

## CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

### Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Thursday 12 June 2025 at 5pm in Room 206A, Wellington Road

#### **PRESENT**

|                          |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Mr Mike Hastings - Chair | Mr Darren Shaw       |
| Mr John Bradford         | Ms Abigail Smith     |
| Mrs Jane Carter          | Ms Doina Surchicin   |
| Ms Wendy Harris          | Mrs Amanda Tomlinson |

#### **IN ATTENDANCE**

|                  |                                      |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mrs Alison Buick | Head of Governance                   |
| Mr Paul Davies   | Director of Finance                  |
| Mr Mike Dixon    | Assistant Principal                  |
| Mr Peter Merry   | Deputy Principal and Chief Executive |
| Ms Lynn Parker   | Assistant Principal                  |

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Governors for attending.

#### **73/25 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)**

Apologies were received from Dionne Barrett, Simon Evans, Louise Fall and Mark Taylor. Sam Duru was not in attendance. Shavante Clarke had submitted her resignation earlier in the day.

#### **74/25 MINUTES (ITEM 2)**

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2025 be **approved**.

#### **75/25 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS (ITEM 3)**

Governors reviewed the actions from the previous meeting and noted the following:

- Further dates for Governor visits to CLQ were being arranged.
- A list of employers aligned to curriculum areas had been circulated.
- Governors had been added to the list of invitees for Business Breakfast events as agreed.

A Governor asked about links to employers for Futures students. It was confirmed that there were arrangements in place with local NHS organisations and the Council.

#### **76/25 CHAIR'S ACTIONS (ITEM 4)**

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive reported that the legal agreements for CLQ were now all complete. The Chair had signed the relevant documents on behalf of the Board as agreed at the previous meeting.

#### **77/25 CORRESPONDENCE (ITEM 5)**

Three items of correspondence had been provided and were noted for information.

The Chair commented on his participation in the Annual Strategic Conversation with DfE, which was the subject of the letter dated 30 April 2025. A comprehensive set of

information had been provided by the Exec team and the discussions with DfE had gone very well. There was recognition of the progress being made by the college.

## **78/25 STRATEGY (ITEM 6)**

### Property Strategy and CLQ Update

It was noted that CTOG had met on 9 June and received a full update on all aspects of the campus projects. Governors had previously received the presentation slides.

### CLQ

- Work on CLQ was progressing well. A press call had taken place earlier in the day to coincide with the scaffolding being removed.
- The slides that had been circulated showed images of the exterior and interior of the building. They also included details of work in progress and planned in the next four weeks, plus when different floors would be ready for handover to the college.
- There had been no changes to the expected completion and opening dates.
- A fully fitted science lab and classroom would be available in July.
- Key activities such as timetabling and IT procurement were underway.
- Student applications were very positive and higher than last year.
- The overall project was on budget, as was the college element. Some pressures on costs and contingency were being seen in the adult education and library elements.
- Work on the disposal of Paget Road was continuing, with meetings having been held with prospective developers. A proposal was expected to be brought back to the Board meeting in September. DfE approval would be needed for the preferred bidder.
- The sale of Newhampton Arts Centre (NAC) had not yet completed. Solicitors were reviewing the need to remove the restriction of title on the property before this could be finalised.
- £1.9m of condition funding had been received. A plan for use of this would be brought back to a future meeting.

A 3D video of CLQ was shared on screen for information. This had recently been received. It would be used to share images at open day and also to create a virtual tour.

### Accountability Statement

Governors had received the draft Accountability Statement at the last meeting. Some minor updates had been made and the final version was now presented for formal approval. The Statement needed to be submitted to DfE by 30 June 2025.

Governors noted the detail on the position of the college within its community and that their duty to review the provision had been met. The table at the end of the document outlined the key strategic goals. The new CORE programme was explained and discussed. It would be a focus for personal development work in the new year and would also have employer focus.

A Governor noted some minor updates required. These would be actioned before final publication.

**Resolved** – that the Accountability Agreement for 2025/26 was approved.

### **Student Engagement**

#### **Student Union Update**

The Student Union President referred to her written report and commented on the following:

- The range of activities that the SU had held and attended since the last meeting, including health and wellbeing day, a live music event and World Culture Day.
- Planning had started for activities in next academic year.
- SU representatives had met with the Principal and had also attended a Black Country Summit to discuss the results of the diversity survey.
- Elections for new SU Officers had started.
- A class reps survey had been done and the results had been reviewed. This had focused on the future of the SU, college life and student engagement. Examples of the feedback were shared. It was confirmed that communications with class reps were through college platforms and the weekly Sway publication.
- Work was now focused on supporting the next college open day and on doing end of year review meetings.

Governors recognised the work of the SU, which had been very active this year, and thanked the President for leading this.

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive responded to questions submitted by a Governor about enrichment. This would form part of the role of one of the newly appointed Assistant Principals so would be a focus for the new year.

#### **Applications Update**

The Assistant Principal (Lynn Parker) reported that applications in almost all areas were significantly higher than last year. This included T Levels, indicating more interest in this qualification this year than previously. Particular areas of growth were automotive, hair & beauty and electrical. There were small drops in Science and Brickwork, but not at a level to cause concern.

The effect of new facilities at ATAC and CLQ was felt to be a factor in attracting more applicants this year. Growth at ATAC was 149% compared to last year.

Discovery days were planned before the end of term. Other 'keep warm' activities were in place for prospective students.

260 High Needs students had been enrolled this year with around 300 expected for next year. Consultations to meet need were continuing.

A Governor asked how the college reviewed EHCP students to assess whether needs could be met. The Assistant Principal (Lynn Parker) outlined the process and how consultations were completed. Needs were becoming more complex and the processes were very time consuming.

Adult applications for this year were 9% higher than the previous year. Growth had been seen in Access to HE, Health and Social Care, Automotive and Hospitality and Catering.

A Governor asked about adult numbers in relation to WMCA contracts. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive commented that adult contracts were a complex picture. Numbers were expected to be down on the DfE allocation but slightly higher

than the WMCA one and the funding rules were different. The college controlled this area as tightly as possible and aimed to achieve at least 97% of both contracts.

There was a short discussion about the opening of CLQ and the expected impact of this on student applications. There was likely to be a further effect from this in 2026/27. Future growth and capacity would need to be monitored as CLQ had been designed with a theoretical maximum of 3000 students.

## **Student Success**

### **Predicted Achievement Rates 2024/25**

The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) commented on predicted achievement rates.

The current retention rate for Classroom-Based Learning (CBL) was 96.1%, a 4% increase compared to the same period last year. Final achievement rates for the 2024/25 academic year would not be fully determined until examination results and feedback from awarding bodies were received. However, based on predictions regarding core vocational qualifications (excluding partner delivery), an achievement rate of approximately 90% was anticipated.

A Governor asked about the data and it was confirmed that it was checked weekly. The Assistant Principal showed the Proachieve data on screen and explained how Curriculum Managers could filter data in various ways. Data could be triangulated with attendance and interventions, with action plans agreed where needed.

It was noted that there were some areas of concern, including Brickwork, where there were some staffing gaps.

There was a short discussion about staffing and the impact on consistency of teaching and learning. For next year, specialist personal tutors were being introduced to reduce the pastoral workload of teaching staff.

The Chair asked about the costs of agency staffing. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive responded that costs were relatively high but that for next year there would be a single agency arrangement in place. This was expected to generate savings and efficiencies.

Attendance to Maths and English exams had been good.

Apprenticeships achievement to date was 57.4%, higher than last year's outturn. It was hoped that the target of 60% would be reached.

A Governor asked how overall achievement rates were expected to outturn compared to last year. The Assistant Principal responded that 90% was 2% lower than last year. Reasons were explained. However, there was confidence in the 90% figure.

### **Curriculum Planning Update**

The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) commented on the following:

- A breakdown of the anticipated enrolments by provision type was set out in the written report.
- The curriculum planning process was now complete.
- Recruitment had started for identified staffing needs.
- Curriculum Managers affected by the move to CLQ were all mindful of potential effects on enrolment for next year and also for 2026/27.
- There had been a robust review of the apprenticeships offer so there was a focus on key areas such as engineering.

## **People Engagement**

### **Pay Award**

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive commented on the £188k one off grant received to support staff recruitment and retention. DfE had allocated this following a Judicial Review by the Sixth Form Colleges Association.

It was proposed to use this for a one off, non-consolidated award of £300 per staff member on a pro rata basis.

Approval was sought for this. It was noted that the Directors of City of Wolverhampton College Enterprises Ltd, the subsidiary company, had agreed that the staff employed through Enterprises should receive the same award as those employed directly by the college.

**Resolved** – that the pay award was approved for all staff.

## **Business Success**

### **Management Accounts – April 2025**

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:

- The management accounts to April showed an Earnings Before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) surplus of £3.3m (11.16%) compared to a budget surplus of £2.7m (8.61%).
- AEB allocations were currently behind budget but there was ongoing work with partners on this and it was expected that this would recover by year end.
- A grant allocation had been received for the increase to employers National Insurance. The impact for the remainder of this financial year was £175k.
- There were apprentices awaiting end point assessments before the end of the year so it was expected that further income would be able to be claimed.
- The surplus on pay costs previously reported was starting to reduce due to the impact of the pay award and the increases to National Insurance and National Living Wage that had taken effect in April.
- Overheads continued to be carefully monitored.
- EBITDA at year end was expected to be £3m.
- A provision of £90k had been included for a potential overspend on the 16-19 Bursary fund

**The Board of Governors received the Management Accounts to April 2025.**

### **Credit Control Policy**

The policy was presented for annual review and approval. There were no changes to report.

**Resolved** – that the Credit Control Policy was approved.

### **Bad Debt Write Offs**

In line with Financial Regulations the College was required to obtain Board approval for all debt write-offs in excess of £5k per item.

Bad debt write-offs for 2024/25 to the end of May totalled £52.9k with one invoice greater than £5,000.00 requiring Board approval. There were no individual debts

greater than £5k. The debt written off related to unrecoverable income prior to the 2023/24 year. There was an annual provision of £25k for write offs.

**Resolved** – that the Board approved the bad debt write offs as presented.

#### 2025/26 Budget Update

The Director of Finance commented on the latest draft of the 2025/26 budget.

- Total budgeted income was £43.7m, an increase of £1.3m on the current forecast outturn and £2.5m on the 2024/25 budget. This was mostly due to the increase to the 16-19 programme funding allocation. The growth in income over the last four years was noted.
- Additional funding for National Insurances increases had recently been received so was to be added.
- There was a 5% uplift for T Level funding.
- There was more work to do in finalising the adult and partnership delivery plans.

A Governor noted the reduction in the DfE's adult education allocation and asked if this was sector wide. It was confirmed that it was.

- There was planned growth in apprenticeship income, including carry in for existing apprentices as well as increased numbers of new starts.
- HE and trading income were still to be finalised.
- Pay costs had been budgeted to reflect all current posts plus known vacancies. The FE Commissioner's financial benchmarks had recently been updated but the pay to turnover ratio remained at 65%. The college was currently at 75%.
- All overhead submissions had been received and reviewed.
- A final version of the budget would be brought back for Board approval in July.

A Governor commented on the current level of partnership income as per the management accounts, which was below budget. The Director of Finance was reviewing the position. Improvement was expected before year end. Lead times were longer with partners. There were regular reviews of the contracts through dialogue and QEB meetings. No concerns about delivery had been raised.

A Governor noted the pay to turnover ratio and asked if the college had a long term financial plan. The Director of Finance stated that there would be a two year plan. Five year plans were difficult to do with any accuracy.

#### Bakery Works Contract

Governors noted the Bakery Works Procurement Briefing Note, which outlined the project to remodel the existing commercial salon space at the Wellington Road campus into a permanent bakery and reinstate the foyer area.

The rationale for the work and the project outline were explained.

The tender had returned higher than anticipated costs so some value engineering was taking place.

It was confirmed that there would be new equipment installed.

Costs and other aspects had been considered in making a recommendation for Board approval.

The preferred contractor was William Gough and Sons. Governors were advised that John Gough, Associate Member of the Campus Transformation Oversight Group, was a Director of this company. A full and transparent procurement process had

taken place and this would be recorded as a related party transaction for the purposes of disclosure.

**Resolved** – that the Board approved the award of the Bakery works contract to William Gough and Sons in accordance with the costs set out in the written report.

#### Partnerships Update

The report noted that the position as at the RO10 data return date would be available for the July Board meeting.

A subcontracting controls internal audit had been completed and would be reported to the Audit Committee later in June.

Dialogue continued with WMCA and partners regarding delivery of Wave 6 Bootcamps.

There was a potential new partner for warehousing and logistics work for 2025/26. Further information would be brought to the Board once due diligence had been completed.

#### Fees Policy

The Fees Policy was reviewed annually and brought to Board for approval. There were minimal changes. The updated fees for franchised courses with the University of Wolverhampton were noted.

**Resolved** – that the Board approved the Fees Policy.

### **80/25 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 9)**

The minutes of the following recent meetings had been circulated:

- Campus Transformation Oversight Group 12 May 2025

**The Board of Governors received the committee reports.**

### **81/25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 10)**

#### Matrix Accreditation

Governors noted the recent re-accreditation of the Matrix award. The Principal and staff were congratulated on this.

#### Governor vacancies

The Chair noted that there were several vacancies and asked Governors to consider any suitable contacts

### **82/25 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 11)**

**It was resolved that the following reports would remain confidential:**

- **Property and CLQ Update**
- **Contract awards**

**83/25 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 12)**

Board of Governors – Thursday 10 July 2025 at 5pm on Teams.

The meeting ended at 6.55pm.