DURHAM SU BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON 4 DECEMBER 2024

Members present: Graeme Osborn (Chair) Dan Lonsdale, Moitreyo Ganguli, Helen Cutting, Rob Drury, Emma Clarke, Josh Loan-Clarke, Dylan Jones, Calum Cook, Oliver Davis, Catherine Howells.

In attendance: Gareth Hughes, Jane Whalen, Georgina Lambert, Martin Horrocks.

Apologies received: Liam Isaac.

Usual business

1. Opening of the meeting

NOTED: apologies, and no conflicts of interests.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting, and actions

APPROVED: minutes of the previous meetings on 17 July 2024 and 25 September 2024.
REVIEWED: Action Log 2024/25.

3. Reports from Committees

RECEIVED: the report of the Officer Committee of 13 November 2024.

4. Chief Executive's Report

NOTED: the Chief Executive's report.

5. Finance Report

NOTED: the Finance Report to period 12 of 2023/24.

The evaluation of period 12 is covered by the report of the auditors.

The first quarter of the year is a quiet period for Durham SU, which means additional surplus. The trustees noted that the accounts show a £2k deficit against a budget of a £15k deficit, most of which is underspend from timing differences, and little cause for concern.

Strategic development business

6. Strategic Development between Teesside Students' Union and Durham SU.

APPROVED: dialogue with respect to strategic collaboration between Teesside University Students' Union and Durham SU.

The paper was written collaboratively by both Chief Executives and would be shared with both Boards of Trustees. TUSU and Durham SU share an appetite for innovation and partnership working, alignment of need, and a well-established professional relationship.

The Finance Manager and Administration Manager will work with TUSU in January to see how this would work for HR and finance services as a starting point.

The trustees queried what the advantages were in doing this is a formal way, rather than just sharing expertise and costs. The Chief Executive said this was an opportunity to embed the relationship, reducing the risk that the work collapses due to lack of commitment.

The trustees discussed the risk of no significant return from the collaboration and the expectations compared to the reality outcome. They noted that this needed to be an organisational commitment, and not only a passionate project for the Chief Executives.

7. Investment Proposal in Principle: Housing Cooperatives

APPROVED: an investment proposal in principle.

The proposal in principle was that Durham SU make a social investment in a housing cooperative for the benefit of Durham students, assuming:

- A cash investment of £100k, and no more than £150k.
- Fully recovered, including costs, over ten years.
- Made with no intent that Durham SU owns or manages property in the longer-term.
- Made to a housing cooperative for the benefit of students at Durham University.

The trustees noted that this was a proposal in principle only, and that further papers would enable gateway decisions. The Chief Executive confirmed that an experienced partner, Student Cooperative Housing, was able to help Durham SU navigate the initial steps into making this social investment.

8. Review of the 28-hour work week trial

APPROVED: recommendations to confirm the success of the 28-hour work week trial.

The Administration Manager presented the evaluation of a 28-hour work week trial conducted over 12 weeks in summer 2024 to assess impact on employee wellbeing, productivity, and business performance. The trial was part of an initiative to explore more flexible working during university summer vacation, with the goal of improving work-life balance, reducing burnout, and enhancing job satisfaction, without compromising productivity or operational efficiency.

The trustees agreed that the trial demonstrated that a reduced work week can lead to significant benefits in employee well-being without sacrificing productivity. With thoughtful adjustments as noted in the paper, the model has the potential to become a sustainable long-term contribution to Durham SU's ambition to be an excellent place of work.

Good governance business

9. Report of the Auditor

RECEIVED: the report of the auditors, Armstrong Watson.

The Auditors presented their report, which with the trustees' annual report, brings together the story of Durham SU's activity in 2023/24. The Auditors advised this was a clean audit and nothing had been found of concern. The management report sets out responsibilities and limitations, and actions were green/advice actions only.

The Auditors thanked the Finance Manager and team for their work with the audit. There had been no difficulties, which is a good first experience as a new Auditor.
The trustees accepted the report, and that Durham SU was a going concern. The trustees thanked the Finance team for their hard work, and the Auditors for their report.

10. Articles of Association

APPROVED: new Articles of Association, and a proposal for call of a referendum.

Items for Information

11. Governance Matters

NOTED and **AGREED:** governance matters.

12. Any other urgent business

Update on Durham University Finances

The Chief Executive advised the trustees that Durham University was soon to announce significant financial challenges. The rest of the higher education sector was facing similar challenges and Durham was, in many ways, better off than many of its peers; the fact that this sort of pain was rare at Durham is a luxury, although it may not feel like that as a change process would soon negatively affect many colleagues across the institution.

Although the extent to which Durham SU would be affected by the financial challenges was not yet clear, Durham SU should fully expect to be impacted, with a likely cut to grant. This would have consequences for the delivery of strategy, and the staff team.