

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Monday 19 June 2023 at 5pm via Teams

PRESENT

Mr Clarence Crosdale (Vice Chair and Chair for the meeting)	Mr Mal Cowgill
Mr John Bradford	Ms Ioana Axinte
Ms Nisha Rai	Mr Ian Gardner – until 6.10pm
Mr Trevor Dutton	Mrs Hshaana Knight – until 6.40pm
Mr Sam Duru	Mrs Amanda Tomlinson
Ms Anya Luis – from 5.10pm	Ms Wendy Harris
Ms Lindsey Flynn – until 6pm	

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

36/23 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Mark Taylor, Mr Mike Hastings, Mr Scott Thompson and Ms Dionne Barrett

It was agreed that Mr Crosdale would chair this meeting.

There were no declarations of interest.

37/23 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING (ITEMS 2 AND 3)

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2023 be approved.

There was one outstanding item, and it was agreed that the Deputy Principal and Head of Governance would discuss this outside of the meeting. **Action:** Deputy Principal and Head of Governance.

38/23 CORRESPONDANCE (ITEM 4)

There was no correspondence to be noted at this meeting.

39/23 STRATEGY (ITEM 5)

The Deputy Chief Executive commented on areas discussed at the Campus Transformation Oversight Group (CTOG) meeting on 12 June 2023. The presentation slides and draft minutes of this would be circulated. **Action:** Head of Governance.

Governors particularly noted the following:

- The impact of the Barclays debt on the projects. The Director of Finance would give an update later in the meeting;
- At CowTech, work had been completed to fill in the mine shafts. It was hoped that construction would be complete to allow for opening in 2024/25;
- Delays to CLQ continued and were adding pressures to the overall costs due to inflation and other factors. It was estimated that the cost had increased by around 25% compared to the original estimates.

(Anya Luis arrived at 5.10pm)

The college was continuing to look at value engineering to manage the CLQ costs and also to seek additional funding opportunities. There was much work to do in the next few weeks but it was hoped that some progress would be made on the finances;

- There were ongoing discussions with DfE regarding their proposals to re-develop St Peter's School and their request for a lease of part of the Paget Road site. The amount of land requested had increased and the impact of this on the potential future sale of Paget Road needed to be considered;

There was a discussion about the DfE, St Peter's and Paget Road. A decision to proceed with a lease could be linked to other developments, given the uncertainties around CLQ and whether any Paget Road sale proceeds could be used towards the CLQ costs. In the event that a swift decision was needed, it was agreed that a Chair's Action could be taken in relation to St Peter's if necessary before the next Board meeting and in consultation with CTOG members.

A Governor commented on the extent to which the Board had sight of risks relating to the capital programme and how scrutiny of the plans was taking place. It was noted that CTOG was the forum through which updates were being provided but at the point when formal decisions were needed, these would all be presented to Board with written supporting papers. CTOG had no decision making powers. All decisions would be at Board level, including debt re-financing.

- Other capital funds had been received. CTOG had been updated on how these would be spent, including for energy efficiency projects. CTOG had also been advised on the requirements of Martyn's Law, which related to preparedness for a terrorist or other significant attack on public buildings where at least 100 people could be gathered at a time. Specific guidance for colleges was expected but the college was reviewing processes and site security;
- NCATI would be closing on 31 July 2023 and the building would be returned to DfE. There was no decision yet on its future use. The college, with support from WMCA, hoped to be able to use it to deliver rail provision. At this point in time, no firm commitments could be made;
- There were potential opportunities for other rail provision to be rolled out across the region;
- The City Council was looking to re-develop Newhampton Arts Centre. The college owned half of this but no longer used it. A capital receipt for disposal was possible;

Governors discussed the plans for Newhampton Arts Centre and were reminded that any proposal to dispose of college land and buildings would require Board approval.

It was confirmed that no decisions were required at this meeting.

40/23 COLLEGE REPORT (ITEM 6)

1. Student Engagement

Students' Union Constitution 2023/28

The Deputy Principal reported that the constitution had been reviewed and that minimal changes had been made, to reflect updates to legislation and to college terminology. It had been some time since the last review. The Student Union President had been working with staff on the update.

Governors were required to approve the document.

Resolved – that the Students' Union Constitution 2023/28 was approved.

The Student Union President was thanked for her contribution to this work.

Careers Advice and Guidance Policy 2023/24

The Deputy Principal confirmed that the policy required approval from the Board. It was an annual exercise to update the policy in line with the DfE's Matrix Standard.

A Governor asked about the metrics that the policy supported, in terms of destinations and positive outcomes. It was agreed that the Deputy Principal would bring a Matrix report to a future meeting. **Action:** Deputy Principal.

Resolved – that the Careers Advice and Guidance Policy 2023/24 was approved.

2. Student Success

National Achievement Rates Tables 2021/21

The Deputy Principal had provided an appendix to show the college performance in 2021/22. This was the first such data published since Covid. Performance was shown nationally against other colleges. Analysis of the high level data showed that the college was ranked 32 out of 162 nationally, and 2 out of 15 for West Midland colleges. Governors also noted the split in performance for 16-18 and 19+ students.

There was one red RAG rated area, for Level 3 achievement in 16-18 students. These were students who had been affected by GCSEs being cancelled in the first year of Covid lockdown.

Predictions for 2022/23 indicated that performance would at least match that of last year.

Governors noted that impact of Covid on achievement rates but recognised the strong performance of the college. A Governor asked about the 16-18 achievement benchmark. The Deputy Principal responded that the college ranked 131, which was similar to other West Midlands colleges. Telford was the best performing out of the WM colleges.

Apprenticeships Update

The Assistant Principal gave an update and Governors noted the following:

- Regular meetings to review quality of provision were continuing. More details of these would be shared at the next Apprenticeships Task and Finish Group later in June;
- Sector leads were focusing on ensuring swift progress to improve achievement rates in year;

- New ESFA accountability measures since January 2022;
- College achievement rates last year were 49% and this year were predicted to be 53%;
- The Head of Apprenticeships had left in May and an interim Head had been appointed. A permanent appointment would be made by October. There had been review and monitoring of other departmental staff, and some changes as a result.

Questions and comments were invited.

Governors asked about the changes to staff and the measures in place for monitoring. The Assistant Principal confirmed that there were clear KPIs in place against the apprenticeships standards and that they were rigorously monitored. Changes to staff had been made to ensure overall performance improved.

A Governor asked about the predicted achievement rates for 2022/23 and whether 53% was a conservative estimate. The Assistant Principal responded that this was based on current data. Staff were confident of there being an improvement on last year.

A Governor asked about staff in performance management and whether the college looked at the achievement of their students. The Deputy Principal confirmed that there was a range of factors taken into account when assessing the need for performance management.

Curriculum Planning

The Assistant Principal referred to his written report and highlighted the following for Governors:

- Governors were aware of the curriculum planning process from discussions at previous meetings;
- The adult plan had been submitted to WMCA and feedback was awaited;
- Plans were expected to evolve due to funding and opportunities that would emerge in year;
- A more detailed process had been followed this year with input from MIS and other college teams, so there was confidence in the expected number of enrolments and the resources needed to deliver the provision;
- T Levels would be introduced in Health Sciences, Digital, Carpentry and Joinery;
- There was a new Level 3 pathway in Business with a civil service focus and new pathways in Access to HE. The foundation offer had been re-designed.
- Adult funding continued to be complex and across a range of provision types. The overall funding allocation had increased in year. There were further opportunities for this to grow, for example in Boot Camps;
- The High Needs allocation had increased due to demand within the area;
- 20 apprenticeship standards were to be offered following the review of provision;
- HE had seen declining enrolments for three years so the offer had been changed. There was now a focus on teaching qualifications, Construction, Engineering and Healthcare.

Questions and comments were invited.

(Lindsey Flynn left at 6pm).

A Governor asked how confident staff were that WMCA would approve the adult plan, and what the impact would be if not. Staff confirmed that there had been much engagement with the WMCA in setting the plan so agreement to it was expected.

The Chair noted the anticipated enrolments for T Levels and asked how many groups were expected. The Assistant Principal confirm there would be one group of 12 students for each area. There was work to do to grow the T Level brand nationally and locally.

(Ian Gardner left at 6.10pm)

Business Success

Management Accounts – April 2023

The Director of Finance presented the report and highlighted key points including variances in relation to income and pay and non-pay budgets.

Governors noted the following:

- Income was £900k below budget and the main reason for this was variances in Advance Learner Loans, HE and AEB;
- Pay costs were £15m, which was better than budget. Figures included re-structuring costs. Agency costs remained high due to sickness cover in place and also difficulties recruiting teaching staff in some curriculum areas;
- Non-pay costs were also better than budget for the year to date although this was largely due to timing differences;
- The year to date operating profit was down on budget;
- Cash balances were healthy and had increased compared to the previous year;
- A re-forecast had been completed based on April's figures and the details of this were summarised. The operating surplus and EBITDA were both lower than the original budget but higher than the February forecast. The financial health score was noted, but could be subject to change depending on the Barclays position.

A Governor noted the levels of spend on agency staffing and asked whether outcomes of students taught by them were monitored. The Deputy Principal responded that there had been no courses taught solely by agency staff.

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

Re-Financing Update

The Director of Finance noted the current position with respect to re-financing of Barclays debt. Actions had not been finalised so no decisions were required at this meeting, although there may be a need to call an additional meeting, depending on progress. It was hoped that an agreement would be reached before year end.

For reasons of confidentiality, the remainder of this item has been minuted separately.

Bad Debt Write-Offs

Debts had been provided for within the accounts for several years but several write-offs were now proposed as detailed in the written report.

Resolved: that Governors approved the bad debt write-offs as presented.

Credit Control Policy

The Credit Control policy had been reviewed and approval was sought.

Resolved: that Governors approved the Credit Control policy

(Hshaana Knight left at 6.40pm)

Financial Regulations

It had been necessary to update the Financial Regulations now that the college had been re-classified as public sector and was required to comply with HM Treasury's 'Managing Public Money' document. Changes resulting from this and other housekeeping updates were highlighted within the document.

The Chair asked for clarification on letters of comfort and this was explained.

A Governor asked about the requirement for the Board to have oversight of contracts registers. The Director of Finance stated that the college was working with the external auditors on this and other new requirements.

Resolved – that Governors approved the Financial Regulations.

2023/24 Draft Top-Down Budget

The written paper included a first draft of the budget which was presented for information. It remained work in progress and would link into the curriculum plan, which was expected to be finalised the following week. The current budget headlines were:

- A break even bottom line;
- Income, pay and non-pay costs all increasing compared to the April re-forecast;
- Significant ongoing impact of high inflation;
- Some capital funding was expected;
- A prudent approach was being taken by not including potential income for new delivery opportunities at this time.

The Principal noted that whilst there were still several external uncertainties, the final draft budget would be brought to the next meeting in July for approval.

Partnerships Financial Update

Governors received an update to information reported at previous meetings. Approval was sought for changes to contract values as outlined in the written report.

Resolved – that Governors approved contract changes as requested.

Procurement

The Deputy Chief Executive explained recent tendering activities. Governor approval was sought to appoint the preferred suppliers.

Resolved – that Governors approved:

- **The appointment of Midwest Mechanical Services for M&E works and**
- **The appointment of Sowden and Sowden for Marketing campaign services.**

The college had also appointed Sitewatch for fire and security systems. Approval for this was not required as cost was below the approval threshold.

People Engagement

Pay Award

The Principal outlined his intention to bring a pay award proposal to the July meeting for approval. Some initial options had been set out in the paper for this meeting, but these would need to be reviewed and finalised in light of the budget and other factors.

Governors noted the options and agreed that further discussions would be held in July.

41/23 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 7)

There were no minutes to review. CTOG had met in the previous week as discussed earlier in the meeting.

42/23 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 8)

None.

43/23 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 9)

It was resolved that the following reports would remain confidential:

- **Partnership Update.**

44/23 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 10)

Board of Governors – Monday 24 July 2023 at 5pm on Teams

The meeting ended at 7.10pm.