

Consultation on the Proposal to Join the Link Academy Trust

Foreword

The Governing Body of the Woodleigh Federation is proposing that it is in the best interests of our 3 schools to pursue joining the Link Academy Trust, a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) currently made up of 6 small schools of similar size and rural location as our own 3 schools.

The consultation period started on 24th February 2017. Meetings have been held at all three schools plus there has been a separate staff meeting, a meeting with the local pre-schools (held on 22nd March 2017) and a final meeting on 21st March 2017. All parents, carers, staff and stakeholders were invited to the school meetings and a dedicated email address was set up to take any other additional questions or comments.

This document aims to bring together all the relevant material arising from and used during the consultation period.

Rationale

Why we need to change and evolve

There are several drivers that are forcing us to think about how we sustain our local schools, improve our financial viability and build upon our excellent education standards, all at the same time as maintaining local influence.

The drivers for change can be summarised as;

- The costs of maintaining our schools is increasing
- The funding we receive from the Department of Education via Devon County Council is not increasing in line with costs
- The amount of physical support we get from Devon County is diminishing
- The Federation legally has to have an Accountable Officer in the form of an Executive Head
- Ultimately there is not enough money in the system to sustain 3 schools with an Executive Head Teacher

Sue Leyman's retirement provides both a problem that needs fixing but also an opportunity to evolve and give us the best chance of a sustainable future.

Previously, we could look to our local education authority to support our resource needs. Continued local authority cut backs mean this support is no longer adequate to effectively sustain the way we work as a Federation. We are very lucky to have small schools and small class sizes but the overheads are high relative to big schools with large class sizes.

We do not want to lose our local schools with local identity but in order to keep them we have to evolve. We are not alone in this situation. All schools are struggling financially and all schools are having to find ways to survive. For small schools, working closely together is a way forward. We found this worked for the Woodleigh Federation when the three schools joined together but it is now time to make another step forward.

In order for our children to continue to receive the best possible education, close to home, we believe that we must partner with like-minded schools. We need to bridge the ever widening funding gap and are passionate about maintaining the long-term sustainability of our local schools.

What options have been explored?

The Woodleigh Federation's Governing Body have spent a long time working on the future strategic direction for our Federation. We had two main issues to tackle. Firstly, in the short term, the Executive Headteacher's (Sue Leyman) retirement and secondly, the long term future for the Federation in these times of uncertainty in the education sector.

Below is a summary of the options the Governing Body has explored:-

- Replace the Executive Head like-for-like
 - This was not financially viable in the current financial climate with cuts to funding and lower pupil numbers.
- Replacing the Executive Head by asking an existing Head of School to step up
 - This would cause disruption to the day-to-day running of the schools and ultimately effect the children's education.
 - This was would have only been a temporary fix for the summer term.
- Management Partnership or re-federating with another Federation within the CLC
 - This option would have satisfied our need to have an Executive Head (as legally required by the Federation model) and allow more small schools to work together.
 - It was a very expensive option and not financially viable.
 - The Heads of School did not want this option and did not see it as a long term strategy.
- Working with a Headteacher from a standalone school
 - This option would have satisfied our legal requirement to have an Executive Head.
 - The governing body of the school involved did not want to "share" their Headteacher.

- Forming a Multi-Academy Trust with the Crediton Learning Community primary schools and QE
 - A natural progression for the CLC.
 - Not permitted by the Department of Education.
 - Many of the other CLC primary schools did not want to join in with QE at that time.
- Forming a Multi-Academy Trust with all the primary schools within the Crediton Learning Community
 - A natural progression for the CLC, with the primaries working together. However, during this process some of the primary schools dropped out.
 - Not permitted as not financially viable. The CLC employed external financial advisors who scrutinised the remaining primary schools' accounts to form their conclusion that this was not viable.
- Co-operative Trusts and other MATs.

While in the process of investigating MATs with the CLC primary schools, a number of other, existing MATs and co-operative trusts were explored and visited. These have included:-

- First Federation – a large MAT which encompasses secondary schools and primary schools and the schools are spread across south Devon and Exeter.
- TAST (Templer Academy Schools Trust) – a large MAT which includes secondary and primary schools around the Teign Valley south Dartmoor area.
- Ventrus - a large MAT which includes secondary and primary schools which is spread across Devon.
- The Dartmoor Federation – this originally included Okehampton College and 5 primaries. However, this federation is now looking to expand into a MAT with a number of other secondary and primary schools to form the Dartmoor MAT. This is still in the planning phase and does not currently exist.
- The Link Academy Trust – this academy consists of 6 small schools of a similar size to ours and their outlook and ethos are the same as ours.

Having looked at the options, it became clear that to be in charge of our own destiny and not be dictated to by either a large MAT or by a secondary school, we needed to work with like-minded people and we feel that working from the Foundation Stage up is more suited to primary schools. The Governing Body believes that becoming a small “department” of a large MAT would not be beneficial for our small schools.

What is being proposed?

The Link Academy Trust have offered the services of their CEO, Nicky Dunford and Executive Principal, Tony Calcutt, upon Sue Leyman's retirement. This option will allow us and the Link Academy Trust to have a “trial run” before we agree to anything formally.

Once the consultation period has ended and all the necessary legal checks and due diligence work has taken place and provided both the Link and Woodleigh are happy and confident in the arrangement, the Woodleigh Federation would academies and become part of the Link Academy Trust.

Why we think the Link Academy provides the best opportunities for the Woodleigh Federation

Having looked at the options, it became clear that to be in charge of our own destiny, we would need to work with like-minded people. The Link Academy is made up of 6 small schools of a similar size to ours which share our values and ethos. They have a lot to offer our Federation, including an Executive Principle, and they are keen to expand their MAT but not too quickly. Being included in the Link Academy Trust would provide many benefits but would not drastically change the day-to-day running of our schools. We would, however, retain our links with the Crediton primary schools and QE and continue to work with them as we have done in the past. **QE would remain the “partner feeder” school for our three schools.**

What happens during the “trial run” with Tony Calcutt as Executive Principal?

It is proposed that a half termly report will be issued to the Woodleigh Governing Body just before May half term break and just before the end of the summer term, then half termly until such time as the partnership either dissolves or becomes more formal.

We learn more from trial runs than at any other time. This opportunity will enable us to learn lessons, capture lessons and validate our requirements and to give us an informed decision about joining the Link Academy Trust or whether to revisit previous options or to make other enquiries elsewhere?

What happens next?

A stringent process of due diligence has been and will continue to be undertaken in the coming months. The process of acadamisation and becoming part of a Multi Academy Trust is similar to buying a house. Nothing is a “done deal” until we have signed on the dotted line and in the run up to that a number of legal and financial checks will be undertaken both internally and externally including by the Department of Education. If either party decides that this partnership is not going to work, we will walk away and look at other options.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Academy?

An Academy is a state school that is run by an Academy Trust. The Academy Trust enters into an agreement with the Secretary of State for Education that sets out its responsibilities and accountabilities for the effective running of the Academy. The Academy is funded directly by the Government and is no longer run by the Local Authority. The Trust is charitable, which means it must operate much like a charity and not for the profit of individuals or businesses.

What is a Multi-Academy Trust?

A Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) is when 2 or more Academies come together in partnership.

Who will be responsible for running our school?

The Link Academy Trust has a Board of Directors (Trustees). This board has been carefully selected for their particular skill set and, other than the CEO and Executive Principle, work on a voluntary basis, as do the Local Governing Bodies. The Trust Board will delegate some powers to the existing Local Governing Body. It is anticipated that the vast majority of Local Governors are likely to be the same people as now as they have a good, in-depth knowledge of Cheriton Bishop, Tedburn St Mary and Yeoford schools and of what is required of them and the schools by Ofsted.

On a day to day basis, the existing Heads of School will be responsible for their schools. In turn, they would report to the Executive Principle of the Link Academy Trust.

For further information on The Link Academy Trust, please visit their website:
<http://www.thelink.devon.sch.uk>

What is involved in becoming an Academy?

The Governing Body has voted for this proposal *in principle*. Once the Academy Orders are issued, The Secretary of State for Education (via the Regional Schools Commissioner) and the Headteachers' Board will need to approve our application.

Would the Woodleigh schools have to change their names, logos or uniforms?

There is no obligation for a school to change its name or any other part of their individuality.

How will being an Academy affect staff?

Currently, the employer for staff at our schools is the Local Authority, Devon County Council. After conversion, all staff at all the schools will be employed by the Link Academy Trust. Staff are legally protected to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions, including pensions. Their continuity of service is protected and all staff will be consulted in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations.

How are the children affected?

In many ways the children will not notice any immediate difference, they will be in the same uniform, in the same classrooms with the same teaching staff. We will continue to strive for an outstanding education for all our children. However, in time the children may notice changes and improvements in the way that they learn, resulting from the greater training opportunities given to teaching staff to innovate and improve the pupils' learning.

Will we get more money as an Academy?

Academies receive the same amount of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. They also receive additional funding in the form of the Education Services Grant to cover the services that are no longer provided for them by Devon County Council and to cover the costs of Academy status.

All funding comes direct from Government to the Multi-Academy Trust which, through the Board of Directors, then controls the overall budget. Each school does not necessarily have more money, but as a group the schools are better able to control that part of the budget currently "top sliced" by the Local Authority. As a larger group of schools, it is possible to get better deals and purchasing power.

What are the risks of becoming an Academy?

The change to Academy takes a school out of Local Authority control, but does not exclude the school from Local Authority support. For example, Academies can continue to receive finance, HR, behavioural support and other services from the Local Authority and where these represent 'best value' the MAT would use these services. Where the MAT feels that others can provide better services or better value the change to Academy increases the freedom to make these changes.

There are risks associated with not changing to Academy status. At some stage in the future, any school might be influenced to become part of a broader Academy chain.

How will admissions to the school be affected?

The school will become its own admissions authority but will be required to adopt clear and fair admission arrangements in line with the admissions law and the School Admissions Code. The Local Authority will continue to have responsibility for making sure there are sufficient places locally and will coordinate the admissions process for all schools. This means parents will still only have to complete one application per child.

Does becoming an Academy change the relationship with other schools and the community?

No. Academies must ensure that they continue to be at the heart of their community, collaborating and sharing facilities and expertise with other schools and the wider community.

Will our responsibilities in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and exclusions change?

No. Responsibilities as an Academy in relation to SEND and exclusions will be just the same as they are now.

Can a child with a statement nominate an Academy as his or her school of choice?

Yes. Schools converting to Academy status can retain the admissions criteria they currently use. These arrangements and related processes must at all times comply with the School Admissions Code.

Glossary

CIF bid	Condition Improvement Fund is an annual bidding round to which academies can apply for capital funding. The core priority for CIF is to address significant condition need, keeping academy buildings safe and in good working order. This includes funding projects to address health and safety issues, building compliance and poor building condition.
CLC	Crediton Learning Community. An informal partnership between QE and 13 other primary schools in and around the Crediton area.
DfE	Department of Education.
EFA	Education Funding Agency, responsible for funding and monitoring academies.
LA	Local Authority, i.e. Devon County Council
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust. A multi-academy trust (MAT) is a single entity established to undertake a strategic collaboration to improve and maintain high educational standards across a number of schools. A group of schools form a single MAT which has overarching responsibility for their governance.
QE	Queen Elizabeth's secondary school (academy) in Crediton.

Governors' presentation to parents/stakeholders of Woodleigh Federation

as delivered by Mrs Sue Leyman, Executive Headteacher

Held on 1/3/2017, 7/3/2017, 8/3/17, 13/3/17, 21/3/17 and 22/3/17

Background

- In line with the national picture all schools are under financial constraints.
- As a Federation our costs are increasing and we are not currently financially sustainable.
- Yeoford is now under 50 pupils with further pupil reduction due in September 2017/18. Therefore, there has been a huge shortfall in revenue i.e. a loss of around £60,000 because their pupil numbers have fallen (Sept '16, 41 pupils on roll).
- We need to make changes for the future of the Federation but we want to make changes on our terms.
- It is important we as school Governors, staff and leadership teams make strategic choices for the future.
- The Governors have been actively researching many options for the future of our schools in the Federation over 2-3 years knowing that I was retiring in April 2017.

Multi Academy Trust (MAT) options

- MAT option explored both with QE and without QE over the past two years. The DfE did not allow a MAT (at the proposed time in 2015/6) with QE and not all Crediton Primary schools wanted a MAT with a secondary school i.e. QE.
- Forming a Crediton Primary Schools MAT, but again not all primary schools wished to pursue this option and it also proved in January 2017 not to be financially viable with the remaining interested schools.
- For last 2 years researched and visited other MATs within Devon – First Federation, Primaries Academy Trust (changing to Ventrus Academy Trust), The Link, as well as others in Exeter and other parts of Devon and one in Bristol.

Non MAT Options

- Explored Co-operative Trusts with our Crediton school partners (2014/5/6).
- Re- federation with other primary schools – Copplestone and Spreyton (2014/5) and Bow (2016).
- Management Partnership with the Exe Valley in November/December 2016.
- The Heads of School put forward a short term proposal to run the Federation between them for the summer term 2017 as a short term fix. Governors felt this would be too disruptive for teaching commitments and still need a Executive Head for the Federation.

Future possibilities – joining an existing MAT - Exploration joining with The Link Academy Trust

- It is a small school MAT and has at its heart our own values and ethos – it is about primary schools exactly like us, in similar circumstances, working together.
- If we joined we would be a hub, with a hub manager and all the advantages of being able to access the Link resources for CIF bids, HR, Finance advice, Legal advice etc, as well as their long term plans for a Foundation Unit/Pre-school in each school.
- Each school will still retain its autonomy with the Heads of School in place and you really won't see too much change on a day to day basis.
- You should see a change over time in improved resources, buildings and financial sustainability as well as long term security for village schools and communities.
- There will be a local Governing body – the Governors as they are currently – who in essence will be responsible for teaching and learning along with Heads of School. Policies and other such matters (HR, Property, etc.) will be dealt with centrally.
- The staff will benefit from shared resources, shared professional development and opportunities for leadership development, as well as accessing advice and support from their colleagues across a wide range of expertise.

- Staff will not have to move schools to the other Link schools unless they specifically wish to for career development or as part of a work-life balance request.
- Finances are tight and with the diminished Local Authority it's not going to get any easier.
- It is also for The Link parents, staff and village communities to decide whether they wish for other small schools like Woodleigh to come on board. It is a 2 way conversation.

Proposal

- The proposal is that the Federation will continue as they are with Woodleigh as the 'Crediton' hub, within the Link Academy MAT, but importantly with access to all the resources and backroom support The Link can provide (ie HR, Finance, Legal Curriculum, CPD advice).
- The Link have also offered to work in partnership for the summer term 2017 as an interim – this will be an opportunity to see whether we can work with each other before committing to any long term agreement.
- The Governors believed this to be a sensible option and one that causes least disruption to the day to day running and teaching within the Federation and therefore opted for this model rather than the HOS proposal.
- Please be assured the current close partnership work with QE and other primary schools will still be an integral part of our community links within the Crediton area now and for the foreseeable future.
- The schools within the Woodleigh Federation will continue their strong links with QE as partner primary schools with the sports partnership, staff training and SEN support as and when appropriate.
- This part of the consultation is about openness and transparency – there is no hidden agenda - it is what we as Governors, senior leadership and staff believe is best for our pupils, our village communities and you as the stakeholders within Woodleigh Federation for our future.

- This is your opportunity as stakeholders to meet formally now with Nicky Dunford (CEO) Matt Matthews (Finance) and Tony Culcott (Executive Principal) from The Link Academy Trust to ensure your questions and concerns are answered.

Sue Leyman, Executive Headteacher, Woodleigh Federation

Minutes of Question and Answers from the Woodleigh Federation

MAT Consultation Meeting - Tuesday 7th March 2017

Recorded as discussed (by the Clerk to the Governors)

Cheriton Bishop

Question	Response
The Head of School at Tedburn St Mary does not have a teaching role, could he not cover the Executive Headteacher role for the summer term, rather than the Link Academy's Executive Principal	It was agreed that all questions should be taken at the end of the presentation.
Is the Woodleigh Federation applying for funding to maintain the school buildings at Cheriton Bishop	Yes, the Woodleigh Federation is applying for funding to maintain the school buildings at Cheriton Bishop.
Can the Woodleigh Federation apply for Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) grants?	No, schools have to be academies to be eligible for this funding.
Do we not have to make the decision about a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) until September?	Governors consider we possibly have until April 2018 to make a final decision working as a partnership but not as a Federation alone.
Would the Federation receive a grant for pursuing a MAT? What would happen if we subsequently decided not to join a MAT?	The Federation would receive a grant, currently £25k per school. If we should withdraw from the MAT process, any monies spent on the consultation and due diligence processes would be retained, but any unspent balance would be returned.
What are the pros and cons of going with the Link Academy compared to a primary only or secondary-led MAT?	We considered that the Federation would have a greater say in the Link Academy than we might in a Cheriton Primary Academy Trust, or a secondary-led MAT. Under the Link Academy's hub model, we would currently constitute the third hub, so would be approximately one-third of the Link Academy as a whole. We would be considerably smaller in either of the original Cheriton MAT proposals.
Might a larger MAT be a better business model?	This depends entirely on funding and the financial forecasts. Larger schools in Devon have been badly hit by the new Fairer Funding Formula.

Would we prop up smaller schools?	No, each school has to be sustainable in its own right, with its own budget that must balance within the MAT.
Can we see all the financial breakdowns for the options considered by the governors?	No, we are not able to provide all this information, because much of this is Part 2, containing confidential financial information about schools that are not a part of our Federation.
Would joining the Link Academy benefit teaching staff and our pupils? Will teaching staff have more time to teach and less time spent on administration?	We believe that joining the Link Academy will benefit both staff and pupils. There will be a bigger pool of staff from which to draw ideas and share planning, share good practice.
Are all staff generally behind the Link Academy proposal?	Yes, it is the small schools ethos that particularly draws staff to the Link model.
Have the staff had more information than we have?	No, staff have had access to the same information. The exploration of options, finances and due diligence is the governors' responsibility. We are focused on how to ensure the Federation's longer term sustainability, and we believe, based on the available information, that the Link Academy provides this. However, we do not have a crystal ball.
Could we go through this process now, only to go through this all over again in a few years' time because we are then required to join a secondary MAT?	At the moment, we have the opportunity to maintain our small schools' ethos, which is a fundamental part of what we are trying to achieve. However, we could be forced to change at some stage in the future, according to any subsequent changes in government policy. This would be the case whatever option we took.
Is the Woodleigh Federation not viable? If we don't join a MAT, will a school need to close?	We are consulting on joining the Link Academy in order to ensure our Federation remains viable. At present, if we stay as we are, we will need to make cuts to make our budgets balance.
If we are to help governors to make this decision, we need to have more information, including seeing the accounts. Many people feel negative because they do not have enough information.	It is the governors' role to review the detailed information and to make the final decision. Governors have access to confidential information that is not in the public domain, and that they cannot make public. However, both the Federation and the Link Academy must go through a thorough due diligence process conducted by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC). The due diligence process is the governors' responsibility. Either the Federation or the Link can withdraw if the due diligence process identifies anything that suggests that this is not a viable option for either party.
The Link Academy is a new MAT, and does not have published accounts covering a full year yet. How can we determine if	The Link Academy has published accounts for 5 months (to 31 August 2016). The Dartmoor MAT, which Queen Elizabeth's (QE) is considering joining, has not yet set up and therefore has no accounts. The scrutiny of the budgets to check viability over the next 3

the Link itself is viable?	years is a fundamental part of the due diligence process.
If Cheriton Bishop were to fall down or to become unusable, what would happen to the pupils?	This would be managed under business continuity and emergency plans, which would see pupils going to Tedburn or Yeoford, if they could not be managed on site by closing parts of the school whilst any necessary work is carried out. If the work on Cheriton Bishop were a part of a strategy rather than an emergency, managing how pupils would be educated during this period would be forward-planned. The buildings have been well looked after at Cheriton Bishop and are not seen as being in a critical condition by DCC. It was emphasised that there are no hidden agendas. The questions and responses are being minuted and will be used to inform governors' discussions.
Why were the other MATs not considered to be appropriate options? The Link has not had any time to prove itself.	Governors and senior staff have visited and explored a number of different options. The First Federation has a very prescriptive way of working, where effectively all schools are clones. Governors considered we did not want to lose our individuality. The Primaries Academy Trust did at one time join with the First Federation, but then moved apart because of a divergence in views on school ethos. All staff and governors who visited the Link liked the Link for its small schools ethos and its desire to support schools to retain their individuality, whilst supporting their back room functions. All the schools in the Crediton Learning Community (CLC) decided that they did not want to go down the First Federation or Exeter route.
Will we be able to sustain our individuality?	This will be a non-negotiable in the due diligence process. The Link's hub model preserves local autonomy.
How can we retain our autonomy whilst also achieving the economies of scale and value for money that a MAT should provide?	It is correct that the Link will maximise economies of scale and value for money. However, the Link is keen to preserve individual school ethos and teaching and learning.
What is so different and compelling about the Link that has swept the other options aside?	The Federation has explored other options, two of them in significant depth as follows: Option 1 – all CLC schools in a MAT led by QE. This was not allowed by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time. Not all primary schools or Federations with Crediton supported this model. Option 2 – a Crediton Primary MAT, with all the primary schools in the CLC. For one reason or another, individual schools dropped out. With the remaining schools, this was assessed as not financially viable in

	January 2017.
Could we have created a larger Federation?	The Federation did explore creating a larger Federation, ultimately with the Exe Valley Federation and/or with other schools/Federations were not in a position to or not interested or the proposal was not financially viable. Mid Moors Federation has a school that has been assessed by Ofsted as Requires Improvement (RI) for example and as Governors we have to consider these kind of factors especially as Yeoford is now out of RI and a good school. We have to do what is right for us now.
Could we have managed without an Executive Head for a term?	We did explore this, but legally we have to have an Executive Head, and so we have no option but to cover this position.
How will you quantify parent/staff opinion in this consultation?	The purpose of the consultation is for parents and parishioners to question, test and challenge, to ensure that the proposed change is thoroughly investigated. However, only governors have the final say on the decision that is made. The consultation process opens up and airs questions, and people's questions are answered as the consultation develops and people become more informed. It is similar to the consultation prior to setting up the Woodleigh Federation.
QE set out all the reasons why they are exploring the Dartmoor MAT. However, we were told by the Woodleigh Federation that we were going into a MAT, which has created a "them and us" feeling.	The letter that was issued should not have stated that we have "made the decision". Mrs Saffin – Chair of Governors - apologised for the wording of the letter and took responsibility for the letter stating it was not clear and clumsily worded. The decision that governors have made is to enter into a consultation with a view to joining the Link Academy. The decision cannot be made until we have carried out the consultation and due diligence process, and we can withdraw from the process at any stage if we decide that the Link Academy is not appropriate for us. Equally, the Link can also withdraw from the process if they consider we are not appropriate for them. The process is very thorough and stringent, and is monitored closely by external agencies.
Does it matter that the Link does not have local knowledge?	The Link model is collaborative, and the Link will rely on our local knowledge.
Will we be disadvantaged locally?	The Federation will still retain its links with the CLC and other local school networks.
If academies are scrutinised closely, how did QE get into a deficit position?	QE is a standalone academy, which is different from a MAT. It has also been hit by the new Fairer Funding Formula, which has seen its budget cut.
What does the Link gain from us?	The Link will gain from the strengths of the Federation; the added value through an increased pool of people

	<p>and resources; and reduced overall costs, the savings from which will be used to support specialisms eg employing the Link's own educational psychologist instead of buying in from Babcock, which is expensive. The Link's strapline is "stronger together", so the focus is on supporting each other and sharing expertise. A bigger pool of schools with the same ethos facing similar challenges will improve how we manage, respond and improve the outcomes for our pupils.</p>
<p>Will we maintain links with the local community, specifically relationships with pre-schools?</p>	<p>Maintaining local links is very important to the Link. The Link currently has three schools working with pre-schools, and is supporting another one through a build. Working with local pre-schools is a non-negotiable for the Federation, it is a part of what we want to achieve for the future.</p>
<p>Would we still be able to make decisions about school trips etc?</p>	<p>Each Head of School would have a local budget to manage, so that they decide individually what trips they would want to do. The Link will provide a consistent approach for arranging and risk assessing trips.</p>
<p>Is the CIF pot diminishing?</p>	<p>No, this remains roughly the same. CIF bids are very important. All academies can bid to this, from a minimum of £15k to millions. The Link's Business Manager gained c.£3 million in CIF funding in previous roles, and in his current role has placed bids currently totalling £1.9 million.</p>
<p>What is there to stop the Link Academy from knocking down Cheriton Bishop school and building a single super-school?</p>	<p>CIF funding does not allow for school expansion and it would require planning permission.</p>
<p>Who makes the decision about increasing school numbers?</p>	<p>The local authority makes decisions about whether a school needs to increase its numbers. It would provide funding to expand a school if this was required. This funding would be given specifically for a particular school, rather than for a Federation or MAT as a whole.</p>
<p>Having visited the schools, the Link must have an idea of what it could or could not get funding for?</p>	<p>The Link's Business Manager has only currently visited Yeoford and Cheriton Bishop. There is no obvious need at Yeoford, but there are clear opportunities at Cheriton Bishop. All this expertise can be accessed during the proposed management partnership. It is not dependent on joining the Link Academy.</p>
<p>How quickly could we get a CIF bid in?</p>	<p>The Business Manager would pursue this immediately, and will speak to architects tomorrow, to help Cheriton Bishop to put in a CIF bid. The deadline is the third week of December, with the outcome at the end of March.</p>
<p>If we were unsuccessful in a CIF bid, what would the next steps be?</p>	<p>The first step would be to appeal the decision. If this failed, we would build into the budgeting. We can put in two bids per school each year, and would get feedback if the bids are unsuccessful.</p>

What is the governance structure at the Link?	The Board of Directors is responsible for the Link as a whole. There are some vacancies on this Board. Local governing boards will feed up to the Board of Directors.
What is the background of the Executive Principal of the Link?	Tony Callcut, the Executive Principal, took his first headship at Diptford School, which was very similar in size to Cheriton Bishop. Ultimately he became the Head of four village schools, which each ranged from between 80 – 110 pupils. They explored joining with Ivybridge Community College, but decided against this because the College operated a top-down model, and was a large school with no experience of the problems faced by small schools. Subsequently, he joined with the Newton Abbot Federation to create the Link Academy. The collegiate approach of the Link enables sharing planning and expertise, and the development of a bespoke training package for newly qualified teachers, teaching assistants and subject leaders. The Link's School Improvement Strategy is focused on supporting leadership and benchmarking, including through learning walks.
Do you encourage staff to do learning walks?	Yes, the Link encourages staff to do learning walks.
The Executive Head is currently full time, how will this work in the summer term and beyond? How much time would the Link Executive Principal give to the Federation?	At present, the Executive Principal would give three days. Subsequently, he normally manages time across the schools according to where the need is. The Executive Head role that he would replace would not be precisely the same, and would not be a full time role. Staff in the Federation will be able to access more expertise, and the Executive Principal actively supports communication between teachers, using email and Skype as appropriate.
If the Link has a pupil joining the Academy with very specific and expensive needs, what would the approach be?	The Link is not selective and would be focused on meeting the pupil's needs. The Chief Executive described an example of how a child's special physical needs have been met by the Link, and how children with challenging behaviour have their needs met.
How does the Link manage overspends on capital funding?	The Link uses fixed price contracts, so that any overspends are picked up by contractors.

**Minutes of Questions and Answers from the Woodleigh Federation MAT
Consultation Meeting - Wednesday 7 March 2017**

Recorded as discussed (by the Clerk to the Governors)

Tedburn St Mary

Question	Response
Will the presentations be published?	Yes, they will. The published timetable states these will be published by 21 April.
Is the Dartmoor Federation still not a viable option, even though Queen Elizabeth's (QE) is now exploring this formally?	This proposed Multi Academy Trust (MAT) has not applied to the Department for Education (DfE) as yet and so it does not formally exist. None of the primary schools in the Crediton Learning Community (CLC) are proposing to join the Dartmoor Federation. The Woodleigh Federation would like to keep the small schools ethos.
Is the strategic objective based on the best evidence and discussion of the governors?	Governors agreed that the strategic direction should be small schools, to maintain the local communities as much as possible. The Federation explored secondary-led MATs and they did not achieve this.
This process feels like the outcome has already been decided and that it is a consultation in name only. It feels like it is a business decision or acquisition, when it should be about the children.	Governors stated that the best interests of children are at the heart of any decision that they make and that the correct procedures have been followed including consultation.
The only set of accounts for the Link show a £22k overspend. What guarantees are there that the Link will be viable in a year's time?	Both the Federation and the Link have to go through a due diligence process with the DfE. Ultimately nothing is changed until we sign on the dotted line, so either side can pull out until the completion date is reached. The management partnership can operate even if the due diligence highlights that the MAT will not happen.
What does due diligence mean?	Due diligence is a process that involves the scrutiny of external DfE auditors whose scrutiny will include finance, land and buildings. Due diligence means researching thoroughly.
Is longevity a part of the due diligence process?	The reason the Federation has been considering the available options is to ensure the longer term sustainability of our village schools.
What are the non-negotiables?	Examples of non-negotiables are for the Heads of School to remain as they are, the SENCOs we have trained to stay.
What if staff cuts are needed?	If we stay as we are, we will have to make staff cuts.

<p>We will have to negotiate everything with a new organisation, so it is hard to see that there will be any real non-negotiable?</p>	<p>We will aim to retain our individuality and autonomy regardless, ensuring a bottom-up model.</p>
<p>It is clear that something will have to happen from April, with the Executive Head's retirement. If the partnership with the Link does not work out, what will happen after the summer?</p>	<p>We will need to go back to the drawing board and research our options.</p>
<p>If we did not enter the management partnership, what would happen from April?</p>	<p>We have investigated whether the Heads of School could step up temporarily, but this would be disruptive to classes and teaching and it does not move us forward. The financial hole would remain. We believe this option is a short-sighted quick fix, and we have taken this strategic route to place our schools on a secure footing for the future. The Link will provide the business back office support that we no longer receive from the local authority.</p>
<p>What are the real timescales for making this decision?</p>	<p>We need to make a decision about the Federation's future by April 2018. We could therefore have a management partnership for up to one year. We are not viable to continue as we are indefinitely.</p>
<p>We should wait and continue to investigate options whilst we wait to see if the Link is still viable after 12 months.</p>	<p>We will be doing this as part of our due diligence.</p>
<p>Will the Federation continue to explore options? Have you explored other federations? Or disbanding and going to three individual schools?</p>	<p>We have explored other federations, and will continue to explore other options. Going back to three individual schools would not be financially viable at this time.</p>
<p>Government funding has reduced so drastically over the last few years that all schools are in a difficult position. What are the plans of the other CLC primaries? What is Spreyton doing?</p>	<p>Some schools are not doing anything at the moment. Some are fighting fairer funding. Spreyton are in the Mid Moors Federation and supported by them. It has been at risk of closure as a very small school. The Mid Moors Federation currently has a school that is in Requires Improvement which is something the Governors need to take into consideration when viewing options open to them.</p>

<p>The presentation has helped set out that there is a problem. What criteria were used to judge and measure different options by? What autonomy will we have?</p>	<p>Our core non-negotiable is retention of each individual school's identity. We will draw from these consultation meetings and from staff consultations to identify other core non-negotiables.</p>
<p>Given QE's decision to go with the Dartmoor Federation, would we want to revisit this as an option, or has this been written off?</p>	<p>We investigated joining with QE last year, and decided against it, partly because of differences in ethos, but ultimately the DfE had determined that going into a MAT with QE was not viable at that time. QE is now starting the same consultation process with the Dartmoor Federation and others, as we are doing with the Link. There is no guarantee that this will go ahead, but based on our exploration last year, we consider we would not want to revisit this now. The proposed new Dartmoor MAT would contain 4 senior schools, each of whom has been badly impacted by the new Fairer Funding Formula, which sees them individually losing up to £300k. The Crediton primary schools MAT was not financially a viable option (January 2017). We cannot rule out the possibility that we might still end up joining the proposed Dartmoor MAT in the future because future governments may insist on larger MATs including secondary schools, but we cannot base our decisions now on what a government may or may not decide in the future. We have to base our decisions on what we feel is best for our pupils, schools and communities now.</p>
<p>There is no government legislation currently to make schools become an academy.</p>	<p>The government made a clear statement about academisation of schools and then pushed any prospective legislation on the backburner for the time being. However, the government has the power now to force schools to become an academy if finances are not sound, or if a school is assessed as coasting. There is no clear definition of "coasting" and this could simply be a school whose results have not improved from one year to the next, regardless of what standard those results were in the first instance. If a school is forced to join a MAT, there is no choice about which MAT it would join. There are two different types of academy: a converter academy, eg the Link; and a support academy, eg Ivybridge Community College. If a school is forced to join a MAT, it will join a support academy, not a converter academy.</p> <p>The Federation's aim is to support our villages and communities in the longer term through ensuring that we retain our village schools and that we deliver high standards of education for our children. The purpose of this consultation is to determine whether it is right for us</p>

	<p>to go with the Link or not. We are only now at the starting point of that consultation.</p> <p>A number of MATs are very prescriptive and would not allow us to retain our identity, eg the First Federation. Size does not necessarily make a MAT safer. There is a recent example of a MAT in Plymouth failing, on a safeguarding issue. The DfE is currently working with this MAT and it is not known yet how the schools within the MAT will be allocated across other MATs.</p> <p>The DfE does not want MATs to fail and as a result its scrutiny of any proposed MAT is rigorous. It is not easy to set up a new MAT. Both the Federation and the Link will scrutinise each other's legal and financial information surrounding land, leases, staffing contracts, finances and standards.</p> <p>The DfE carry out a compliance inspection within 4 months of a MAT being established. The Link is a charitable trust and has ongoing compliance demanded by this, which includes external audit. In addition, the Link commissions an internal audit by an independent company each year, to audit the Link's processes and procedures, in addition to the financial audit.</p> <p>The Regional Schools Commission (RSC) scrutinises established MATs for growth now, as a part of the focus on ensuring the stability and longevity of MATs.</p>
<p>Is the Link a multi academy trust or a multi-site academy trust?</p>	<p>The Link is a multi-academy trust.</p>
<p>As a MAT then, the Link has to put in Conditions Improvement Fund (CIF) bids, of which there is an approximately 55% chance of success. The Link cannot therefore guarantee that they will bring money in for conditions improvements.</p>	<p>The Link cannot guarantee this, but we can ensure that the bids go in, and that we make them as high-scoring as possible. If a bid is turned down, we can appeal. We are able to put in two bids per school per year. The Federation cannot put bids into the CIF, which is for academies only.</p>
<p>What are the threats to the Link's sustainable model?</p>	<p>The Link is currently small and we are new. However, we have a very strong school improvement model, which has been assessed as exemplary by the DfE, and both the Chief Executive and Executive Principal each have around 12 years' experience of leading small primary schools.</p>
<p>Is closing a school a non-negotiable?</p>	<p>This is a non-negotiable for both the Federation and the Link, whose smallest school has 35 pupils. The Link's strapline is "Stronger Together" for just that reason.</p>

<p>The Link is a business, so surely closing a school cannot be ruled out?</p>	<p>The Link has had a balanced budget for its smallest school from the outset. We do have to be creative in our thinking about funding, just as the Federation has been. The Link is confident that we can achieve this.</p>
<p>Isn't the Federation keeping a school going at the moment?</p>	<p>The Link's business manager has already had conversations with the staff to look at the finances and how to boost pupil numbers, and ideas are already being generated.</p>
<p>Is the Link's model based on centralised funding or on shared funding?</p>	<p>All schools within the Link have equal access to the business management support. Each school has its own budget to deliver teaching and learning. The basis of the Link is on sharing expertise, support and resources, to ensure that our schools are leaders in education. We bring staff together across the MAT to focus on different projects, eg early years assessment.</p>
<p>How would physical resource sharing happen over an extended geographic area?</p>	<p>Not all resource sharing is dependent on geographic location. The Link uses Google Drive to share planning work and so on. We would be able to arrange Inset Days for the MAT as a whole, and with planning would be able to share physical resources between the schools regardless of the distance. The Link Academy schools currently physically share resources, just as the Woodleigh Federation schools do. Local partnerships with schools will also be maintained in both areas, these are not excluded by joining the Link.</p> <p>The Link has developed a training package for newly qualified teachers (NQTs), and is developing one for teaching assistants (TAs) and for subject leaders. These are possible because of the numbers of schools involved. They would not be possible without this volume.</p> <p>The Link is able to afford high quality, inspirational speakers to impart cutting edge educational techniques for staff, which again would be difficult for an individual school to provide.</p> <p>Economies of scale mean that each school can contribute to the purchase of expensive equipment that individual schools would not be able to afford.</p> <p>The Link can offer better career development for teachers, which means it becomes a more attractive proposition to candidates when recruiting.</p>
<p>The Link does not have a full year's accounts available for scrutiny, just 5 months, and these show an overspend. How far ahead do the Link's projections look?</p>	<p>Each individual school in the Link had a carry forward in the accounts covering the first 5 months. There were overspends against restricted funds, not unrestricted funds, and these spends took place on items that were needed. The software used by the Link's Business Manager looks 5 years ahead.</p> <p>The funding position for all schools is tight at present. The DfE has advised that £3 billion worth of savings have to be found. Although spend on education is ring</p>

	fenced by the government, costs are going up and income isn't. £33 per pupil has been lost in this financial year alone.
On what does the Link base its projections?	The Link's projections are based only on the schools that it currently has.
How many schools represents the Link's ideal number?	Our growth plan assumes that we will rise to 12 schools in the first 3 years. We would then review our position. The growth plan is a confidential document and cannot be made available.
If Cheriton Bishop school is falling down, how would its rebuild be funded?	The CIF is the key route. We can put in a bid each year, and we can appeal if we are unsuccessful. Ultimately, if this did not succeed, we would need to go elsewhere. The Link's charitable status means that we can apply for grants from trusts, and the Link employs a member of staff who specifically works on bringing in these grants, eg the Big Lottery, Foyles Foundation.
We can see how capital funding is covered, how is everyday funding covered?	Everyday funding comes from the DfE monthly, based on pupil numbers. There are a number of income streams, including restricted, that based on pupil numbers, and unrestricted income eg from catering.
If a school had to be closed because its buildings were unsafe or it was uneconomically viable, what would happen? Would the school be closed, or would you draw from the other schools?	The Link would not aim to close schools – it actively supports small schools like us. If anything happened physically to a building there is an emergency fund – with the Local Authority or within the MATs that can be drawn down to support a school.
Is it a non-negotiable to use the funds of other schools to support another?	Yes in a MAT. Each school has its own local budget, which has to be used for that school – restricted funds must be used in accordance with the restrictions placed on them. Each individual school makes a contribution to the executive and business management of the Link, to provide the back office support and expertise eg finance, HR, funding.
Who audits this?	The Link's auditors are Bishop Fleming.
Where are we on the due diligence process?	We are at the beginning, this has not yet started.
What savings could the Link make for the Federation?	This is difficult to quantify at this early stage. However, since the Link's Business Manager started in September 2016, between £15-20k savings have already been made, for example by reducing photocopying costs by two-thirds.
Is it possible to produce documentation as we are going through the consultation process?	We will produce a summary of the questions and the responses.

<p>Why are the meetings so early when many parents work?</p>	<p>We have staggered the timings of meetings between 4.30 and 5.30. It is difficult, when childcare also has to be factored in, so that later is not necessarily any easier for parents.</p>
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**Minutes of Questions and Answers from the Woodleigh Federation MAT
Consultation Meeting - Monday 13 March 2017**

Recorded as discussed (by the Clerk to the Governors)

Yeoford

Question	Response
What do you think are the negative aspects of joining an academy/the Link?	We view joining the Link as a positive and do not yet know if there are any disadvantages that might be highlighted through the due diligence process. Some multi academy trusts (MATs) had definite disadvantages e.g. they were very prescriptive. The Link's small schools focus could be seen as a negative, but it is a positive for the Federation. The geography of the Link could be seen as a negative, but because the Link delivers back office support and operates a hub model, the geography is not an issue. The fact that the Link is a newly formed MAT could be seen as a negative, but for us again this is a positive because we can play a role in shaping the MAT.
Why was the Heads of School proposal only short term, and not seen as viable?	The proposal required one Head of School to step up to the Executive Head role, and could only ever have been a temporary measure. Each Head of School has a teaching responsibility, which would need to be backfilled.
If we join the Link, would the Heads of School have more teaching time? The presentation states that bureaucracy will be taken away from senior management.	Joining the Link primarily affects the governor and Executive Head roles, it does not change the Head of School role.
Where does the money come from to pay for the management at the Link?	The Federation is currently paying for an Executive Head, and it is from here that the money will be drawn to contribute to the management support costs. It means that the Federation will not need to make redundancies to cut costs, as we would if we stayed as we are.
Are the options appraised by the governors and senior management in a document that we can see.	Much of the information is Part 2, but we will put forward what information we can. We will try to get as much of this together and published before the final meeting.
It would be helpful to see the options so that we can understand why they were ruled out.	We explored all the options as a part of our role as governors of the Federation. This investigation showed that the only viable option would be to join an existing MAT. The Department for Education (DfE) determined that a proposed new Crediton MAT was not viable, in

	part because it involved a number of substantive Heads (equivalent to Executive Heads), which made the proposal too expensive. The government is moving against more new MATs being formed.
It would be helpful to see everything pulled together including the rationale and weighted criteria used to make the decisions. Is it cost-neutral to join the Link?	The Federation will not lose financially in joining the Link, and will save costs through, for example, getting HR support from the Link that currently we buy in from the local authority.
If the current Chief Executive leaves and a new person comes in, what is the due diligence to ensure that the ethos is maintained?	The Link has a Board of Directors with overall responsibility, who set and maintain the ethos. Both the Chief Executive and the Executive Principal are passionate about small schools and their communities. The Link has succession planning in place. Any schools that subsequently join will also be involved in setting and supporting the ethos. There are vacancies currently on the Board of Directors. The Link has a well-structured financial system, which has been driving down business costs. The schools within the Link have benefitted from being able to focus on teaching and learning.
Are any of our governors considering putting themselves forward to the Board of Directors?	Yes.
Is there a critical mass in terms of either number of pupils or number of schools?	The structure for overseeing MATs is headed by the DfE, who then delegate to 8 Regional School Councils (RSC), who stringently audit MATs for compliance, standards and viability. The RSC is notified of any changes in leadership. RSCs are looking at “growth” academies, and as a result are monitoring growth. If the Federation joins the Link, there will be 3 hubs, and the Link would consolidate at this stage. The rule the Link operates by is to take a step, grow, embed, and then review again. The RSC likes the geographic hub model operated by the Link. The ethos is to keep our village schools in our local communities.
There appear to be 6 or so layers of governance at the Link. How do parents link into and connect with these governance structures? How do parents have a voice?	The members meet once a year to appoint the Directors. There are 5 members (one place is vacant), 3 of whom represent corporate bodies – the Deanery, the Diocese and Tertiary Education. The members meet to check they are satisfied with the performance of the Directors. The Directors are also the trustees under charity law, and these positions are unpaid. There is a maximum of 12 Directors, and currently 8 positions are filled. The Link is looking for very specific skills on the Board of Directors, who must view the

	<p>Academy as a whole and cannot be bound by geographic links. There is a local governing board for each hub, and the local governing boards make representations to the Directors and can attend meetings.</p> <p>Not all MATs have local governing boards. The Federation considered that local governing boards are an important part of the structure, helping to preserve local autonomy and individuality.</p>
<p>Will we be better off financially as a school? Our children haven't been able to access activities in Crediton because of lack of funds.</p>	<p>The Link is focused on school improvement and standards. We want to ensure that any savings are directed to teaching and learning, and take a collegiate approach, using the expertise existing within schools across the Link as a whole. This provides opportunities for efficiency savings, benchmarking and sharing expertise, whilst maintaining and encouraging individuality.</p>
<p>Will efficiency savings be instant or will they take years?</p>	<p>The Link is seeing the benefits of this approach already, and we have not been operating for quite one year. The Executive Principal's focus is to raise standards, to facilitate teachers to achieve this, and to ensure that our small schools are at the cutting edge of education. The Link has been able to develop a support programme for newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Teachers have more of a career path through increased opportunities, which means that we can improve our staff retention.</p>
<p>In terms of the curriculum, what changes does the Link anticipate making?</p>	<p>It is too soon for the Link to have looked closely at this aspect. However, the Woodleigh Federation has three schools that have been assessed by Ofsted as good. The Link would want to look at what each school is doing, to see if there are any improvements or support we can offer, and any learning that we can gain from the Federation.</p>
<p>Will efficiency savings be invested in teaching staff?</p>	<p>The Link is keen to set up Foundation Stage Units in all the schools, with appropriate staffing structures, but this is dependent on staffing numbers.</p>
<p>What percentage of schools in Devon are going down the MAT route? What schools are staying as they are? Is that an option for the Federation?</p>	<p>All schools are under pressure to work together because of low budgets. As more schools become academies and move out of local authority control, it becomes less viable for the local authority to provide the schools that remain with support. If the Federation does not move now, it may be required to join a MAT, without a choice. The schools within the Link created the Link so that they could control their destiny. The RSC is focusing on "coasting" schools, without a clear definition of what "coasting" means.</p>

<p>What are the requirements for Church schools within the MAT, for example the obligation to provide daily worship?</p>	<p>The Link comprises both Church and non-Church schools. The Church schools provide a daily act of collective worship. This does not influence the non-Church schools. The requirement under the Link's Memorandum & Articles of Association is for the Directors to uphold the character of the Church schools, but no more than that. Of the 12 Directors, 7 are appointed by the Church.</p>
<p>Given the geographic distance, we would not be able to share resources on a weekly basis?</p>	<p>We can share some resources via Google Drive, and with planning can share physical resources.</p>
<p>Should parents have a say in whether the Federation stays in or moves out of the state system of education, because this is such a major change?</p>	<p>The RSC does not require this. Some schools carry out a straw poll, but this would have no more weight than these consultation meetings. We will be publishing a document which sets out all questions and responses, by 21 April.</p>
<p>Will the reasons for the non-viability of the other options be published? Whilst it is the governors' responsibility to carry out the explorations and ultimately take the decisions, it feels as though there has been a lack of transparency.</p>	<p>The Federation governors see joining the Link as an evolution of the Federation. Governors are unpaid, but despite this have to make huge decisions. There are so many options that came to a dead end, and it would have been wrong to go through this process for each one. For example, the proposed MAT with Queen Elizabeth's was not allowed by the DfE. There will be transparency, but within the confines of what is permissible with regard to Part 2 information.</p>
<p>As a parent who does not agree with academisation (although the Link sounds good), I would want to know that all proposals within the local authority system has been thoroughly considered.</p>	<p>Some governors were initially anti-academisation, but through detailed discussions and challenge, came to see this as a positive route for the Federation.</p>
<p>Who has been advising the Federation?</p>	<p>Babcock and the local authority. In financial terms, it is not possible to give any numbers at present, which will form a part of the due diligence process. However, Yeoford's pupil numbers have dropped by 20, which, based on £2,931 per pupil, means that Yeoford's funding has reduced by £58k. The Link's 6 schools have saved c.£15k in about 3 months, and the Executive Principal is currently liaising with Yeoford to review how areas like catering and recruitment are carried out to begin identifying where potential savings may be made.</p>

How many pupils could Yeoford fall to and still remain viable?	The Link's smallest school has just 35 pupils. All schools are being asked to make £3 billion in savings by 2020, with £1.3 billion from administration and £1.7 billion in staffing. We are looking at getting in sponsorship and grants.
How are decisions on the curriculum made? Academies do not have to follow the national curriculum.	The Link follows the national curriculum. Each school has its own School Improvement Plan, and we cost each plan to ensure that the resources are in place.
Tedburn has a very active Parent Teacher Association (PTA), which makes a positive contribution to school activities and events. Will this remain the same if the Federation joins a MAT?	Yes, this would be unchanged. Local school relationships should not be affected by joining a MAT, and there should be no real difference seen in the daily running of each of the schools.
Do we remain eligible for grants within the MAT?	As a charity, the Link is eligible to apply for more grants than schools are. Applications can be made as an individual school, or as a PTA or "Friends of" charity.
The accounting period for the Link is 1 September – 31 August. Will we get to see full year accounts for the Link before making our decision? The first published accounts, covering 5 months, look like they show a small operating loss and have taken on a huge pension deficit, so it would be helpful to see full year accounts.	Each of the schools in the Link had a carry forward at 31 August 2016. All schools have taken on the pension liability from the local authority. The Link's accounts are stringently audited, and the Education Funding Agency (EFA) carries out a Finance, Governance and Management Structures (FGMS) audit.
What happens in the interim, when Mrs Leyman retires?	There will be a management partnership with the Link in the interim, which will also work as a trial to see how the Link and the Federation work together without making a formal commitment.
Can we still explore other options during this management partnership period?	Yes, we can. The RSC will only give academy orders when they are fully satisfied that it will work, and this will then set a date for the academy order. Either party can withdraw from the arrangement up to and including the day before the date of the academy order.
After the date of the academy order, there is no going back?	No, this is an irreversible decision, but it is only taken after a very thorough and structured process.

<p>Have governors identified any negatives for joining the Link?</p>	<p>The Federation has reviewed the potential negatives, as outlined earlier in the meeting, and has considered that these are manageable and by far outweighed by the positives.</p>
<p>It is important to ensure that any decision is driven by the benefits of the arrangement, rather than by the finances, and that parents are brought with you in the decision. However, it is inevitable that smaller MATs will be swallowed up by larger MATs, irrespective of the present ethos.</p>	<p>There are already a number of parents within the Federation who are on board, and we hope through this process to bring all our parents on board. As governors, we have identified what we consider is the most advantageous option, and we are exploring with parents now from scratch. A decision has not been made about the outcome of this process.</p>
<p>It would be helpful to have something from the Link showing the difference they have made to learning, school improvement and so on.</p>	<p>Parents and parishioners are welcome to visit the Link's schools and to discuss the difference teachers on the ground experience as a result of being a part of the Link.</p>

**Minutes of Questions and Answers from the Woodleigh Federation MAT
Consultation Meeting – Tuesday 21 March 2017**

Recorded as discussed (by the Clerk to the Governors)

Tedburn St Mary

Question	Response
<p>What is the process after today? What will happen in the 4 weeks to 21 April 2017?</p>	<p>We will continue to take questions, and to pull together information, reviewing anything identified as contentious and concerning. We will determine if the option we are exploring offers the best answer that is currently out there for the Federation. We will issue a document setting out the questions we have received and the responses to them. After we have done this, governors will then make their decision about the proposal to join the Link Academy. This is a decision that is the governors' responsibility to make.</p>
<p>What are the Link Academy's plans for the future?</p>	<p>The Link has a three year plan currently, with the aim of achieving three Hubs in that time, and expanding the existing Totnes and Teign Hubs. The Link is in discussions with schools in those areas, as well as the exploration with the Woodleigh Federation. The Link would then aim to consolidate what it has, and review what its next steps might be. It is difficult to look further ahead because the situation with schools is constantly changing. For example, there are a number of small schools in a federation in Ivybridge, who do not want to join the Ivybridge MAT and who are not currently interested in the Link, but who may be in the future.</p>
<p>Sarah Clarke, Head of School at Bearn's, was introduced and asked to give her perspective on the difference joining the Link Academy has made.</p>	<p>Joining the Link has not resulted in any real difference or loss of identity in terms of how the school operates on a day to day basis. She meets regularly with another school in the Hub, and they hold joint staff meetings. The two Heads of School have an arrangement to support each other during Ofsted inspections, which they managed to do during their most recent Ofsted. The Link provides a very supportive environment, and works to expand support and share best practice.</p>

<p>How will the finances work? The Link's Business Manager is not an accountant, and, having knowledge of due diligence processes and internal audits, there is not have a lot of confidence that this will provide much meaningful information.</p>	<p>School finances are difficult generally, and all schools are losing money this year. As well as the Business Manager, the Link's Finance Director is an accountant with 30 years' experience, and the Link also employs a Trust Administrator whose role is to apply for funding, bringing in £10,000 just last week. The Link always maintains cash reserves of 2 months' funding in the bank.</p>
<p>If we remain as we are and do nothing, what will happen?</p>	<p>The Woodleigh Federation will be in deficit, and we would need to review and reduce staffing, from September 2017.</p>
<p>If we join the Link, will we receive more money for teaching?</p>	<p>The Federation's schools will receive exactly the same budgets, but the management costs would be reduced by virtue of being split across 9 schools instead of 3, as is the current position. We explored a management partnership with another federation, but this was very expensive. We are unable to publish the figures for this because they are Part 2 and confidential.</p>
<p>Governors have a thankless task to agree the budgets, review all the options and make the ultimate decision about how best to maintain our schools. It would be helpful to see, at a high (not detailed and Part 2) level what options have been considered and why they were assessed as not suitable.</p>	<p>We have used the consultation meetings, through Mrs Leyman's presentation, to set out the options we have reviewed and why they were not considered suitable. We are working on pulling together the information from all the meetings, including the presentation, to go into a pack. We have the meeting today, and a pre-school meeting tomorrow, and once we have the information from those, we will work to get the information pack prepared and circulated by the end of next week.</p> <p>Broadly, the options we have considered include sharing an Executive Head with another school; federating with the Mid Moors Federation; a management partnership with a federation; and, with the Crediton Learning Community, variously co-operative trusts, a MAT with Queen Elizabeth's (QE) and a MAT without QE.</p> <p>The Federation is in a financially vulnerable situation and it is imperative that we set a balanced budget. The possible management partnership with a federation was challenging for us financially, and the potential loss,</p>

	<p>particularly if the management partnership did not work in terms of agreeing the Federation's future structure, meant that it was not value for money.</p> <p>Joining the Link should not overtly change anything for pupils in the classroom. However, the back office functions, like finance, HR and contracts, will move elsewhere, meaning that Heads of School can focus on the teaching and learning.</p> <p>In the time that we have been exploring the different options outlined, nothing has remained static, so that an option that appeared feasible one day was not the next. This exploration has taken place alongside all the normal day to day running issues for the Federation eg delivering teaching and learning, moving Yeoford out of Requires Improvement (RI), and managing Mrs Leyman's imminent retirement.</p>
<p>It is reassuring to hear all that has been outlined, and will be very helpful to see this laid out in a single document.</p>	<p>All of this will be covered in our information pack. We have tried to be strategic, focusing on what is best for our pupils, communities and staff. Since September 2016, we have lost 20 pupils at Yeoford, which amounts to £60k – a significant amount for the Federation's budget.</p>
<p>Have pupil numbers gone down across the Federation as a whole?</p>	<p>Yes, by more than we had originally anticipated through what we knew of the cohorts starting at the Federation (ie Reception), and leaving the Federation (ie Year 6). This has created the unexpected vulnerability in our budget.</p>
<p>It is important that we recognise and thank the governors for the responsibility that they have taken on for our schools. It is not a paid role, and clearly a lot of work has gone into exploring all these options, to produce all the information.</p>	<p>Mrs Dunford spoke of the time and energy that the Federation's governors have put into the research of the different options, and into the consultation, which is considerably more than many other schools she has come across. There have been numerous visits to the Link, by a variety of different Federation governors and staff, over an 18 month period.</p> <p>Mrs Carter advised that if there were no need to change, the Federation would remain as a local authority maintained school. Unfortunately, the political drive to academisation and to move schools out of local authority control, and the cuts in funding, mean that we have to change to be able to retain our schools in our</p>

	<p>local communities for the foreseeable future. The management partnership offered by the Link is cost-effective, keeping the Federation running after Mrs Leyman's retirement, but also acting as a trial for how the proposed MAT might operate.</p>
<p>Will the report set out the next steps, for example when the trial is starting, and when the trial will be reviewed?</p>	<p>Yes, it will.</p>
<p>Will we lose a teacher in September 2017?</p>	<p>We do not think we will with this proposed management partnership, we think this is the most cost-effective way for us to manage the resources that we have. However, funding is challenging, and it is dependent on pupil numbers, so if these changed significantly beyond our current assumptions we would have to review again.</p>
<p>There is a huge amount of change in education at present. Currently, 71% of schools in Devon are maintained. There is a concern that we could be making this move too soon. The government could state that there has to be a secondary school in a MAT. Geographically, the Link is more likely to join with a secondary school in the Totnes/Teign areas, where the Woodleigh schools would not be feeder schools. Our pupils may therefore be prejudiced from our local secondary schools because they are in a different MAT. My concern is about future-proofing, maintaining links</p>	<p>It is impossible to tell what decisions the government may make in the future. We can only work with the information that is currently available to us, and with our present financial position. Secondary schools will still want their entrants to perform well, regardless of whether they come from a different MAT, or a maintained school, and so on. What is important is that we retain control of our choices as far as we can. The government decides where a school goes if it is assessed as RI. If we focus on ensuring that our schools are good or outstanding, we retain this control.</p>

<p>with QE as the secondary school, and ensuring that we protect what we want to keep for the future.</p>	
<p>And if we remain financially sound. As an academy auditor, there is a concern that the Link's first set of accounts do not look robust.</p>	<p>Within the Link, the Federation's 3 schools would continue to work together as a hub, and we would maintain our local relationships. The proposed Dartmoor MAT contains schools that are also geographically distant, like Tavistock and Holsworthy, and there are no guarantees that our 3 schools would continue to remain together. The proposed Dartmoor MAT is not in existence yet, but it contains a number of secondary schools, all of which will have big funding cuts through the new fairer funding formula. We do not have to go in with secondary schools at this stage, and we believe that the Link's small schools ethos is right for the Federation. The Link already exists, and will not experience such big budget hits through the fairer funding formula precisely because there are no secondary schools within it.</p>
<p>QE has stated that it will have regard to small schools in a MAT, and that each school would be able to appoint someone to the Board.</p>	<p>The proposed Dartmoor MAT does not have its orders yet and does not currently exist.</p>
<p>It is staff who are most likely to notice any difference, rather than pupils or parents. What do staff want?</p>	<p>Mr Keay advised that governors and staff have been researching different structures for the Federation for 2 years, and we need to make some changes to remain viable. Ultimately, the government wants all schools to be in MATs by 2020, with the potential to move towards 4 giant MATs across the whole country. However, all of this could change following a general election. We cannot speculate, we can only take what is the best course of action for us now. As part of the Link, we will continue to work in the same way.</p>

	<p>Mrs Waterman considered that joining the Link was a sensible option now, where we would form one-third of the Link. We are currently carrying out staff visits to the schools in the Link, to check that the schools do operate within the same ethos as our own, as a part of our ongoing assessment. We want our own schools to retain their individual identities, which would not be possible within some of the more prescriptive MATs.</p> <p>Some MATs move staff between schools without giving their staff a say in the matter. The Link will not move any staff member between schools without their consent, so no staff member will be required to work at a different school (although they can choose to if they see an opportunity for career development).</p>
Once we have joined a MAT, we would not have a say in who joins.	The Federation would become a hub in the Link, and we would have a say as hub.
How would our hub have a say?	We would have a say as the local governing board (LGB) of our hub. Each hub has its own LGB, responsible for the teaching and learning, which will report to the Board of Directors.
Would we have a veto on who joins?	No, we would not have a veto, but we would be consulted and will have influence.
What is the Link's views on on-site pre-schools?	The schools within the Link have different arrangements: some have a Foundation Stage Unit (FSU); some have a pre-school in a village hall. Where an arrangement is working well, the Link would not seek to change it. The Link is passionate to build and maintain strong, close and supportive links with pre-school providers, setting up forums for the pre-schools across the MAT to work more closely together, to gain support and share experiences.
As a local pre-school provider, would you work with me if the intention was to have a pre-school on site?	Yes, the Link's approach is entirely focused on building relationships and strengthening educational provision in local communities. This could be built into the Federation's non-negotiables for joining the Link.

<p>Who will cover Mrs Leyman's position after her retirement?</p>	<p>Mrs Dunford will be the named Executive Head, although Mr Callcut, as the school improvement lead, will be the management representative most often seen in the Federation's schools during the management partnership. Mrs Leyman will continue as a governor for the Federation for the time being.</p>
<p>If we go down this particular MAT route, will all staff stay? Have the underpinning calculations been made?</p>	<p>The Federation is currently working through our budgets for 2017-18, but it is our aim and intention to retain all staff.</p>
<p>How do you feel the consultation is going?</p>	<p>The consultation is going well. There have been many positive comments, at the meetings, by email and through conversations with parents on the school sites.</p>
<p>Do you feel that the last 3 meetings have gone well? Many parents have been unable to attend because of the timing of the meetings.</p>	<p>We have staggered the timings for the meetings as best we can, but recognise that evening meetings are always difficult for parents, whether they are held in the early or late evening. This is part of the reason why we have set up the dedicated consultation email address, so that people are able to raise any concerns, ask questions, or make any comments, without the day and time constraints of a set series of meetings.</p>

Woodleigh Federation MAT Pre-School Consultation Meeting

Held at Cheriton Bishop - Wednesday 22 March 2017

Recorded as discussed (by the Clerk to the Governors)

Question	Response
	<p>Mrs Leyman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced governors, Mrs Dunford of the Link, and the Heads of School. Mrs Leyman took the meeting through her presentation and invited Mrs Dunford to talk about the Link. Mrs Dunford advised that the Link has a collaborative, non-prescriptive approach, actively encouraging and protecting the individual school identities. The business costs of running a school are shared across all the schools in the Link at the end of the year, when the costs are known. The Link encourages and actively seeks strong links with pre-schools, because it is important to ensure that pupils come to the Link with the best possible start.</p>
<p>How would the Link manage if a child has a form of epilepsy?</p>	<p>The Link is currently working with a child with epilepsy. The Link provides 1-1 support, has raised awareness throughout the school, and increased training and support, including investing significantly in SEN support.</p>
	<p>Mrs Leyman advised that there is a consultation email address for any questions, which is open until 21 April 2017, when this consultation period formally comes to a close.</p>
	<p>There was a general discussion in the meeting, affirming the importance of a good transition from pre-school to primary school and building familiarity for pre-schoolers with the primary school site.</p>
	<p>Mrs Leyman advised that she considered joining the Link is in the same vein as creating the Federation, whereas the proposed Dartmoor MAT is a top-down model. The Link and the Federation both have good schools and pre-schools, moving towards outstanding.</p>

<p>As a parent, the small schools ethos is very important to me.</p>	<p>Local authority support for schools used to be very good, but as schools move out of local authority control, the expertise provided as reduced. More than 50% of schools either have converted or are converting to academy status.</p>
<p>If we don't choose to go now, we could be forced to become an academy by the government.</p>	<p>All schools are insecure now financially, with the introduction of the new fairer funding formula and the increased staffing costs that have been passed on to schools. The Federation does not have the financial leeway at this time to wait. The Link does try to think creatively in the MAT, for example using currently unused space to deliver training courses on pupils with challenging behaviour, thus generating income and making the best use of space.</p>
	<p>Any questions, comments or concerns can be emailed to the consultation mailbox. The pre-school leader will email out the consultation booklet to all the pre-school parents.</p>

Questions and answers that were emailed to the dedicated consultation email address

Questions:

1. As arguably the most important stakeholders in this conversion, do the governors consider informing preschool managers the day before the consultation meetings, adequate notice, and a proper consultation to these interested stakeholders?
2. Will there be other opportunities for preschools to be involved due to the short notice?
3. Have the governing body approached any local toddler groups as interested stakeholders?
4. At the 'information meeting' it was suggested that consultation dates should be advertised in village newsletters, as arguably the best form of communication with the local community. Have the governors done this?
5. Have the governors made any other efforts to advertise to the local community stakeholders? I was at the doctors surgery yesterday, and no notices were displayed there for instance.
6. Have the governors considered the local press in addition to this, e.g. Crediton Courier in order to inform all stakeholders?
7. At the first information meeting, and again at the meeting tonight at Tedburn, it was suggested by a several parents, that 5pm/5.30pm was an inconvenient time to hold meetings as this was children's tea time, and difficult to get back from work for. I know of some parents who would like to attend, but are going to struggle to attend any meetings, at any of the three schools as they are all within the working day. Indeed I met a parent outside after the Cheriton Bishop meeting, who said he thought he'd better not come in after arriving back late, as the layout of the room meant he would be walking through the front and he felt uncomfortable to arrive late. A later time of 7 or 7.30pm was suggested and many parents nodded in agreement to this. Mrs Leyman suggested she would need to check with staff first if they would be willing to stay. Is the fact that the time is no later due to staff?
8. If the meeting time is at the staff convenience and not the parents, could the governors explain why this is? I would suggest that staff could hold there own separate meeting at an earlier time, as should these consultation meetings not be held at a most suitable and convenient time for parents?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response (to questions 1-8):

The Governing Body have endeavoured to communicate with all stakeholders. Copies of the consultation timeline are displayed in each villages' public noticeboards and a copy was given to the doctors' surgery to be displayed. Each parish council has been written to and each parish newsletter will contain a piece about the consultation in their April editions (we were not in a position to advertise in the March editions by the cut off dates for publication). We would actively encourage parents/other stakeholders to spread the word and ask people to feedback via the consultation e-mail addresses.

The Heads of School were consulted about the timings for meetings and they preferred not to hold meetings at 7pm (or later) and each school decided their own timings.

Once all of the meetings have been held and the consultation period has concluded, all information, questions and responses will be collated and published.

9. At the information meeting, Mrs Leyman suggested that the Woodleigh federation was 'now' (February 2017) not viable. However in her retirement announcement (September 2016), she stated she was leaving "the three schools in really strong positions". What has happened since then that we are now not in strong positions or was this a false statement at the time?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

In her retirement announcement, Mrs Leyman (as we had appointed Mrs Waterman full time as Head of School at Cheriton Bishop) was talking about the Federation leadership in that Senior Management, i.e. Heads of Schools and teaching staff were strong and the schools were all now rated "Good" moving to "Outstanding." However, as explained at the meeting, funding has remained static while expenses have gone up. Financially we are vulnerable. The Governing Body is responsible for the strategic direction of the Federation and we are looking at the long term stability of the schools in the Federation.

10. Many parents are angry and confused at the poor communication sent out by governors, the lack of transparency in our governors making MAT discussions part 2 meeting minutes. Would the governors consider making the MAT discussions more transparent and releasing these minutes to aid transparency? The other schools within the MATs were able to show their minutes. Details of a sensitive nature does not need to be included within these. There can still be a part 2 element, and I wholeheartedly agree staff wages should remain confidential. However, I do not understand why other details cannot be released. Could this be considered?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

In the consultation meetings so far, Mrs Alexis Saffin apologised for the poor communication and the wording in the original letter and we have endeavoured to make sure everyone is informed. Full Governing Body discussions were held under Part 2 as some of these discussions contained financial information about staffing and some contained discussions of a personal nature.

11. As I understand it, consultation should be considering all options and looking at the pros and cons. I have only been presented to about the pros of joining the link academy. If governors are to make an informed judgement, have they considered the negative impacts of joining, and if so, what are they? I currently feel that it is the parents job to do this as the governors are not presenting a balanced argument, until perhaps the final meeting. Do the governors not think this is an unbalanced consultation and that it is unacceptable to only present negative aspects at the final meeting?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The Governing Body are responsible for making strategic decisions for the Federation and any decision about the future of the Federation rests with the Governing Body.

The Governing Body had to make a decision regarding which direction the Federation went in, firstly financially and secondly as Mrs Leyman is retiring. Financially, we are vulnerable and we are having to make a long term strategic decision. Having looked at the options available and having decided that we should explore going down the academy route, the decision fundamentally came down to which academy best suited the Federation as it currently is and our vision for the Federation in the future. Our schools are small schools, and we like what that means; i.e. we have a greater sense of community and the individuality that comes with schools of our size.

The senior management and staff have been consulted and this is the direction that they would also like to pursue and explore and the Governing Body have taken this into account when making decisions.

12. Most importantly though, and after the first two consultation meetings, I am still unaware of this question. If the governors have indeed, not yet decided to join the Link Academy, what alternatives are the governors currently considering?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

Our decision to explore joining the Link Academy Trust was because we could still be us; Cheriton Bishop, Yeoford and Tedburn the 'Good' schools that we all take great pride in. If this process leads to a decision that we do not join The Link Academy Trust we will need to look at any other remaining options and this will happen after the consultation process with The Link has concluded.

There have been questions raised regarding joining the Dartmoor MAT. Whilst the Dartmoor MAT is an option, we do not wish to be dictated to by large secondary schools, including a secondary school that, financially, has not filled us with great confidence to date. Our concern with joining a MAT like Dartmoor is that our individualism would be lost. The Governing Body appreciates some may be concerned regarding the transition of your children from primary schools to the secondary schools, hence why they might think the Dartmoor MAT is attractive, but our relationship with the local secondary schools will remain the same and we will continue to do our best to make the transition to secondary school as smooth as possible, as we have done every year to date.

13. At tonight's meeting Mrs Leyman suggested if we don't go down the Link Academy route we would be losing staff members via redundancy and see a rise in class sizes in September, yet then said we don't have to join until April 2018. If we rush a decision through could we maintain this staffing or is this due to happen anyway?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The budget has only just come through and we are still looking at the implications this will have on staffing.

As explained in the meetings (and as proven by our three schools becoming a Federation originally), there are better economies of scale to be made when working collaboratively. These include better procurement, sharing of resources, sharing

expertise (including having to buy in specialist services) and reduced overheads. This has worked in the past but our Federation is being increasingly financially stretched. The Link Academy Trust employ a Business Manager whose procurement expertise is already proven by the fact that they have already a good level of savings since September '16. These savings are only achievable as part of a larger collaboration.

There will be further savings achieved through the leadership which is currently provided by Sue as Executive Head, being supplied by The Link.

Questions:

1. How is the Governing body going to quantify parental and staff opinion?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

All questions, answers and correspondence will be collated and a final report published once consultation has ended. This will take into account all participants views. The Governing Body are responsible for making strategic decisions for the Federation and any decision about joining the Link Academy rests with the Governing Body.

2. How are they ensuring that all 'stakeholders' have been given the opportunity to be consulted? If you walk into any of the schools you would have no idea that this process is being undertaken. It was requested in the previous meeting that a paper copy of the consultation dates be sent out to parents but this did not happen at Cheriton. It was confirmed to me in your email to me that the preschools have been informed on the consultation however Cheriton Bishop preschool parents got the letter the date before the Cheriton consultation date and Yeoford preschool the day of the Tedburn meeting. It is not on display in the doctors surgery and I have not seen it in the Cheriton Parish newsletter. It has been noted by a number of parents that the times of the meetings mean it is not possible for them to attend and they would like to have an evening meeting.

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

Copies of the consultation timeline are displayed in each villages' public noticeboards and a copy was given to the doctors' surgery at Cheriton Bishop to be displayed. Each parish council has been written to and each parish newsletter will contain a piece about the consultation in their April editions (we were not in a position to advertise in the March editions by the cut off dates for publication). We would also actively encourage parents/other stakeholders to spread the word and ask people to feedback via the consultation e-mail addresses.

3. How is the stakeholders' opinion going to influence them?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The Governing Body will take everything into consideration when making the final decision.

4. Why are the options on forming a MAT (and other options that have been explored) discussed in Part 2 of the Governors meetings which do not have

public minutes? I requested the minutes relating to options of the schools' futures public, or if this is not possible extract these points and collate them on 23rd February (after the last meeting) however I was told 'to be patient a little longer as this information will be coming out as part of the consultation material'. What consultation material will be available?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

Discussions were held under Part 2 as the Governing Body did not want to discuss matters in public when there was a chance other options would come to nothing. Some of these discussions contained financial information about staffing and some contained discussions of a personal nature. Regarding consultation material, everything that is relevant will be collated and published.

5. To issue the document reflecting the full range of response to date on the same day as the consultation process concludes does not give any time for reflection. Could a summary of the responses to date be sent out to interested parties prior to the conclusion of the consultation period?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

This is a good point and upon reflection the Governing Body will endeavour to publish a draft report once all of the meetings have been held, hopefully a week or so before the consultation period ends, enabling further stakeholder engagement and comment prior to the finalised report.

6. Can it be proved that we would be better off financially with the Link MAT than sharing a head with another school or joining forces with another federation? Are we able to see these calculations?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The Governing Body's local authority financial advisor prepared finances using various scenarios and it is not financially viable to share an Executive Head with another Federation while remaining a Local Authority maintained school. We're afraid that this information is confidential as it would divulge personal salaries and cannot therefore be shared. However, sharing an Executive Head with the Exe Valley Federation was a very expensive option and not financially viable for Woodleigh.

7. In the original letter sent out to the parents it notes that the Link Academy can offer us financial sustainability moving forward. How has this conclusion been reached?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

As explained in the meetings (and as proven by our three schools becoming a Federation originally), there are better economies of scale to be made when working collaboratively. These include better procurement, sharing of resources, sharing expertise (including having to buy in specialist services) and reduced overheads. This has worked in the past but our Federation is being increasingly financially stretched. The Link Academy Trust employ a Business Manager whose procurement expertise is already proven by the fact that they have already made

around £16,000 in savings since September '16. These savings are only achievable as part of a larger collaboration.

Alongside this, the opportunity for current leadership within The Link Academy to fulfil the role currently undertaken by the Executive Head of Woodleigh Federation will make significant savings for our schools.

8. The Link is unproven financially as it has only been around for less than 1 year. In 5 years the outcome may be that the Link was not a good business model and needs to be restructured/ staff numbers and resources cut? Is it not a better idea to delay any decision to join to ensure that the model is sound? What tests/ checks/ assessments have been made by the Governing body on the strength of the Link's business model?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The financial sustainability of The Link Academy Trust will be scrutinised as part of the due diligence procedure by external auditors and the Department of Education. They have also expect to undergo a "growth check" which will address their financial stability. We do not wish to go "out of the frying pan into the fire" and will ensure that the finances are scrutinised by qualified financial professionals. On the flip side, remaining in our existing structure is not financially sustainable. We are being squeezed financially and the support received from Devon County Council is diminishing. The effect of the latter is actually driving our costs up. Staying as we are is not a financially viable option.

9. Under the academy route the federation would lose control of its budget etc. as it would be decided by the CEOs of the Link Academy. The proportion of the funds allocated to us would be determined by the Link Academy not the Local Authority and would not necessarily be proportional to the number of pupils. In the Link's 5 months financial statement it shows that £110,077 was used for teaching and educational support staff costs at Stoke Gabriel (a similar size school to Cheriton and Tedburn) which on average is £1,157 per child. As a comparison what is spent per child in the current arrangement over the Federation?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

Each school will have its own budget to be spent on the children within that school. The Link Academy have a central business office which ensures best value for money on all procurement and the cost of this central function is divided across all schools on a per pupil pro-rata. Finances are monitored on a monthly basis.

10. The Link stated that closing a school was a non-negotiable however what happens when the school is unviable? What protection do we have against 'propping' up unviable schools – say schools with pupils say than 30? Currently in the same equation Hennock (35 pupils) gets £1,914 per child for teaching and education support staff – nearly double that of Stoke Gabriel. Do the Governors consider this is fair?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The Governing Body are and have always been dedicated to ensuring that our village schools survive which is why we are exploring joining the Link Academy Trust as they have the same ethos. As a Federation we have been supporting each other's schools both financially and with staff and resources. We believe that there is strength in numbers. At some stage in the future our schools may need to be "propped up" by other schools in the Link Academy.

The quality of education is more important to the Governing Body than the income per child. By being part of the Link Academy we can ensure quality across all of the involved schools by sharing resources where and when necessary.

11. It is not accurate to say that we will be forced to become a Multi Academy in the foreseeable future especially if we strengthen the federation by linking with other schools. Currently only 25% of schools are MATs or Academies and the percentage of primary schools is lower. I have read the House of Commons Education Committee Multi-academy trusts (22.02.2017). It recognises that the most successful MATs are ones where the schools are geographically closer together (which we would not be); that there is no financial incentive or otherwise for small schools to convert to become MATs, that there are concerns over the EFA's ability to manage the expansion of MATs, and that in the future Local Authorities should start forming MATs which in my mind would be preferable. See extracts below: -

68. There remains a high degree of uncertainty around the effectiveness of MATs and there is not yet the evidence to prove that large scale expansion would significantly improve the school landscape. Only time will tell whether multi-academy trusts are more successful than local authorities at creating and supporting high-performing schools and tackling underperformance.

70. If the Government is to pursue the goal of further academisation, it will need to partner with and use the expertise of local authorities. Local authorities with a track record of strong educational performance should be allowed to use the expertise within their education departments to create MATs.

71. The transfer of schools from local authority control to MATs has placed pressure on the resources of the DfE and the EFA. Several witnesses cast doubt on the EFA's ability to manage a significant expansion in the number of trusts. Academies Enterprise Trust (AET) concluded its written evidence by saying "we have some concerns over the role of the EFA as funder, controller and charity regulator".

78. Despite a range of proactive and reactive measures taken by EFA to promote strong financial management in academy trusts, the Department has a long way to go in order to demonstrate that public money disbursed to academies is being used effectively.

80. Small primary schools, particularly those in rural locations, are especially vulnerable to isolation as MATs spread in size and number. Witnesses told us that there is little financial incentive for these schools to academise and join MATs as the process can put a "huge drain" on the financial resources of a small primary school.

81. The Church of England education office told us that small primary schools are significantly less likely to join MATs: It is also the case that secondary schools

and larger primaries have been more likely to establish or join MATs while smaller schools (those with less than 100 pupils and particularly those with less than 50 pupils) have either been seen as not sufficiently attractive in financial terms to MAT or potential MAT leaders or are themselves less interested in MAT structures. A reliance on existing local authority support structures may be one of the reasons fewer primary schools have chosen to convert to academy status than secondaries. Regional structures which allow schools to share expertise and resources—the most successful trusts are those which pursue cautious expansion in a relatively limited geographical area. Schools which operate within close proximity to one another are best able to share resources and expertise and subsequently can most successfully take advantage of being part of a MAT.

Are any other options being explored concurrently with the Link Academy route? If so what? And it not would this not be prudent given that the decision has not been made and the conclusion may be that this is not the right option for our schools?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

Many Devon schools are joining Multi Academy Trusts because Devon is one of the lowest funded education authorities in England. The local authority is struggling to support us. The Governing Body had to make a decision regarding which direction the Federation went in, firstly financially and secondly as Mrs Leyman is retiring. Financially, we are vulnerable and we are having to make a long term strategic decision. Having looked at the options available and having decided that we should explore going down the academy route, the decision fundamentally came down to which academy best suited the Federation as it currently is and our vision for the Federation in the future. Our schools are small schools, and we like what that means; i.e. we have a greater sense of community and the individuality that comes with schools of our size.

The senior management and staff have been consulted and this is the direction that they would also like to pursue and explore and the Governing Body have taken this into account when making decisions.

There have been questions raised regarding joining the Dartmoor MAT. Whilst the Dartmoor MAT is an option, we not wish to be dictated to by large secondary schools, including a secondary school that financially has not filled us with great confidence to date. Our decision to explore joining the Link Academy Trust was because we could still be us; Cheriton Bishop, Yeoford and Tedburn the 'Good' schools that we all take great pride in. Our concern with joining a MAT like Dartmoor is that our individualism would be lost and that we would never have sight of the senior management team. The Governing Body appreciates some maybe concerned regarding the transition of your children from primary schools to the secondary schools, hence why they might think the Dartmoor MAT is attractive, but our relationship with the local secondary schools will remain the same and we will continue do our best to make the transition to secondary school as smooth as possible, as we have done every year to date.

Questions:

1. What sort of guarantee, if any, can be made that the smallest schools in the Federation will be protected if numbers on those schools dropped further or dipped temporarily? Does the MAT have a policy about this, and if not, I think parents would like to see something on paper which specifies whether there are circumstances under which a school may be considered non-viable under the operating framework of the MAT (or preferably, something which specifies that all schools will be protected).

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The whole ethos and vision of the Link Academy focusses on small primary schools. All small schools struggle when their numbers dip but by working together they can support each other. This has worked with our schools in the Federation, especially for Yeoford with it being the smallest school in the Federation. The Link Academy Trust has a strong commitment to small schools and Nicky Dunford the CEO of The Link has reiterated this.

2. Linked to the above point, from a financial point of view, would Yeoford School and potentially others in the Federation not be more secure joining a larger MAT with larger schools and hence more resources? Can we have some reassurance that several small schools joining together will not just lead to a larger group of struggling schools?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The Governors have looked at the larger MATs and strongly feel that we would become lost within a larger organisation as we are such small schools. The staff have been consulted and they too feel that we would be better off working with like-minded, small primary schools. All schools are struggling financially, including the secondary schools. The Governors believe that we would **not** be more secure in a larger MAT, quite the contrary. The Link Academy specifically supports small schools which is why the Governors are exploring this option in more detail.

3. I understand that a proposed MAT with Crediton Primary Schools came to a dead end. However, I believe this was a little while ago. Now that the local authority context has changed further still, with further cuts proposed, I imagine Crediton schools may be revisiting their options. Would it be wise to think about revisiting conversations with those schools before agreeing to/ rushing into the Dartmoor MAT?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

It was only towards the end of January this year (2017) that the remaining Crediton primary schools that wanted to create their own MAT were advised that this was not financially viable. Finances have not improved since then. We have also been advised that it would be very unlikely that a new MAT would be allowed to be created from scratch and that the "powers that be" would prefer individual schools to join existing MATs, which is why we are exploring joining the Link Academy Trust.

4. In any MAT, what would be the procedures for agreeing distributions of resources among the member schools? For example, if two schools needed a new roof, but only one could be funded, which would be prioritised? Are all schools equal partners?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

For buildings' expenditure over £15,000, the MAT would submit a CIF bid (Conditions Improvement Fund) for a specific project (or multiple CIF bids for multiple projects) so if two schools needed a new roof, two bids would be submitted. There is no guarantee that the MAT would win these bids but there's around a 60% chance. However, there is practically no chance of getting money for building work from our Local Authority (Devon). If a roof caved in suddenly, there is an emergency fund that can be called upon but the condition of all school buildings is monitored so one would hope a sudden problem would not arise.

5. Would teachers' and other staff salaries be protected at current levels with similar training opportunities to those which they already receive?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

As part of any agreement the Woodleigh Federation would ensure we continued with Devon Local Authority Payroll pay and conditions – exactly the same as we are now. However, for your information - Teacher's salaries/contracts are protected for 3 years and Support staff (Admin, TA's MTAs and other staff) for 2 years.

The training and career development opportunities would be greater if we were to join the Link Academy Trust. We are currently allied with Training schools which provide professional development for all staff – through Crediton Learning Community and through the Link Academy, if we joined. This is a very cost effective and efficient service for training needs. The Woodleigh Federation staff are very excited about working across other schools with other teachers and support staff for their own professional development.

6. Is there any reason why the three Federated Schools have to move together into one Trust? Could any one school go it alone if it found a better viable alternative? (I'm not sure that there is one, but wondered in principle).

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

The Woodleigh Federation is a legally formed body and would have to de-federate if one school wanted to go it alone but as proved by the Federation model, the schools are stronger together, especially Yeoford with its small pupil numbers. We have looked at de-federating as an option. The Governing Body is committed to the Federation.

7. If the governing body decides to opt for a MAT, can we be reassured that parents who wish to will have the opportunity to input into the process to ensure that all new opportunities the MAT presents can be taken (eg parents' and teachers' ideas of sharing of resources or offering new opportunities to pupils for things that may currently be lacking eg multi school sports competitions, or continuation of things that are working well at Federation level eg shared music teacher)?

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

Everyone's ideas for anything that benefits the children's education would be warmly welcomed. There are already a number of shared resources, e.g. music and French teachers and sports competitions such as the Crediton Learning Community swimming gala, cricket and football/netball tournaments. As a Federation, the year 5/6 residential is also a shared event. We envisage that nothing will adversely impact the day-to-day running of the schools and the close connections our Federation has with the Crediton Learning Community and QE. By joining the Link Academy, our contact with other small schools will be increased and we expect to share resources with those schools, as well as getting together for sports and other events. The teachers, support staff and Heads of Schools will have opportunities to work together, plan together and share good practice. It is seen as a 'win win' situation for all.

Question:

Can I ask why joining the Devon Moors federation along with Spreyton and Coplestone has not been explored? I have heard many times that all avenues have been explored, but I don't believe this one has, and it is logical in terms of geography.

I know many people have expressed concern about converting to an academy and I share those grave concerns. I think perhaps consultation could have considered an academy option and a non-academy option, to provide contrast and not be presented with one option as if it is the only one.

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

We have looked at working with Spreyton and Coplestone schools in the past. As you know, they are part of the Devon Moors Federation. Currently, one of their Federation's school is in Requires Improvement so it would be difficult for us to form a formal Federation with them in these circumstances, having ourselves only just got Yeoford back to being Good. Also, the cost of sharing an Executive Head is not financially viable for us. However, we are still in consultation and talking to colleagues within the Crediton Learning Community. The Link Academy Trust have an Executive Principal but the cost of this partnership is considerably more affordable in the short term and longer term if we were to sign up with the Link.

Question:

One question we would like to ask is if budgets and forecasts have been completed for the future link academy once you have joined. Also if the Woodleigh Federation has their current set of figures for budgets and forecasts. Getting the correct financial assistance and information is particularly important to us as a Parish Council to ensure the security of the future of the school.

Woodleigh Governing Body Response:

Thank you for your email re finances for both ourselves as a Federation and for the Link Academy. Please be assured there will be due diligence on both sides and from the DfE (Department for Education) to ensure we are financially viable. Mrs Saffin will attend your meeting on 3rd April to clarify such matters with you.

Consultation Timeline for parents and families of children
in the Woodleigh Federation of Schools

Date, time, venue	Action
Friday 3 rd February	Parents were made aware of the Woodleigh Federation Governing Body's decision to consider joining The Link Academy Trust
Thursday 23 rd February 4.00pm	Informal presentation of Information about The Link Academy Trust by the CEO - Nicky Dunford Question & Answer session
Friday 24 th February	Formal Consultation period of 6 weeks starts – 5 weeks before the Easter holidays and 1 week after- ending on 21 st April
Monday 27 th February	An email address established for parents to post their questions, concerns and positive remarks. woodleighconsultation@gmail.com and at consultation@thelink.devon.sch.uk Responses will be sent within 2 days and all correspondence will be considered as part of the consultation
Wednesday 1 st March From 4pm Cheriton Bishop School	Presentation to all staff : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the considerations Woodleigh Federation have explored • Why convert to Academy status - what are the advantages? • What the Link Academy has to offer • Questions & Answers
Tuesday 7 th March 5.30- 7.00pm Cheriton Bishop School	Presentation to all parents and interested parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the considerations Woodleigh Federation have explored • Why convert to Academy status - what are the advantages? • What the Link Academy has to offer • Questions & Answers
Wednesday 8 th March 5.00 – 6.30pm Tedburn St Mary School	Presentation to all parents and interested parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the considerations Woodleigh Federation have explored • Why convert to Academy status - what are the advantages? • What the Link Academy has to offer • Questions & Answers
Monday 13 th March 4.30 – 6.00pm Yeoford School	Presentation to all parents and interested parties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the considerations Woodleigh Federation have explored • Why convert to Academy status - what are the advantages? • What the Link Academy has to offer • Questions & Answers
Tuesday 21 st March 4.30-5.30 Tedburn St Mary School	Final consultation meeting for all Woodleigh Federation parents Consideration of : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns • Positives • Further requirements
Friday 21 st April	Document produced reflecting the full range of responses to date and posted on each of the Cheriton Bishop, Yeoford and Tedburn St Mary school websites. Consultation period concludes