

# Directors' 2019-2020 Strategic Report



**Annual Report to  
Shareholders**  
*Learn Sheffield AGM*

This **Annual Report to Shareholders** is the fifth one produced by Learn Sheffield, coming at the end of the fifth year since incorporation on the 14th August 2015. This period has included the second year of our second three-year commission from Sheffield City Council in relation to school improvement and the second 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, Mike Allen, 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 4th February 2021.

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

## Chair's Message

I am again delighted to be able to report on the continued progress of Learn Sheffield in this, our fifth Annual Report to Shareholders.

It has been, as people have frequently remarked since March last year, an unprecedented year. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on all aspects of society in this country and around the world has been, and continues to be, profound.

The challenge of both lockdowns and re-openings for the education sector has been immense and by extension the need for and importance of Learn Sheffield has been even clearer than before. As a board we are extremely proud of the way that team has performed and, in particular, that the organisation has continued to move forwards despite the obvious demands and challenges of this incredible period.

Whilst responding to the pandemic and supporting schools, Learn Sheffield has moved to new premises, implemented a number of technical infrastructure developments (which have made us better able to work remotely and improved our internal and external communications) and still find time to plan and deliver an online festival.

Learn Sheffield has, as you will see in our financial reports, had a positive year financially and moved to a positive carry forward position.. It has also been very encouraging to again see no significant decline in the level of school subscriptions, as we move into the third year of this model.

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.

The year ahead will be another important one for Learn Sheffield. We must continue to provide support to schools amidst the pandemic whilst also considering the next stage of our development as we come to the end of our current SCC commission and first three years of subscription.



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mike Allen'.

**Mike Allen**  
**Chair - Learn Sheffield Board**

# Chief Executive's Overview

Welcome to our Director's Strategic Report for 2019-2020, which is our fifth annual report to shareholders. The twelve-month period covered by this report included the second year of delivery for both our new school subscription offer and our second school improvement commission from Sheffield City Council.

As Mike has already noted, this period will be remembered for the Covid-19 pandemic. This began to impact on the education sector later in the term of last year's AGM and, at the time of writing this, continues to define all of our work.



I have been extremely proud of the team and the way that we have responded to the challenges that we have faced, as I have been of our schools, academies and colleges. It has, and continues to be, an extraordinary period in all of our professional and personal lives, but I think that we also know that the greatest challenges are to come.

Recovery from the pandemic, as we seek to close gaps and deficits that have widened considerably for many of our most vulnerable learners, is likely to be tougher than the pandemic itself in many ways. In this context organisations, like Learn Sheffield, which glue together the education system and facilitate collaboration are needed more than ever.

Our role in the last twelve months has principally been to provide direct and bespoke support to our members. As the pandemic starts to have less impact on our day to day work, we will need to find new ways to facilitate and share learning between institutions. This will be crucial if we are to accelerate the impact that we can have on the gaps that reduce the life chances of our children and young people.

Allied to this, we may be about to enter a new phase in our school-led education system. Locally, the new Education and Skills Strategy offers the possibility of greater investment and focus on education. Nationally, the sector's questioning of the relevance and efficacy of significant aspects of our existing education landscape may perhaps move us towards a reshaped context in which to work.

As always, Learn Sheffield will continually reflect and try to learn from both the things that have gone well and the things that didn't. Our advantage in doing this is our relationship with our schools, academies and colleges. It is your honest and constructive feedback which enables us to improve and aspire to be the organisation that you need us to be.

It was notable that there was little change in the high proportion of settings subscribing to Learn Sheffield, despite the carnage that Covid-19 made of so many plans. We are extremely grateful for your support, of course, but also recognise that these dire times have also cemented for many the reason why having an organisation like Learn Sheffield, which is which is your company, is so important.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Betts', written over a light blue background.

**Stephen Betts**  
**Chief Executive**

# Board Effectiveness

The substantive Learn Sheffield Board was elected and confirmed at the AGM/EGM in December 2016. The Interim Board, which resigned on 6 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.

In the year 2019/20 there has been two resignations, both of whom have been replaced. One of these replacements, Dean Linkhorn (special sector) was confirmed at the last AGM. Bev Matthews was elected in a secondary sector ballot and will be confirmed subject to passing a resolution at this AGM.

We continue to have two current vacancies for co-opted Directors. These vacancies have not been addressed during 2019-20, as we had planned to do, because of the changing of priorities during the pandemic. The terms of existing Co-opted Directors, Mike Allen and Antony Hughes, have both been extended during this year for a further three-year period.

Attendance at the board and committee meetings remains good with overall attendance of 75% (76 attendances out of a possible 101 meetings between September 2019 and August 2020). Board attendance, including apologies, was 97% during 2019/20.

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 board has been the most notable change this year. During the first phase of the pandemic a new approach, broadly characterised by shorter but more frequent meetings focussed on six identified areas, was put in place. From March 2020 Learn Sheffield Board and committee meetings have taken place online via a video conferencing platform.

Since September 2020 the board meetings are split between business meetings (of which there will be three) and strategic meetings (of which there will be five). The latter are 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](#).

### **Mike Allen (Chair of the Board – Co-opted Director)**



Mike was appointed as one of the three non-executive Directors of the Board on 1 February 2017 having served previously on the Interim Board since November 2015 as a co-opted Director. Mike has been a school Governor in Sheffield since 2000 and is currently Chair of the Governing Body at Pipworth and also Chairs the recently formed Sheffield South East Trust. He is a member of the Executive of the Sheffield Association of School Governing Boards and a Local Leader of Governance.

### **Councillor Andy Bainbridge (Sheffield City Council nominated)**



Andy was appointed as the Director nominated by Sheffield City Council on the 18th September 2017. He has been the Councillor for East Ecclesfield since May 2016. In addition to being a member of the full Council, Andy also serves on the Licensing Committee, the Children, Young People and Family Support Scrutiny and Policy Development Board and the Corporate Parenting Board. His interest in the Learn Sheffield role was partly informed by previously working in education across a number of different stages of education.

### **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.

### **Andrew Hartley (FE sector nominated)**



Andrew was appointed to the Board as the FE Sector Director in March 2018. He has held the position of Commercial Director at The Sheffield College since summer 2016, with a particular focus on developing partnerships with employers and apprenticeship programmes. Previously he worked for Systems Training, one of the UK's leading training providers for the logistics industry, and the University of Derby.

### **James Henderson (Sheffield City Council nominated)**



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 twenty-eight 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 is currently supporting schools in Sheffield, Hull and Derbyshire. He represents his locality partnership on the Primary Improvement Board and co-ordinates the Primary Leaders Partnership.

### **Antony Hughes (Co-opted Director)**



Antony was appointed as one of the three co-opted non-executive Directors on the Board on 1 February 2017. 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 (Primary School sector nominated)**



Angela is one of the two Primary School Directors on the Board of Learn Sheffield. She has worked in Primary education for the past 30 years, in a variety of contexts, and has been leading schools for the past 20 years. Angela has a strong track record of school improvement and is currently part of the Executive Team at Tipton School Academy Trust. In her role as Director of Primaries, she leads a team of five Sheffield primary schools. Angela also represents her locality partnership on the Primary Improvement Board.

### **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 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. Mike was previously (from 2010-2014) the Principal of Parkwood Academy in Sheffield and returned to Sheffield in 2018 after four years working away from the city. He is also a governor of Learning Skills Partnership which provides apprenticeship and work based learning opportunities.

Current vacancies exist for two co-opted Directors.

## **Financial Performance**

Learn Sheffield re-appointed Hart Shaw as company auditors for the financial year 2019-20 and they will present the fifth 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 fifth year of operation, but it is worth noting here that it has been a good 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 surplus (excluding the adjustments for the pension deficit) for the year to 31 August 2019.

The 2019-20 accounts show a stronger trading surplus (circa £73k) which reverses the deficit position going into 2019-20 into a positive carry forward position going into 2020-2021. The accumulated fund in September 2019 was a deficit of circa £51k but has now moved to a surplus of circa £22k at the end of August 2020.

This outcome was influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, which created underspend in some areas of the budget, but was also achieved against the backdrop of additional costs linked to moving premises and developing new ways of working. It is clearly extremely positive news that Learn Sheffield no longer has an accumulated trading deficit and reflects the improvements that have been made in financial management capacity and systems over the past two years.

The trading position continues to exclude adjustments for the pension deficit. There are ongoing discussions between our auditors and the pension fund about the calculation on the pension deficit, which has increased sharply this year. These centre on the question of how historic pension deficit is apportioned. It is possible that the report at the AGM may produce different figures if this point has been resolved by then. Either way the focus of Learn Sheffield is on the trading position, which is the element that defines our ability to operate successfully and our viability.

In summary the Learn Sheffield Board believes that Learn Sheffield is a going concern and this view is supported by the auditors.

# Significant Developments in 2019/20

The developments identified below summarise some of the key work that has been undertaken by Learn Sheffield in its fourth year of operation.

## Covid-19 Support

Although this wasn't part of our planning this time last year, Covid related support has naturally become one of the central areas of focus for Learn Sheffield in 2019/20.

The list below includes some of the support that has been provided:

- The Learn Sheffield team have provided point of need support to school leaders throughout the pandemic, accompanied by regular checking in with leaders.
- A share site was created in the first phase of the pandemic to facilitate sharing of content between schools across a range of identified areas.
- The programme of school leader meetings (across the nine partnership groups) has been amended throughout the pandemic to meet the needs of leaders, for example many groups have (at some points) preferred to have frequent but shorter meetings.
- Learn Sheffield has supported the SCC bulletin throughout and completed several audits to support decision making.
- Bespoke guidance has also been developed, for example Home learning guidance was produced in April 2020 linked to an audit of provision.
- Communication with leaders has also been amended as required during the pandemic with comms (including leader briefings) adapted to function without face to face contact.
- A [Covid-19 website](#) section was created on the Learn Sheffield website including content for families, leaders, other professionals and those involved in governance.
- Learn Sheffield contributed to a multi-agency working group on mental health and hosted a range of developed resources on the new section of the website (above).
- The 'Sheffield Learning Together' home learning supplement was developed in partnership with the Sheffield Star ([example – first edition](#)). Eleven (weekly) editions were produced between 7 May and 16 July and more than 80,000 supplements were delivered. The cost of the project was almost completely covered by sponsorship.
- A [Covid Recovery Festival](#) was held in September 2020 with 23 sessions taking place across the month on the themes of leadership, curriculum, mental health and Sheffield. All sessions were also recorded and had been watched over 1000 times by the start of October. The content was also shared with other areas, including a package which was traded and covered all the costs of the festival.
- Public Health education briefings were established in the festival and have

continued.

- Collaboration with a wide range of partners has continued throughout the pandemic. This has included various attempts to provide resources for schools (most recently including the online pantomime from Sheffield Theatres) and support positive media coverage and messaging about education. The 'Thank You – December 2020' video is a good example of this.

## **School Improvement Strategy & Commission**

Alongside supporting schools with Covid related challenges, we have continued to deliver the school improvement commission from Sheffield City Council (SCC).

2019/20 was the second year of this second three-year commission. In line with SCC and national guidance the commission continued to be funded, with the focus of activity amended by agreement with SCC to meet the demands of the new circumstances.

We decided not to re-categorise schools and academies in September 2020 through discussions with each sector and SCC. In reality many criteria are not currently useable and the consensus was that the process did not merit the investment of time on all sides to put into place a new system 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.

We will revisit this decision ahead of September 2021 in the early part of the summer term. Our existing strategy remains in place for a further year but there may be an appetite for considering the criteria as we emerge from the pandemic.

## **Subscription Model**

Similarly, the second year of the Learn Sheffield subscription offer also continued to be delivered despite the pandemic. This was challenging and work that needed to be cancelled at different points in the pandemic could not automatically be rearranged if the capacity to deliver at more feasible times was finite.

Schools, academies and colleges were extremely flexible and supportive in relation to the challenges that this brought. Learn Sheffield has increasingly looked to develop different aspects to the offer so that where delivery is compromised there are options available to ensure that each subscriber does receive value for money.

The subscription offer includes some differentiated additional support for schools (linked to categorisation) and in 2019-20 these days we largely retained and used for universal support for schools in relation to the pandemic.

Learn Sheffield is delighted that there has been no significant reduction in the proportion of schools who are engaging with the subscription offer in year three, as can be seen overleaf.

		2018-19		2019-20		2020-21	
<b>Signed-up</b>	Primary (inc nursery)	90.6%	89.6%	88.3%	88.3%	87.6%	87.4%
	Secondary (inc FE)	81.3%		83.9%		81.8%	
	Special	100%		100%		100%	
<b>Not Signed-up</b>	Primary (inc nursery)	9.4%	10.4%	11.7%	11.7%	12.4%	12.6%
	Secondary (inc FE)	18.8%		16.1%		18.2%	
	Special	0		0%		0%	

## Moving Premises



The other very significant change for Learn Sheffield during 2019-20 was to move premises. The [news item](#) about this on our website includes more background but we moved across the summer holidays.

We made the commitment to move in order to support an expansion of special school places in Sheffield from September 2020. Talbot and Seven Hills special schools took over our existing building to create fifty new places and use the building as a Post-16 base.

Our new home is Albion House on Savile Street, which is just beyond the Wicker in central Sheffield. Our new base includes training and meeting rooms along with office space for the Learn Sheffield team and some of our partners. Once the pandemic restrictions are no longer in place we look forward to inviting school leaders in to see for themselves!

# School Improvement Performance

In previous years we have 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 year and the Outcomes Report was suspended in the summer of 2020 once both the school and pupil data had ceased to function in the way that they had before the pandemic.

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'. The most notable development prior to the pandemic was the continued improvement in Sheffield's Ofsted outcomes which were the strongest they had been but remained 'amber' because our relative performance remained below national.

When we emerge from the pandemic the Learn Sheffield Board, in conjunction with Sheffield City Council (as our school improvement commissioner) will decide whether to reinstate the Outcomes Report or develop a new approach.

# How can I find out more about Learn Sheffield?

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

**By Phone:** 0114 250 7417

**By Email:** [enquiries@learnsheffield.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@learnsheffield.co.uk)

**In Person:** Learn Sheffield,  
Suite 6, Albion House,  
Savile Street,  
Sheffield, S4 7UD

**Online:** [www.learnsheffield.co.uk](http://www.learnsheffield.co.uk)

**Follow us:**  [@learnsheffield](https://twitter.com/learnsheffield)



Learn  
**Sheffield**

Learn Sheffield is a not for profit company limited by guarantee, of which 80% is owned by schools and colleges and 20% by Sheffield City Council.