

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Monday 15 May 2023 at 5pm via Teams

PRESENT

Mr Mark Taylor (Chair)	Mr Mike Hastings (Vice Chair)
Mr Clarence Crosdale (Vice Chair) – from 5.55pm	Ms Wendy Harris
Mr John Bradford	Ms Ioana Axinte
Ms Nisha Rai	Mr Ian Gardner
Mr Trevor Dutton	Mrs Hshaana Knight
Mr Sam Duru	Mrs Amanda Tomlinson
Ms Anya Luis	Ms Dionne Barrett – from 5.40pm

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Peter Merry	Deputy Chief Executive
Mrs Louise Fall	Deputy Principal
Ms Lynn Parker	Assistant Principal
Mr Mike Dixon	Assistant Principal
Mr Andrew Woodford	Director of Finance
Mrs Alison Buick	Head of Governance

26/23 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Mal Cowgill. Mr Scott Thompson and Ms Lindsey Flynn were not in attendance.

Ms Harris was welcomed to her first meeting since appointment as a Staff Governor.

It was agreed that Mr Hastings would chair this meeting.

Mr Taylor declared a conflict of loyalty as an employee of Wolverhampton City Council.

27/23 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING (ITEM 2)

It was resolved that the non-confidential and confidential minutes of the meeting held on 13 March 2023 be approved.

28/23 REPORT ON OUTSTANDING ITEM (ITEM 3)

The table would be updated for the next meeting.

29/23 CORRESPONDENCE (ITEM 4)

OFS Case Closure Letter

The Deputy Principal noted that Governors had been provided with the letter for information. It confirmed that OfS had removed enhanced monitoring for the college as a result of changes to registration condition B3.

ESFA Financial Statements Review Letter

The Deputy Chief Executive commented that this related to the 2021/22 financial statements and that it agreed with the college view of its finances. There was an

online dashboard available for Governors to view and the Deputy Chief Executive would provide log in details on request.

Post 16 Capacity Fund Letter

This had been received after the meeting papers had been circulated and a copy had been emailed earlier in the day for information. Unfortunately the college bid for funding to support work at Wellington Road had not been successful.

30/23 STRATEGY (ITEM 5)

CLQ Stage 4 sign off

The Deputy Chief Executive explained the RIBA Stage 4 work for CLQ, which was to approve the detailed technical design prior to manufacturing and construction. A summary of the work done by the college to progress this was provided in the written paper for Governors' information. There remained challenges with the financing of the project and further discussions were scheduled with stakeholders in early June. However, it was critical that the college ensured that the detailed designs met requirements.

Governor approval was being sought for the submission of comments to the design team, not approval for the design per se. Governors were assured that management had carried out a detailed review with input from staff across the college.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor commented on the level of contingency within the project and asked about plans for future proofing the building, with particular reference to electrical infrastructure. It was important to ensure that the current designs met future needs as far as could be reasonably anticipated. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that some pilot work was currently ongoing and that value engineering was being considered. The college was working in partnership with the Local Authority on preparatory work, but within the budget constraints.

A Governor asked whether infrared heaters were being considered. The Deputy Chief Executive would provide confirmation on this. **Action:** Deputy Chief Executive.

Governors discussed the financial challenges of the CLQ project. The impact of the re-classification of colleges into the public sector was being assessed.

It was confirmed that Governors agreed that the Stage 4 comments should be submitted and that an update on the project budget would be brought back to the next meeting. **Action:** Deputy Chief Executive.

31/23 COLLEGE REPORT (ITEM 6)

1. Student Engagement

Student Survey Outcomes

The Deputy Principal reported that the results of the On Programme surveys completed between February and March 2023 had been very positive and in line with the previous year. There had been 25 questions, which were linked to Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework. The key question, whether students were proud to be part of the college, had improved by 1% compared to the previous year.

HE students had also been surveyed and their results were positive. The same question had been asked about whether HE students were proud to be part of the college, and responses to this had improved by 5% on the previous year.

Staff were aware of the comments and results. Where comments had been made on general college areas and were not course specific, relevant college managers had been informed.

A Governor asked if surveys were anonymous and it was confirmed that they were. Responses did identify which courses they related to.

Applications Update

The college aim was to improve market share and early data showed an increase in 16-18 applications of 38% compared to last year. However, it was often the case that prospective students made multiple applications, so converting these into enrolments was critical. For adults, there had been an increase of 26% in applications to date and the college was now the largest adult provider within the city. HE applications were currently low, but this reflected the reduced offer and also the time of year. HE students tended to apply later in year.

2. Student Success

Accountability Agreement 2023 to 2024

The Deputy Principal had provided an introduction to the Accountability Agreement requirements at the recent Governor Strategy session. Governors were reminded that by 31 May, the college needed to have submitted this to DfE and published it on the college website. There was a need to link to the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), although these had only recently been published and were still in draft.

The management team had agreed aims, objectives and targets aligned to the LSIP although some data was expected to change.

Governors had been provided with a written copy of the Accountability Agreement in the Board papers and were required to approve this.

Resolved: that Governors approved the Accountability Agreement for 2023/24.

Curriculum Planning Update

The Assistant Principals commented on the curriculum planning process and Governors noted the following:

- The planning process had been refined to ensure that the college was aware of local and national priorities;
- Employer breakfasts with college managers had been introduced;
- There had been a formal launch in November 2022 with key stakeholders. This had reviewed economic plans and key priorities;
- All curriculum areas had completed an 'Intent' document this year. These had been scrutinised at the curriculum purchasing meetings and had included plans for working with employers. Some Governors had attended these meetings;
- The Assistant Principals had reviewed the curriculum plans presented, including the expected growth. The final curriculum plan would be presented to Governors in due course.

3. **Business Success**

Management Accounts – March 2023

The Director of Finance presented the report and highlighted key points including variances in relation to income and pay and non-pay budgets. Mr Dutton was thanked for meeting with the Director to review the management accounts. His comments had been incorporated into the report.

Governors noted the following:

- Year to date income was down against budget but higher than the previous year. Variances in specific areas were explained;
- Pay and non-pay costs were below budget, so this offset the reduction in income to some extent;
- The cash position had improved, partly due to capital funding and also the fact that the ESFA had changed its payment profile following re-classification. A 'restricted cash' line had been added to the forecast for reasons which were explained;
- Numbers were in line with the re-forecast presented in February and would continue to be monitored. A further update would be completed as part of the April accounts. This would inform a decision on a pay award;
- A pay award would be considered in line with what was affordable;
- A revised Finance and Estates Strategy had been submitted to DfE in April and a copy of this was in the Board papers for Governors to review. The proposals for the debt re-structuring were noted. These were being reviewed by DfE and the final proposal would need to be approved by the College Board. It was hoped this may be possible before year end.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked about the accounting treatment for the breakage fees. The Director of Finance confirmed that these would be capitalised in future subject to agreement of the DfE and auditors. The breakage fees with Barclays were to be confirmed but were expected to depend on market conditions at the time of the transaction.

The implications of the debt re-structuring were discussed. Although gross debt would increase, the financial health grade would improve and this should enable the financial notice to improve to be removed.

Governors noted sector requests for a 15% pay award and asked when the college would look to make and agree its offer.

The Director of Finance stated that 15% was not affordable for the sector and that the college was not in a position to make an offer at present. More work was required on affordability. The Deputy Chief Executive added that the pay award in 2022 had been 3.1% paid in July and backdated to February. A proposal would be brought to the Board for discussion when scenarios, including the impact of inflation, had been considered by management.

(Clarence Crosdale arrived at 5.55pm)

The Board of Governors received the Management Accounts to March 2023.

Partnership Update

The Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on current partnership activities. Details had been updated since the last Board meeting and now reflected recent

funding uplifts. It was important for Governors to be aware of current partnerships, the contract sizes and their associated risk profiles.

£6.7m of partnership activity had been budgeted but due to rate increases and new opportunities in year, this had risen to £7.5m.

The details of the partners were outlined, as set out in the written report. Of particular note was the very positive relationship to date with NIS. Governors were also advised of developments in community learning.

Approval was needed for the contract changes.

Resolved: that Governors approved the updated partner contracts as presented.

Insurance Renewal

The Deputy Chief Executive noted that the College's insurance services were currently provided through FE Protect Limited who had been the broker since August 2020. The company was originally awarded the contract on a '3 + 2' year basis, therefore the College had an option to extend the agreement for an additional two years for the period 1 August 2023 to 31 July 2025.

The arrangement had generated savings and these had been used to enhance cover across a number of areas, including Cyber and Governors' Liability insurance.

The renewal cost for 2023/24 was £92k, reflecting growth rather than rate increases.

Governors discussed the insurance arrangements and costs.

Resolved: that Governors approved the extension of the contract with FE Protect for a further two years until 31 July 2025 AND the costs of cover for 2023/24.

4. People Engagement

Workforce Development Update

The Deputy Principal outlined progress against the Workforce Development Action Plan. Governors had previously received and reviewed the three-year strategy. A full update of all statistics would be brought back at the end of the year.

The overall position was that progress was being made but had slowed due to the Ofsted inspection and the recent re-structure.

Performance management processes had been reviewed. HR were supporting managers to undertake this more effectively.

Quality of education was good. More staff were receiving support and were sustaining improvement, which demonstrated impact of the process.

Recruitment continued to be challenging in a number of areas, but the average recruitment time had reduced from 11 to 8 weeks.

All documents had been updated to reflect Keeping Children Safe in Education.

There had been an increased focus on communication with staff though the new 'Talking College' emails. Staff feedback to date on this had been positive.

Governors asked about the impact of recruitment challenges and staff exits on students. It was confirmed that staff that had exited were not in areas that had been

difficult to recruit to. Agency staff were used where needed and the quality of provision was carefully monitored.

There was a discussion about pay rates for teaching staff and how recruitment campaigns were conducted. College West Midlands were doing some work to look at racial equality and BAME recruitment practices in colleges, and Wolverhampton would be involved in this.

Pay Award

The Deputy Principal confirmed that there were ongoing management discussions and that there was a commitment to reviewing pay. At this time there was no further information to share with Governors. There were no indications that strike action, which was affecting schools and some other colleges, was planned at Wolverhampton.

The Board of Governors noted the report.

32/23 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 7)

The following Committee and Task & Finish Group minutes had been included with the Board papers for information:

- CTOG 20 March 2023
- Apprenticeships 23 March 2023
- Audit 29 March 2023

The Chair of Audit Committee commented that the Committee had reviewed the internal audit contract and wished to recommend that it be extended for a further two years, as was permitted within the original tender.

Resolved: that the Board approved the extension of the internal audit contract for a further two years until 31 July 2025.

The Chair of the Apprenticeships Task & Finish Group noted that the aim of the group was to secure a Good Ofsted rating in this area. As this was not currently the case it was agreed that the Group would continue as there was still improvement to be made.

The Board of Governors noted the minutes.

33/23 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 8)

Re-appointment of Governors.

Members were advised that the terms of office for Mark Taylor and Trevor Dutton would end on 31 July 2023. Having reviewed this, the Search and Governance Committee wished to recommend that both be re-appointed for a further four year term of office ending on 31 July 2027.

Resolved: that Mark Taylor and Trevor Dutton were both re-appointed for four year terms of office ending on 31 July 2027.

34/23 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 9)

It was resolved that the following reports would remain confidential:

- **Partnership Update;**

- **CTOG and Apprenticeships Task & Finish Group minutes**

35/23 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 10)

Board of Governors – 19 June 2023 at 5pm on Teams

The meeting ended at 6.30pm.