to School Improvement grant and schools' lack of awareness about the potential implications for their operations. RL noted that as the final position is not yet known he has been unable to give a definitive answer. Once more detail is given, he will do this. JK stated that as the mechanism of allocation of the SI grant is changing, the subscription model of OL needs to be progressed as a matter of urgency. RL brought to the Board's attention the expected Schools White Paper and the changes this will mean for LAs' responsibilities.

VB commented that work is in train supporting the White paper, and that some pilots are running to look at the practicalities of this. One of the pilots is exploring a model of how maintained schools use local forums to commission SI activity. VB re-iterated JK's point about the subscription model for OL, but added that the relationship across LA, MATs, OL and OFSTED needs to be enhanced, with a clarity on who holds intelligence on the needs of vulnerable schools and that all the information is brought together to shape the offer of support. VB also asked if there is a common approach to how we risk assess and define vulnerable schools, and stated for clarity we should name vulnerable schools in the paper.

JK noted that when he goes to the OA Board next week he will be presented with a challenge around the budget invested in OL and the high proportion of vulnerable schools. He asked the Board to consider has what has been delivered met the needs of vulnerable schools and is OL focused on the right things?

RL and TS agreed to make factual information available.

**Action: TS/RL to make factual information on assessing school vulnerability available to OL Board members.**

TS noted that the assessment of secondary schools was a desktop exercise. AR asked if we know what support schools have had and have things like peer reviews taken place? OL needs clear comms on what support is available.

JA stated she has just looked at the most recent OFSTED information on Secondary schools and much of this is now out of date. She volunteered to go out to all secondary schools to ask that they undertake a self-evaluation. Board members agreed that this was a good idea. JK asked JA to formally lead an OL sub-group on Quality of Education who will lead on the Secondary schools' self-evaluation and determine the next steps, and for Board members to nominate representatives to be on this group. SR will provide JA with appropriate OL branding and RL volunteered to share some previously drafted Terms of Reference. JA agreed to HR's suggestion to speak to the next OASH meeting on Thursday to explain this piece of work with secondary heads.

**Action: RH to invite JA to attend secondary heads on Thursday to start the process.**

**Action: SR to provide JA with appropriate branding to support direct contact with schools and MATs.**

**Action: Board members to nominate (or renominate where applicable) volunteers to join the sub-committee on Quality of Education.**

**Action: JA to identify any secretariat support needs for the sub-group.**

**Action: RL to share existing Terms of Reference for the comparable group in Barnsley.**

VB commented that OFSTED also have a role to play in this and we should use the opportunity to link in with them. SM noted that this gave us the opportunity to change the perception of OFSTED within the system. GJ agreed that OFSTED can give valuable independent challenge.

JK noted that he is very pleased JA will be leading on this and asked the Board to agree that the Operations sub-group of RL, NU and SR continue in the interim as well.

**Action: RL, TS, SR and NU to continue the operations sub-group in the interim.**

JK stated the opinion that OL should not be part of the accountability system, but that the role is to understand the challenges that schools face and support required. RL disagreed, stating that accountability and improvement cannot be divorced, and that whilst OL has a broad remit, schools' accountability is part of that.

## **6. Oldham Learning; operating model and resourcing (JK)**

JK shared reflections on the content of paper 4 and the recommendations made within. The Board agreed that option 3 is the best way forward and that partnership activity is already underway with the TSH and a broader network of partners. Whilst the TSH has some limitations on what it can do, the Board felt that the TSH could facilitate across partnerships and will enable greater capacity for OL. AR noted that careful communications of this approach will be required around who will be our strategic partners and why they have been chosen. JK stated that the operational sub-group will further refine option 3 to move this forward and present to the Board (**Action Point**)

**Action: operations sub-group to work up options for strategic partnerships and bring proposals to the Board for discussion and agreement.**

NU reminded the Board that the capacity of OL still needs consideration as OL is by design at arms length from the OA, and the current support from the OA can only continue in the short term. Board members were asked to consider the capacity within their areas. TS stated OL are unlikely to recruit but could second people in to support areas such as admin, procurement, commissioning etc.

**Action: Board members to consider whether their organisations have capacity which could support OL in the immediate term.**

## **7. Academic year 2021-22: further commissions (SR)**

SR asked Board members to consider future commissions: Are there clear priority areas? Do we currently have areas of duplication or areas that require strengthening?

JK noted that the Quality of Education group will establish the link between need and provision.

NU stated that given the priority of Communications, do we need to set up a group to look at this in detail? There is currently no capacity or expertise in the OA team to support this.

JK noted another area of priority is the afore-mentioned subscription model of operating, particularly in light of changes to funding and schools' budget planning.

JK asked that Board members flex their diaries for the next OL Board meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December. Only 1 hour has been put into diaries, but due to the work needed longer will be required.