

Paper Title	<b>A Guide to Governance in TEFAT</b>
Prepared by	Katie Stobbart
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# **A Guide To Governance The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust (TEFAT)**

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## Introduction

TEFAT was founded in 2012 to transform primary education. Today, we're a community of 36 academies working toward one goal: creating a space where every child can succeed. We do more than just manage schools; we're here to build a collaborative, lasting environment where every child—no matter where they start—has the chance to truly flourish.

The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust *is a group of schools working together in the provision of a high-quality educational experience for the young people we serve.*

While our Board oversees the big picture and some of our systems are centralised to keep things running smoothly, we know that our academies understand their own communities best. That's where our Community Councils (CCs) come in. They are our 'boots on the ground,' helping us understand the unique strengths and challenges of every school. By making sure every voice is heard, they ensure our decisions—both locally and Trust-wide—are grounded in reality. This document explains how the various governing groups in our organisation work together to ensure that we are meeting our charitable objectives for pupils, employees, and communities.

Effective governance is based on six key features.

- Strategic leadership that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy
- Accountability that drives up educational standards and financial performance
- People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity
- Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements
- Evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance

All levels of governance within the Trust incorporate these features; different groups play their part in different ways according to their terms of reference and our scheme of delegation.

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## Our Values

### 1. Put children first

- a. We trust and value your professionalism
- b. We share the responsibility for the learning and welfare of all of our children
- c. Our purpose is to improve the lives of children

### 2. Be safe

- a. Don't assume that someone else will do it
- b. Look after yourself, your colleagues and all children
- c. We are all responsible for each other's safety and well being
- d. Discuss any concerns with an appropriate member of staff

### 3. Be kind & respect all

- a. People are allowed to be different as are you
- b. Kindness creates the positive environment we all need to flourish
- c. This kindness should extend to ourselves as well as to others

### 4. Be open

- a. If you can see a better way, suggest it
- b. If someone else suggests a better way to you, consider it
- c. We exist to nurture innovators and support those who take informed risks in the interests of children

### 5. Forgive

- a. We all make mistakes
- b. Admit them, learn from them and move on

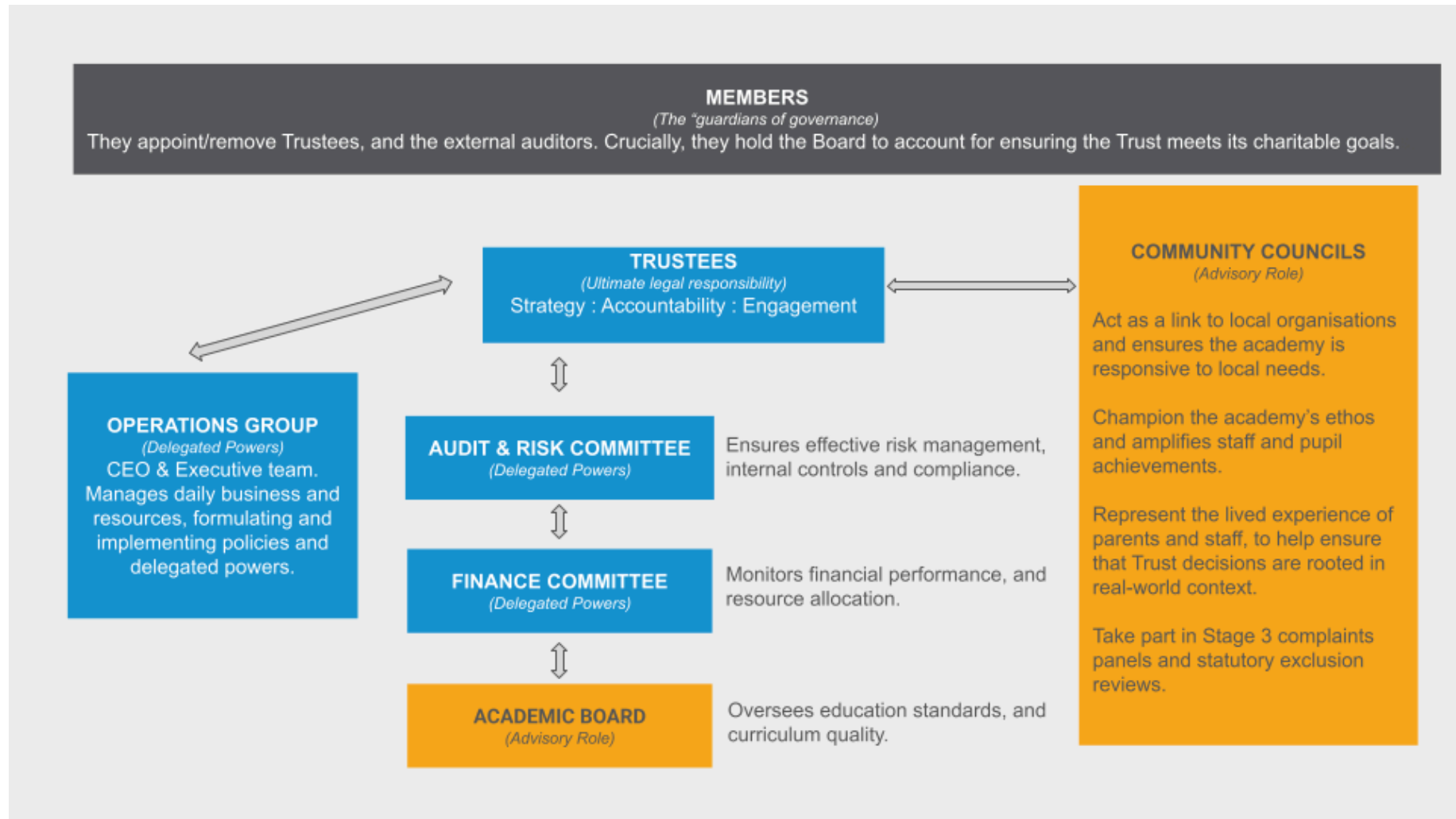
### 6. Make a difference

- a. Making the world a better place starts with you
- b. Model the behaviour that you would like to see from others

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## TEFAT Governance Structure



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## One mission, many parts



**TEFAT**


**The Elliot Foundation  
Academies Trust**

**THE MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST**

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**Financial & Legal Structure**  
Government-funded entity.

**Purpose**  
Providing education, health,  
and welfare services that  
help communities to reach  
their full potential.



**TEF**


**The Elliot Foundation**

**THE REGISTERED CHARITY**

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**Financial & Legal Structure**  
The custodian of the  
foundation's values.

**Purpose**  
Responsible for raising funds  
for social purpose work.



**TEFLA**

**The Elliot Foundation  
Learning Alliance**

**THE COMMERCIAL ARM**

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**Financial & Legal Structure**  
A profit-driven entity  
owned by the charity.

**Purpose**  
To generate income for  
reinvestment and provide  
diverse opportunities for staff.

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While TEFAT is the engine that runs our schools, it is part of a wider ecosystem of organisations designed to support children and their communities. We don't just want to manage schools; we want to sustain a collaborative network where education, charity, and innovation meet. By working as a collective, we ensure that every part of our organisation is aligned toward a single, common goal: helping children thrive.

## **TEFAT: Our educational foundation**

The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust (TEFAT) is the operational heart of our collective. As a Multi-Academy Trust, it is the legal entity responsible for the daily education and well-being of our 15,000 pupils. Our long-term strategy is to build a strong network of approximately 60 schools by 2035. This scale allows us to provide a more rounded and stable educational experience, ensuring every child in our care develops the confidence and skills they need to succeed in the wider world.

## **TEF: The cultural compass**

The Elliot Foundation (TEF) is our registered charity and DfE-approved Sponsor. It serves as the guardian of the "Elliot DNA," setting the philosophy and values that guide our entire collective. Beyond its role in governance, TEF acts as our fundraising arm, with a goal of raising £1 million annually to support our communities. This funding provides the "social glue"—such as Community Hubs in many of our schools—that addresses core school budgets simply cannot reach, ensuring our impact extends beyond the classroom walls.

## **TEFLA: An engine for innovation and reinvestment**

The Elliot Foundation Learning Alliance (TEFLA) is our dedicated education trading company. We believe that some of the best educational expertise in the country sits within our own schools, and TEFLA's mission is to share that knowledge. By offering our world-class training and professional development to schools outside the Trust, we generate a sustainable stream of income. Every penny of profit is reinvested back into the collective, ensuring our own staff have access to the highest quality training without draining individual school budgets.

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## The legal bit

As the Trust’s sponsor, The Elliot Foundation (TEF) is a corporate Member of the Trust and it also appoints up to eight of the trustees along with the Chair of the TEFAT Board. This relationship is formally governed by a 2014 Members’ Agreement, which mandates that the CEO provides annual strategic reports alongside termly progress updates.

*Legally and financially, we operate as a single entity, but we deliver education across 37 schools spread across three broad geographical clusters in the West Midlands, East Anglia, and London.*

While TEFAT focusses on education, it is part of a larger group working together to support children and their communities. We don’t just want to manage schools; we want to build a sustainable ecosystem where education, charity, and innovation meet. To this end, The Elliot Foundation Learning Alliance (TEFLA) is our wholly-owned education trading company. TEFLA’s purpose is to identify income generation opportunities that can be reinvested back into the Trust.

As the National Governance Association (NGA) describes them, **Members** are the “guardians of the governance of the Trust”. They ensure everything is being governed well and are the custodians of the organisation’s purpose.

The **Trust Board** is the group legally responsible for our day-to-day operations and finances. The people on this Board serve as both company directors and charity trustees—we simply call them “trustees.”

To keep things manageable, the Trust Board shares some of its workload with several formal sub-committees - **Audit & Risk**, **Finance**, and a **Community Council** in each of our schools. Our **Academic Board** operates as a working party of the Board as this allows us to have more non-trustee members of the group to bring more independence to the scrutiny of our educational performance. You can find the full Terms of Reference for all elements of our governance structure on the Trust website at <https://elliotfoundation.co.uk/resources/academy-trust-documents>.

Everyone involved in governance is expected to act independently and with integrity. We aim for transparency; we will always justify our decisions to our community, except in rare cases where privacy or commercial sensitivity makes a matter confidential

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## Decision-making framework - scheme of delegation

Our scheme of delegation acts as the definitive framework that defines the relationship between the central Trust leadership and each individual school. While the Board of Trustees is the legal entity responsible for the entire organisation, they cannot oversee the granular, day-to-day operations of every classroom—nor would it be effective to do so. Instead, they use the Scheme of Delegation to clearly specify which decisions are handed to which individuals or groups in the organisation—such as shaping the daily learning environment or managing staff performance—and which strategic responsibilities remain with the Board, such as setting the overarching safeguarding policies or defining the long-term educational vision.

*By clearly marking who has the final say on everything from appointing headteachers, to authorising building repairs, the Scheme of Delegation prevents the "too many cooks" scenario where everyone thinks they are in charge but no one is truly accountable.*

Below you will find an accessible summary of the main responsibilities of the groups involved in governing our Trust. You can view the entire scheme of delegation on our website [here](#).

## The Role and Remit of the Trust's Members

Unlike traditional companies defined by ownership, charities are independent legal entities held "in trust" to pursue specific charitable objectives. In the absence of shareholders, the organisation is supported by Members—volunteer signatories to the governing documents who provide a critical layer of oversight.

In a company limited by guarantee, such as an academy trust, Members take the place of shareholders. While their day-to-day responsibilities are limited, they hold significant powers to ensure the Trust's integrity:

1. Members appoint up to eight Trustees and the Trust Board Chair—and retain the power to remove them if necessary—while also appointing the Trust's auditors.
2. By overseeing the Board of Trustees, they ensure the Executive team is held to account and the charity's mission is protected.
3. Members meet two to three times a year, including a mandatory Annual General Meeting (AGM) each autumn to review the Trust's annual accounts. Decisions can also be formalised between meetings via written agreement.

Details regarding the Trust's current Members are published on our website: [elliottfoundation.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are](https://elliottfoundation.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are).

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## The Role and Remit of the Trust Board

Trustees serve as the charitable equivalent of Company Directors, holding collective responsibility for the Trust’s strategic direction and the appointment of the CEO. They are jointly and severally accountable for the organisation as a whole, ensuring its mission and assets are protected.

They aim to improve educational and social outcomes for all children in all schools by:

- **strategic leadership of the academy trust:** the board defines the trust vision for high quality and inclusive education in line with its charitable objects – it establishes and fosters the trust’s culture and sets and champions the trust strategy including determining what, if any, governance functions are delegated to the local tier
- **accountability and assurance:** the board has robust effective oversight of the operations and performance of the academy trust, including the provision of education, pupil welfare, overseeing and ensuring appropriate use of funding and effective financial performance and keeping their estate safe and well-maintained
- **engagement:** the board has strategic oversight of relationships with stakeholders – the board involves parents, schools and communities so that decision-making is supported by meaningful engagement.

## The Role and Remit of Community Councils

While the Trustees hold ultimate legal responsibility for the governance of all Elliot Foundation schools, each academy benefits from its own Community Council (CC). As advisory bodies, these Councils serve as an important link between our schools and the wider community—supporting our statutory duty to collaborate with parents, carers, and local stakeholders. By fostering this connection, Councillors play an essential role in celebrating local achievements and ensuring that families have meaningful opportunities to engage in improving the pupil experience.

The role of our councils is as follows:

Pillar	Core Function
<b>Community</b>	Acts as a link to local organisations and ensures the academy is responsive to local needs.
<b>Celebration</b>	Champions the academy’s ethos and amplifies staff and pupil achievements.
<b>Context</b>	Represents the lived experience of parents and staff, to help ensure that Trust decisions are rooted in real-world context.
<b>Check</b>	Taking part in Stage 3 complaints panels and statutory exclusion reviews.

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*To ensure clarity in governance, there is a distinct separation of duties. Responsibility for educational outcomes, budgets, estates, compliance, and HR remains with the Principal, Operations Group, and Trust Board.*

The Board maintains a direct link with local Councils via the Company Secretary. Additionally, CC Chairs meet three times an academic year at a dedicated Chairs' Forum, providing a face-to-face feedback loop that strengthens the relationship between local communities and the Trustees.

## The Role and Remit of the Operations Group

The Operations Group comprises the CEO and the Trust Directors, including a regional director for specific geographical areas, and individuals with responsibility for functions such as HR, Finance, Curriculum, Finance, Inclusion, IT, Governance, and Estates. They meet at least twice a month and manage the day-to-day running of the Trust business. They formulate, recommend, and implement Trust-wide policy and planning.

## Governance review framework

Tasked by the Trustees to oversee educational outcomes, the Operations Group holds schools accountable through a structured review framework. Under this system, schools are assigned one of four dynamic designations: recovering, developing, establishing, or extending. These designations are determined by the Operations team's assessment of performance across key indicators—such as academic progress, HR, finance, and estates—and are generally re-assessed annually. Rather than a one-size-fits-all model, a school's specific designation directly dictates which members of the Operations team attend the sessions, the agenda (a tailored focus), and how often the oversight meetings take place.

## The Delegated Powers of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

As well as delegating some responsibilities to its sub-committees, the Trust Board delegates powers and responsibilities for the running of the Trust on a day-to-day basis to the Trust's Operations Group, via the CEO. It is the Trust Board's role to set the strategy and Trust-wide policy, to ensure financial stability and effective school improvement, and to consider and respond to strategic issues.

The CEO is responsible for implementing the strategy and policy determined by the Board, and to establish procedures to ensure this happens.

The Operations Group comprises the CEO and the Trust Directors. You can view the Directors on the Trust website at <https://elliottfoundation.co.uk/about-us/who-we-are>.

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## Key responsibilities of each group

### Trust Board

The Trust Board serves as the strategic anchor for the entire organisation, holding the collective responsibility for ensuring the Trust stays true to its values and mission. Instead of a traditional top-down approach, the Board works to set the shared vision and ethos that guides every school, ensuring that the organisation's activities always benefit the wider community. They act as the custodians of the Trust's "rulebook," approving how decisions are shared and appointing the key people who help move the Trust forward. Their role is about providing the ultimate foundation of support—signing off on major financial plans, ensuring robust safety measures are in place for every employee and pupil, and taking legal responsibility for the wellbeing of staff and the protection of data.

#### Key oversight areas

- Collaborative planning for the Trust's future, appointing key leaders, and defining how different groups work together.
- Ensuring every child is safe and supported, while working with the CEO to maintain high learning standards.
- Approving budgets and large projects to ensure the Trust's long-term health and legal compliance.
- Overseeing health and safety, data protection, and fair pay policies to ensure a supportive environment for all.

### Audit and Risk Committee

The audit and risk committee acts as the Trust's "security guard" and quality controller. Their main job is to make sure that the Trust is honest, safe, and following all the rules. They choose and look after the external auditors (the independent experts who check the yearly accounts) to ensure they are doing a thorough job without any bias. They also set up internal checks to hunt for any mistakes or risks throughout the year. Beyond just looking at spreadsheets, they are responsible for protecting the Trust from fraud or dishonesty by overseeing whistleblowing policies and investigating any suspicious activity. Essentially, they look at the "big picture" of what could go wrong—from financial errors to safety risks—and make sure there is a solid plan in place to prevent problems before they happen.

#### Key oversight Areas

Choosing the independent examiners, checking their fees, and making sure they provide an honest "report card" on the Trust's finances.

- Setting up regular reviews of the Trust's daily activities to spot errors and making sure management actually fixes any problems found.
- Overseeing the rules for reporting fraud, bribery, or whistleblowing to keep the organisation honest.
- Keeping a "risk register" to identify potential threats to the schools and ensuring the Trust is getting good value for money.

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## Finance Committee

The finance committee is essentially the group that keeps a close eye on the Trust's money to make sure it is being spent in the best way for the ultimate benefit of pupils. They look at the funding provided by the government each year and work with school leaders to set sensible budgets that match the schools' goals. Instead of just looking at the numbers once, they check in regularly throughout the year to track spending, manage staff costs, and ensure there is enough cash available for day-to-day needs. They also set the rules for how things are bought and who has the power to sign off on costs. Finally, they act as a "safety check" for all financial reports, asking probing questions to make sure everything is accurate, follows the law, and is easy for everyone to understand before it is officially signed off.

### Key oversight areas

- Making sure the money is spent on the things that help the schools improve.
- Regularly checking bank balances, spending, and future financial predictions.
- Following all the legal rules and government requirements for school finances.
- Setting clear rules for buying equipment and deciding who is allowed to spend the Trust's money.

## Academic Board

This group is focused entirely on the quality of the classroom experience and how well pupils are being taught, and are learning. Their main goal is to make sure every school in the Trust is meeting or exceeding national standards and that pupils are getting the best education possible. Every term, they look at "health checks" for each academy to see where children are progressing well and where they might need more help. They don't just look at test scores; they also check that the subjects being taught are broad and engaging, and that the teaching is of a high standard. A big part of their job is also making sure that extra funding (like Pupil Premium) is being used to help children who need it most to catch up and succeed.

### Key oversight areas

- Checking that every child is making good progress and that schools are meeting national targets.
- Making sure the lessons are engaging and useful, and that teachers have what they need to teach well.
- Monitoring how extra money is spent to help disadvantaged students or those who have fallen behind.
- Regularly reviewing reports to spot any schools that are struggling and making sure they get back on track.

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## Operations Group

This group acts as the Trust's "engine room," focusing on the day-to-day delivery of the Board's strategy. Their role is to turn high-level plans into action by tracking critical activities across the organisation and stepping in to ensure everything stays on schedule. They hold the practical responsibility for making key decisions delegated to them, ensuring that the Trust's daily operations run smoothly and efficiently. By assessing potential hurdles and setting up working groups to tackle specific tasks, they ensure that the Trust remains agile and responsive to the needs of its schools and staff.

### Key Oversight Areas

- Monitoring essential tasks to make sure the Trust's goals are being met on time.
- Making practical, everyday choices that keep the organisation running effectively.
- Identifying challenges in daily operations and finding effective solutions.
- Setting up working parties to handle short-term projects as they arise.