

Learn  
**Sheffield**



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# Directors' Strategic Report **2020/21**

ANNUAL REPORT TO SHAREHOLDERS  
LEARN SHEFFIELD AGM

THURSDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> FEBRUARY 2022



## Directors' Strategic Report 2020/21

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LEARN SHEFFIELD AGM

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This **Annual Report to Shareholders** is the sixth such report produced by Learn Sheffield, coming at the end of the sixth year since incorporation on the 14th August 2015. This period has included the final year of our second three-year commission from Sheffield City Council (SCC) in relation to school improvement and the third year of our school subscription model.

This report provides an overview of performance in this reporting period in relation to Board effectiveness, key developments, school improvement commission outcomes and financial outcomes. It has been prepared by the Chair of the Board, Antony Hughes, and the Chief Executive, Stephen Betts. It should be read in conjunction with the financial statement and other papers for the Annual General Meeting on Thursday 3 February 2022.

Further information about Learn Sheffield can be found at [www.learnsheffield.co.uk](http://www.learnsheffield.co.uk).

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



*This is my first opportunity as Chair to report on the progress of Learn Sheffield in this, our sixth Annual Report to Shareholders.*

It is a privilege to have become the Chair of the Learn Sheffield Board and I would like to start by paying tribute to my predecessor, Mike Allen.

Mike's deep commitment to Learn Sheffield and calm leadership have been a key feature in the development of the company. His period as Chair saw much of the growth in Learn Sheffield which, today, leaves the organisation in the healthiest and most robust position that we have yet seen.

The Board is delighted to welcome the new members of the team who joined in 2020/21 and those who have joined us since the start of the current school year. In particular, it is fantastic to write this message with both a Director of Finance and Operations (Sam Dunker) and a Director of School Improvement (Jean Watt) now in post. I know that Sam and Jean, alongside Stephen as CEO, will play a big part in the next phase of Learn Sheffield's progress.

Returning to focus on the period covered by this report (2020/21), you will see in our financial reports that Learn Sheffield has had another stable year financially. This stability was crucial to enabling Learn Sheffield to make the steps forward and grow in the way that it is now doing. It has also been very encouraging to again see no decline in the level of school subscriptions as we move into a new subscription model. This funding is key to the stability of the organisation but, in many ways, more important to the reach and efficacy of Learn Sheffield in supporting schools and academies to succeed.

2020/21 also saw the final year of our second commission from SCC in relation to school improvement. This close partnership has supported Sheffield schools and leaders well during the pandemic and, as we now move in to the delivery of our third commission and the funded programmes designed as part of the Education Strategy, continues to be important to both our sustainability and the impact that we can facilitate within the system.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Stephen and all of the team at Learn Sheffield for all that they have achieved this year and also thank all of my colleagues on the Board for their contribution to Learn Sheffield.

ANTONY HUGHES CHAIR – LEARN SHEFFIELD BOARD

## OVERVIEW FROM THE THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE



*Welcome to our Director's Strategic Report for 2020/21, which is our sixth annual report to shareholders.*

The twelve-month period covered by this report included the final year of delivery for both our first school subscription offer (whose contract was for three years) and our second school improvement commission from Sheffield City Council.

Whilst this period will continue to be remembered for the ongoing Covid pandemic, it was also a significant year in the development of Learn Sheffield. Maintaining our financial and operational stability (with both a new school improvement commission and funding for a range of new programmes agreed with Sheffield City Council) in 2020/21 has enabled us to make the decision to grow as an organisation. This has been a crossroads moment in our history and the decisions taken will be central to the impact that we will have in the years ahead.

I continue to be extremely proud of our team and their commitment to work alongside schools in any and all circumstances! The pandemic continued to shape our work significantly in 2020/21 but increasingly with a 'business as usual' element. At the time of writing this message Covid is again dominant in our operational support but less so in the development work that we are doing with schools. The transition from Covid to post-Covid is more complex than any of us initially hoped or expected but, as we said last year, the toughest work is probably still to come.

I would like to thank the Board for all of their skill and support and, in particular, offer my personal thanks to Mike Allen as he steps aside as Chair. His thoughtful and well-judged advice, his kindness and his knowledge and experience have made such a difference to me as the CEO and to the organisation as a whole. It is extremely positive that our new Chair, Antony Hughes, is able to step up from the Vice-Chair role and has a long association with Learn Sheffield. This will also be important as we are likely to have a number of new Board members in the months ahead.

Finally, I would like to also thank Sheffield schools for their continued support. The partnership between Learn Sheffield and our schools and academies has continued to deepen over time and this is reflected in both the flexible ways in which we work together and the level of subscription and engagement. The further development of the Learn Sheffield team will enhance our capacity and the offer that we can make to schools and this is extremely encouraging as we look towards the future.

STEPHEN BETTS CHIEF EXECUTIVE

# BOARD EFFECTIVENESS

As described previously, the substantive Learn Sheffield Board was elected and confirmed at the AGM/EGM in December 2016. The Interim Board, which resigned on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2016, led the company through to the end of its first year, enabling it to take responsibility for the first accounting period and the recruitment of the substantive Chief Executive.

During the 2020/21 school year Board membership has been stable, although there are a number of changes as we head in to 2021/22. Several changes will be confirmed at the meeting through the resolutions. The list below summarises these changes:

- Bev Matthews was elected as a secondary sector nominated director in the autumn of 2020 and confirmed at the AGM on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021.
- Cllr Andy Bainbridge stepped down as a SCC nominated director following the local elections in May 2021.
- Andrew Hartley stepped down as a FE sector nominated director at the end of his term of office in March 2021.
- Paul Simpson was nominated as FE Sector nominated director to replace Andrew Hartley. Has been invited to attend the Board as an observer since September 2021 and will be confirmed at the meeting.
- Mike Allen stepped down as a co-opted director (and Chair) on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021.
- Angela Lant stepped down as primary sector nominated director on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021.
- Angela Lant was appointed as a co-opted director with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021.
- Nicola Shipman has been elected as a primary sector nominated director and her appointment will be confirmed at the meeting.
- Mike Westerdale's term as a secondary sector nominated director ends in the same month as the 2022 AGM. He has been re-nominated by the sector and will be confirmed at the meeting.

Subject to the confirmations above at the AGM, we have two current vacancies for co-opted directors and await two nominations from SCC (James Henderson is currently continuing to attend as an observer until this is resolved).

Attendance at the Board and committee meetings remains good with overall attendance of 79% (slightly up from 75% in the previous year). Board attendance, including apologies, has remained at 97% during 2020/21.

The attendance, effectiveness and contribution at meetings of the directors are kept under review by the chair. Directors agree that the Board is effective in fulfilling its strategic duties and the reports and presentations provided by the executive are of good quality, enabling the Board to carry out its functions efficiently.

The format of the Learn Sheffield Board and committee meetings in 2020/21 have continued to take place online via a video conferencing platform. Board meetings were split between business meetings and strategic meetings. The latter were attended by Sir David Carter, who assumed a role as Strategic Advisor to the Board in September 2020.

More information about the Learn Sheffield Board can be found below and online at [www.learnsheffield.co.uk/About-Us/The-Board](http://www.learnsheffield.co.uk/About-Us/The-Board) and the company public records are available at Companies House.

# THE BOARD



## Stephen Betts

*Chief Executive*

Stephen was appointed as the Interim Chief Executive of Learn Sheffield in late summer 2015, having previously chaired the working group that determined the approach that Sheffield would take to school improvement. Following a competitive recruitment process, he was appointed to the substantive Chief Executive role in May 2016. Before becoming involved with Learn Sheffield, Stephen was the Headteacher of Malin Bridge Primary School and had worked for 17 years in the primary sector. His previous schools were Ecclesfield Primary and Nook Lane Junior School.



## James Henderson

*Sheffield City Council nominated (temporary observer)*

James was appointed by Sheffield City Council as a director of Learn Sheffield in September 2019. He is the Council's Director of Policy, Performance and Communications and is responsible for a range of corporate, democratic and strategic services. He has worked at SCC since 2006 and before that was a member of the Homes and Communities Agency set-up team, as well as working for Barnsley MBC. James has served as a governor of a primary school federation in Sheffield and is committed to supporting school improvement through the work of Learn Sheffield.



## Christopher Holder

*Primary School sector nominated*

Chris has almost thirty years teaching experience working in multicultural inner city schools in both London and Sheffield. He has been the Headteacher of Lowfield Primary School since 2012 and is one of the two Primary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which he joined in December 2016. Chris is a National Leader of Education and has been deployed as both an Executive Headteacher and an Associate Headteacher. He represents his locality partnership on the Primary Improvement Board and co-ordinates the Primary Leaders Partnership.



## Antony Hughes

*Chair of the Board – Co-opted Director*

Antony was appointed as one of the three co-opted non-executive Directors on the Board in February 2017. He became the Chair of the Board in September 2021. He is currently the Chief Executive of The Harmony Trust, which is a multi-academy trust containing schools in Oldham and Derby. Antony was previously Commissioner for Children’s Services and Director of the Inclusion and Learning Service at Sheffield City Council, in which roles he worked closely with Learn Sheffield. Antony worked for the Department for Education before coming to Sheffield.



## Angela Lant

*Co-opted Director*

Angela became a co-opted Director in September 2021. She had previously been one of the two Primary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield. Angela worked in Primary education for more than thirty years, in a variety of contexts, and led schools for more than twenty years. In her last role Angela was part of the Executive Team at Tipton School Academy Trust and, in her role as Director of Primaries, led a team of five Sheffield primary schools. Angela also represented her locality partnership on the Primary Improvement Board and supported a wide range of local education initiatives.



## Dean Linkhorn

*Special School sector nominated*

Dean was appointed as the Special School Director on the Board of Learn Sheffield in January 2020. He is currently the Chair of Governors at Rowan School. Previously, Dean was the Headteacher of Mossbrook School and was a previous Chair of the Special School Partnership. In this role he was also a member of the Interim Board when Learn Sheffield was created and becomes the first person to hold a seat on the Learn Sheffield Board for the second time. Dean is a strong advocate for the specialist sector and of cross sector improvement partnerships.



## Bev Matthews

*Secondary School sector nominated*

Bev is currently Chief Executive Officer of the Minerva Learning Trust in Sheffield. It is a local academy trust comprising four secondary schools, one primary school and a FE college. She is one of the two Secondary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which she joined in March 2020. Bev has over 15 years of experience in the education sector, including FE and secondary settings and LA roles. She returned to school leadership in Sheffield following a period of Headship in West Yorkshire.



## Mike Westerdale

*Secondary School sector nominated*

Mike is currently Chief Executive Officer of the Brigantia Learning Trust in north east Sheffield. It is a 2-18+ local academy trust comprising three primary schools, two secondary schools and Sixth Form College. He is one of the two Secondary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield, which he joined in February 2019.

From 2010-2014, Mike was the Principal of Parkwood Academy in Sheffield and returned to Sheffield in 2018 after four years working away from the city. He has a strong commitment to inclusion and also chairs the Secondary Inclusion Panel.

## FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Learn Sheffield re-appointed Hart Shaw as company auditors for the financial year 2020/21 and they will present the sixth set of audited accounts at the Annual General Meeting.

A presentation at the AGM will identify the key elements of financial performance, from Learn Sheffield's sixth year of operation, but it is worth noting here that it has been another stable year financially for Learn Sheffield.

The company carried forward a deficit position at the end of the 2017/18 year before stabilising in 2018/19 to show a small trading in-year surplus (excluding the adjustments for the pension deficit) by August 2019.

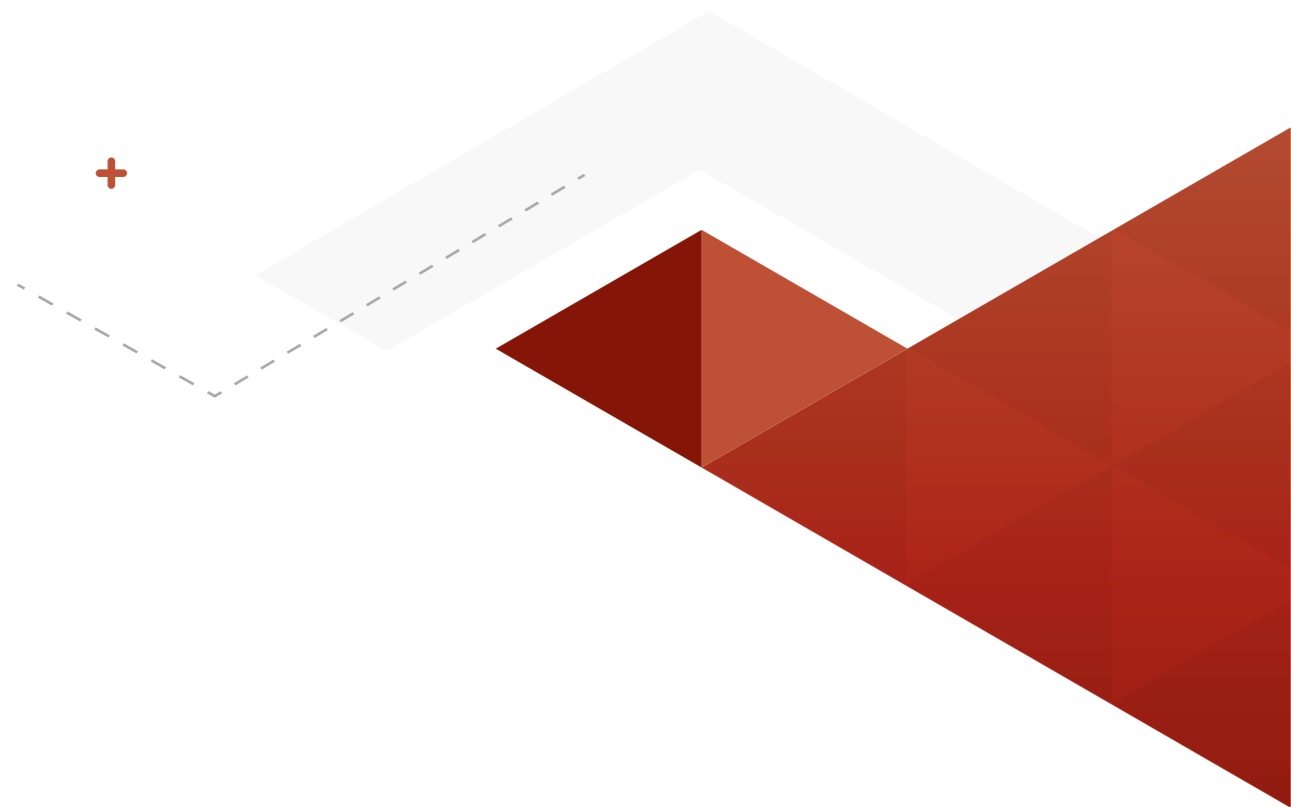
The 2019/20 accounts showed a trading surplus (which

was projected in the last annual report to be circa £25k but was later adjusted to £73,482). This meant that Learn Sheffield started the 2020/21 year with a small reserve carry-forward surplus position (£22,009).

In 2020/21 the accounts show a further in-year trading surplus (£35,752) which adds to the previous reserve to leave Learn Sheffield with an accumulated reserve of £57,761 at 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021.

The trading position continues to exclude adjustments for the pension deficit, which now stands at £569k. We continue to explore the distribution of liability within this figure.

The auditors continue to have confidence in the Board's statement that Learn Sheffield is a going concern.



## SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN 2020/21

The developments identified below summarise some of the key work that has been undertaken by Learn Sheffield in its sixth year of operation. Two themes dominated the year: the need to modify and amend our work in the face of the ongoing Covid pandemic and the development work which has supported a significant step in the capacity and resources of Learn Sheffield as we move into 2021/22.

### Support for Sheffield Settings

Covid related activity continued to be a central feature of support for schools in 2020/21.

This included both Covid-specific activity and the modification of the subscription and commissioned work to recognise the ongoing impact of the pandemic on our work with settings.

Much of the earlier response to the pandemic, including the Covid Share Site, development of bespoke guidance and projects such as the Sheffield Star Home Learning Supplement became less relevant in 2020/21 as the focus moved to interpreting guidance, keeping settings open for all pupils and trying to get back to a greater proportion of 'business as usual' activities.

Learn Sheffield supported schools by adapting existing activity to meet the needs of leaders. This included the ongoing modified support of partnership groups, regular briefings with colleagues from Public Health, online versions of leader briefings and the continued use of live online and recorded training.

The Covid Recovery Festival was held in September 2020 (as reported in last year's annual report) and this has been followed up in the current school year with a new (non-Covid focussed) Autumn Online Festival. This is just one example of an initiative or approach that was created because of the pandemic but which will stay into the future.

The exception to this approach was the Laptops for Kids project which Learn Sheffield got involved in alongside WANdisco, Blanco, SCC and the Sheffield Star. This project set up a system for organisations and members of the public to donate used laptops so that they could be wiped and distributed to settings for onward distribution to children and young people. Some businesses donated to the project so that additional laptops and connectivity could be purchased. A further significant donation by SCC boosted the number by purchasing both new laptops and connectivity. More than 5500 laptops have been provided through this project and the project was shortlisted for an award at the Better Society 2021 Awards!



## School Improvement Strategy & Commission

Learn Sheffield continued to deliver the school improvement commission from Sheffield City Council (SCC) in 2020/21, which was the final year of this three-year commission. The focus of activity has continued to be amended by agreement with SCC to support the ongoing Covid related challenges across the school year.

As we reported in our last Annual Report, we decided not to re-categorise schools and academies in September 2020, following discussions with each sector and SCC. The consensus was that the process did not merit the investment of time on all sides to put a new system in place for one year to identify schools who should receive additional support. Instead the existing categorisation was carried forward with scope for settings to raise any new concerns. This enabled a more flexible response to challenges faced by schools in circumstances that continued to be abnormal.

Discussions also took place in 2020/21 about a new school improvement commission, to run from

September 2021. The content of the new commission was agreed in the summer term for a five year contract (with break clauses at the end of the third and fourth year). The components of the new commission are below:

- Universal component – ensuring that resources can be targeted effectively (including through categorisation) and supporting/facilitating a partnership infrastructure.
- Offer to maintained schools – core element of the school improvement package.
- Targeted support for settings and agreed priorities - includes identified activity such as statutory moderation and Headteacher recruitment as well as support and challenge following categorisation.

Delivery of the new commission commenced in September 2021 although at the time of writing this report the contract has yet to be received and finalised.

## Funded Programmes

Work to develop a new Sheffield Education Strategy continued across the 2020/21 school year. Learn Sheffield took a leading role in the development of the strategy alongside colleagues from Sheffield City Council. The graphic on the right (taken from a Leader Roundtable session in June 2021) illustrates the communication to settings about the different strands of work that Learn Sheffield was engaged in.

It was decided in the summer term that the Education Strategy project would be modified so that education strategy could fall into line with the wider SCC one-year Covid recovery strategy.



This included a commitment to fund a series of programmes designed by Learn Sheffield and funded by SCC as part of its commitment to the strategy. The funded programmes listed below were launched in July 2021 and more information can be found on the [Learn Sheffield website](#).

- Curriculum Project led by Mary Myatt.
- Teaching WalkThrus led by Tom Sherrington.
- Making the Difference led by Marc Rowland and in partnership with the EEF.
- SEND Peer Review led by David Bartram and in partnership with Whole Education.
- Embedding Formative Assessment in partnership with SSAT.
- CPD Excellence Hubs in partnership with the TDT.



## Subscription Model

The Learn Sheffield subscription offer continued to be delivered despite the pandemic. This was third year of the model and it again needed to be modified in light of the pandemic. Schools, academies and colleges have continued to be extremely flexible and supportive in relation to the challenges that this brought in 2020/21.

As the 2021/22 subscription offer was developed (and shared in June 2021), we reshaped the offer to ensure that the SCC Commission (from September 2021) would be able to include the purchase of the core element of the offer for maintained schools. This better reflects the focus of the new commission.

Learn Sheffield is delighted that, as we move into 2021/22 that the proportion of subscribing schools has continued to be stable. The proportion of schools who are engaging with the subscription offer in year four can be seen below alongside the first three years. The overall subscription proportion has increased slightly this year against a similar background of small changes to the cohort.

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Primary (inc. nursery)	90.6%	88.3%	87.6%	<b>87.9%</b>
Secondary (inc. FE)	81.3%	83.9%	81.8%	<b>88.3%</b>
Special	100%	100%	100%	<b>83.3%</b>
<b>OVERALL</b>	89.6%	88.3%	87.4%	<b>87.9%</b>

## Wider Developments

Learn Sheffield completed its move to Albion House at the start of 2020/21 and has continued to develop our base throughout the year. Many changes were driven by Covid and modifying the space to enable the greatest possible level of safe office occupancy. We look forward to welcoming more colleagues to Albion House in 2021/22!

Many of the developments above informed ongoing Board discussions about Learn Sheffield's capacity. These conversations date back to our peer review in 2018 which identified a number of recommendations that we had not yet been able to act upon. These included issues of succession and sustainability and the need for a greater and more structured approach to evaluation.

With a new school improvement commission agreed, the addition of the funded programmes and the success of the new subscription model the Learn Sheffield Board have invested in the expansion of our capacity. As Antony noted in his message this has included both a Director of Finance and Operations (Sam Dunker) and a Director of School Improvement (Jean Watt) joining Learn Sheffield in 2021/22. This has been supplemented by other additions to both the LSIP team and the project officer team.

We believe that these developments have enhanced the sustainability of Learn Sheffield and will enable us to be the organisation that the city needs us to be in the next period of our development.

## SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PERFORMANCE

In the years which preceded the Covid pandemic, Learn Sheffield reported in this section of our Annual Report on the four areas below:

1. Partnership Working
2. School Outcomes
3. Pupil Outcomes
4. Outcomes for Vulnerable Pupils

The nature and availability of data has obviously changed significantly over the past two years and the Outcomes Report was suspended in the summer of 2020 once both the school and pupil data had been changed nationally.

At the time that the report was suspended, Partnership Working continued to be RAG rated as 'green' by Learn Sheffield and the other three areas were RAG rated as 'amber'. At the time of suspending the Outcomes Report Sheffield's Ofsted outcomes were the strongest they had been but remained 'amber' because our relative performance remained below the national level.

During the 2020/21 academic year, the Outcomes Report continued to be suspended.





Please contact us to find out more. We look forward to hearing from you.

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