

CORPORATION BOARD Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday, 14 March 2023 at 5pm

Present

Nick Handy (Chair)
Jacqui Canton, *Principal & Chief Executive*
Howard Dodd, *Governor*
Mackenzie Nordal,
Governor
Robert Weavers, *Student Governor*

In attendance

Penny Challans, *Head of Finance*
Michael Chiyasa, *Head of Estates and Capital Development* (until item 4.2)
Olivier Cognard, *Vice Principal of Funding, Planning & Systems Improvement*
Kelly Haddrell, *Head of HR* (until item 4.3)
Mark Lay, *Finance Director* (until item 7.1)
Yvonne Mortimer, *Health & Safety Manager* (until item 4.1)
Jo Milsom, *Deputy Principal*
Abi Kerr, *PA to the Principal* (minutes)

Governor questions are represented with bullet points, and management responses are italicized.

1. Opening Comments

1.1 Apologies and matters to be raised under AOB

The Committee welcomed Mackenzie Nordal to her first Committee meeting. The Committee noted the apologies from Alan Bark and Edward Collett. The meeting was quorate. In the absence of a Clerk, notes were taken by Abi Kerr. Discussion of the ONS webinar slides, which had been circulated by the Finance Director prior to the meeting, was requested as an item to be raised under Any Other Business.

1.2 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were raised.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2022

The Committee approved the minutes for signature.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Finalise signing of previously approved Committee minutes	Principal	Next meeting

3 Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points

Most matters arising had been completed with some due to be completed by the next meeting. The Committee reviewed the actions which were in progress.

The Committee noted the report.

4 Reports

4.1 Health & Safety report

The Health & Safety Manager presented the report and highlighted the key points to note.

- Was the Hand Arm Vibration (HAV) RIDDOR report from a staff member a result of using tools? *Yes. The staff member who reported this had been with us for approximately 3 years, which on its own is not sufficient time for HAV harm to be caused.*
- Where was the swimming pool where the serious student incident occurred? *Carterton. A group of SEND students were accompanied by several SEND team staff for a hydrotherapy session where one student had a seizure whilst underwater. The*

staff members present reacted expertly and were commended for their efforts. The student recovered and is doing well.

- What proportion of the total number of accidents and incidents reported were near misses? *Approximately 5%.*
- What is the process for reporting near misses relating to poor driving (i.e., speeding) on or near campus? *If inappropriate driving was witnessed, where possible, the H&S Manager would endeavour to confront the driver and highlight the dangers of their actions. Statistically, matters of this nature were difficult to measure. The routine procedure would be to fill out a near miss report which would notify the H&S Manager. It would then be arranged for Estates to take further action as appropriate in the form of signage or speed bumps, for example.*
- Did the College have an agreed crisis/reaction plan for evacuations? *A number of College managers formed a Crisis Management Group who reviewed potential crises. It had recently been determined unnecessary to trial a crisis lockdown procedure and to instead reinforce the “run, hide, tell” message. In the context of the report, the evacuation plan in question was regarding student PEEPs (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans).*
- Governors voiced their interest in reviewing the College’s use of Smartlog in order to understand it’s use more fully by the College. *In addition to the H&S Manager’s work, the VP of FP&SI and Head of ITS were working together to optimise the College’s use of the platform.*
- Was the total number of Risk Assessments reported across the College accurate? How would we know if all necessary RAs had been completed? *There wasn’t a set or limit to the number of RAs. RAs were raised as necessary by staff members for certain scenarios. In terms of the broader picture, the number of RAs was in line with expectations and deemed to be appropriate.*
- To what extent was the increased number of RAs due to students now predominantly being based on campus as opposed to at home, following the lapse of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions? *It was recognised that the number of RAs had increased due, in part, to the number of students now on site. However, the College was also experiencing a higher number of students with more complex needs. Therefore, there was a need for more student-specific RAs.*
- Has it always been the case for the College to have a small number of students with behavioural issues? *Ordinarily, yes.*
- Have there been any incidents on any of the College’s trips? *No.*
- How is the number of trips arranged by the College being managed following the pandemic? *Anecdotally, most curriculum areas were arranging trips as normal. It would be difficult to compare and outline trends relating to College trips over the recent previous years due to the pandemic and lack of data recorded in this area.*

The Committee noted the report.

4.2 Capital Projects & Estates reports

4.2.1 Public report

The Head of Estates and Capital Development presented the report and highlighted the key points to note.

- Was the issue with Wifi coverage at Common Leys still part of the capacity issues? *The Wifi issue had been rectified. The key challenge in Witney and Common Leys was space. The DfE was not currently approving bids requesting footprint increases. Due to the size of Witney campus, it had been a struggle to gain approval for expansion at the Common Leys campus.*

- Had the temperature of the heating been adjusted and could that be attributed to the savings in gas? *A lower temperature had been trialled and there had been notable savings to the College's outgoings for gas and electricity.*
- What was the charge for staff to use the Electric Vehicle charging points? *Currently, 20p per kW. It had been noted in the EV Charging policy that the price per kW could be adjusted as necessary.*
- Can we track assets at room level at the moment? *The Financial Asset Register is not broken down by room level so we would need to change this if it was felt to be important, potentially by trialling the use of Smartlog in this area, if possible.*
- What level of materiality is captured on the asset register? *Assets over the value of £1k.*

The Committee noted the report.

4.2.2 Confidential report

The confidential minutes for this item were recorded separately.

4.3 HR report

The Head of HR presented the report, which had been revised in terms of content, and highlighted the key points to note.

- Were as many as 1.7 days per month lost due to short term sickness? *This figure was the average number of days lost due to sickness per staff member per term, as opposed to per month, which was considered low. This amounted to 5 days for the full year which was considered low for the sector.*
- What was the response rate for the staff survey? *Relatively low at approximately 20%, which was lower than preferred but comparatively in line with previous years. Ways to improve staff engagement in the survey were being considered.*
- Were the key recruitment challenges predominantly within Construction? What steps were being taken to solve this? *The College were endeavouring to recruit staff from industry and increase engagements across the Thames Valley through DfE initiatives and via Recruitment Fairs in collaboration with other local colleges. More recruitment events were being planned.*
- Had the recruitment events taken place in Abingdon? *Yes, both Abingdon and Witney simultaneously. An event was being arranged to take place at Common Leys also.*
- Are secondments offered within the College? *Not at the moment. Internal progression was encouraged but not in a secondment capacity at present.*
- Why was there a lack of focus on succession planning with the emphasis instead on staff development? *It would be interesting to note the difference between the two. HR were looking at how to better map in these areas in order to understand whether secondments could be an option in the future.*

The Committee noted the report.

5. Policies

5.1 Reserves Policy

The Finance Director advised that no material changes had been made to the policy.

The Committee approved the policy and recommended it to Board.

6. Finance matters

6.1 Management Accounts to 31 January 2023

The Head of Finance presented the report and highlighted the key points to note.

- What were the financial health grading bands? *“Outstanding” was measured from 240 to 300 points, “Good” from 180 to 230 points, “Requires Improvement” from 120 to 170 points and “Inadequate” 110 points or lower. The College’s financial health grade was “Requires Improvement” currently but should progress to “Good” within this year. The College was likely to remain at “Good” until the end of the year but was projected to revert back to “Requires Improvement” for next academic year.*
- Should our Reserves Policy reflect the changes likely because of the recent ONS reclassification? *The DfE are likely to outline specific requirements for matters such as reserves. There was potential for unused financial reserves to be clawed back at some point in the future.*
- The Committee considered the breakpoint terms and logistics for repaying the College’s bank loans over the course of the next 2 years+.

The Committee approved the report and recommended it to Board.

6.2 Update on 2022/23 Adult Education Budget income

The Principal presented the report and highlighted the key points to note. There was potential for funds to be clawed back if 97% of the funding allocation was not achieved. All was being done to ensure that there was no clawback of funds. It was likely for there to be clawback in the area of Free Courses for Jobs.

- Was the Free Courses for Jobs initiative aimed to encourage individuals into free courses with the intention of retraining in order to get jobs? *Yes. However, there was difficulty delivering the provision because of the limiting eligibility requirements.*

The Committee noted the report.

6.3 2022/23 Full Year Forecast

The Finance Director presented the report and highlighted the key points to note.

- Did the College need to request permission from the DfE for financial deposits? *Not for deposits.*
- Were the College concerned by the reported issues recruiting 16-18 year olds in the media? *The national picture showed that there had been a small percentage of growth in the number of 16-18 students across the country. The College’s growth had increased by over 10% which the Green Construction Skills Centre had been the main reason alongside the quality of the College’s provision. College forecasts were indicating that a further increase was expected next academic year.*
- What about the local picture? *There had been an increase in the local 16-18 demographic but not to the same degree in which the College had experienced student number increases.*
- Who would be losing students to us? *Management were trying to understand that. It was believed that there had been limited growth at Activate who were the biggest competitor. Henley College had reached capacity.*
- Could we acquire sixth form students? *Yes, but it is difficult to measure the possible size of the market.*
- The Committee noted the success of the GCSC.

- Are we comfortable that the increased forecast for High Needs Student income is accurate and could be achievable? *Whilst the figure was high, the College had experienced a large increase in the number of HNS this year so it was a conservative figure. It was estimated that the DP was approximately halfway through the process of agreeing the funds with the County Council and outlined the process itself was very difficult and time consuming.*

The Committee noted the report and recommended it to Board.

6.4 2023/24 High Level Shape

The Finance Director presented the report and highlighted the key points to note.

- Had there been a modest increase in Apprenticeships? *Yes. The BCSC would be full next year.*
- What was the reason for the full year forecast for Apprenticeships? *It has been a struggle to recruit staff at Bicester and would not be possible to start as many apprentices as hoped in April. There would be a much higher carry in next year with less risk on growth. Whilst the number of new starts this year was less than hoped, there was capacity for growth moving forwards. It had been challenging to recruit plumbers to teach as the College had been somewhat restricted by salary limitations. For full time provision, we are endeavouring to be innovative by training students into technicians and lecturers.*
- Are there any additional costs for the redundancies? *Not significant enough to not be absorbed by the forecast.*
- Would HE engagement decrease further next year? *We were working hard to counteract the sector's pattern by understanding the reasons for the decrease in HE engagement. It was, however, sensible to factor in a loss of income in this area for next year following the trends noted to date despite efforts to reverse them.*
- *With regards to Electricity, the College currently purchased mixed renewables products. The costs for purchasing fully green products would increase costs by £13k per year; 1p per kW more than currently paying. If it was deemed for this increase to be financially viable, it would offset the College's carbon footprint.* *Governors felt that the green market needed to resolve itself before the College took on substantial costs in an endeavour to be more sustainable. It would be sensible at this time to proceed with the current arrangements for purchasing renewables. Management were conscious of the marketing power of sustainability and the positive impact it could have on the College's reputation. Governors acknowledged it needed to be considered what would be most attractive to existing and prospective students.*

The Committee noted the report.

6.5 College energy costs

The Finance Director gave a verbal report on College energy costs. A 2-year fixed contract would be sought in the Summer when it was expected for energy increases to be at their lowest.

- Following the ONS reclassification, did the ESFA procure energy on behalf of Colleges? *Not that we were aware of.*

The Committee noted the verbal report.

6.6 Alternative to LGPS

The Finance Director presented the report and highlighted the key points to note. Previous concerns that the College's costs towards pension contributions would increase had proven to be unfounded based on the latest valuation. There had been no increase to costs and with the ONS reclassification it would be sensible to defer any decision until the end of the two year transition period.

The Committee approved the report.

6.7 Bank Loans

The Finance Director gave a verbal report. It was advised that the College's current 2 main bank loans have break points in 2024 and 2026 when it is expected that the ESFA will pay. Barclays and the College will then start repaying the ESFA at a lower interest rate than currently being paid.

The Committee noted the verbal report.

7. General purposes

7.1 Curriculum Planning update

The Vice Principal of Funding, Planning & Systems Improvement presented the report and highlighted the key points to note. The Curriculum Planning process was explained for information. The Power BI reports for "Planned Hours vs Timetabled Hours" and "Enrolment Tracker" were presented.

- Could the report be viewed in line with previous year's data? *Not at this time but a report would soon be developed in order to allow for comparison.*
- Were the numbers based on standard costing levels? *Yes*
- Do we have a sense of capacity for each faculty given time and space restraints? *We are paying close attention to areas with capacity to grow according to current application levels. The College should be able to accommodate current expected growth in all areas other than construction where the GCSC is already at capacity. It was being considered where else Construction delivery could be based on site.*
- Were any other models outside of 16-18 being tracked? *Yes. Potential HE and AEB student numbers were also projected and their courses planned in the same way, but the focus was predominantly on 16-18 at the moment..*
- Was there much data on the margin of safety for courses? *HoFs were required to meet with SMT to discuss reasoning for not meeting their targets. There was a minimum 50% contribution which was a standard costing across the board.*

The Committee noted the report.

7.2 College redundancies

The Principal gave a verbal report regarding the staff redundancies in the area of Science and Creative Industries. 6 weeks ago, a small number of staff were put at risk of redundancy. The formal consultation period had come to an end last week.

The Committee noted the verbal report.

7.3 Review of Underpinning Strategies in support of the College Strategic Plan

The Principal presented the report and highlighted the key points to note. It was noted the report was being shared for governor information and management would welcome any observations from the Committee in their overseeing capacity.

The Committee were responsible for monitoring the delivery of the College's Strategic Plan through the SMT. The meeting cycle of the Strategic Committees was explained.

Governors requested that a presentation be given at the next Board meeting on the Business Improvement Strategy for clarity. The level of detail in the strategies was commended.

- It was helpful to see 1-2 year operational plans for budgeting purposes. Whilst the financial implication of the Strategic Plan had been approved by Board, specific activities had not previously been shared with governors as they were now. This level of insight was helpful and enabled oversight of the bigger picture. *A tracker was in place to monitor achievement of the various operational plans, as well as the KPI measures.*

The Committee noted the report.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Deliver presentation on Business Improvement Committee Underpinning Strategy	Principal	Board meeting

8. Any Other Business

The Committee discussed the matter of the ONS reclassification. The slides shared outlined the current requirements and included an outline transition plan for the next 2 years. The Committee acknowledged that there was still significant uncertainty.

Management advised that time would be set aside during the Board Strategy Day, a date for which would be confirmed in due course, for ONS reclassification matters to be discussed in more detail.

9. Future Business and Reflection

9.1 Committee business plan

No changes had been proposed. An informal Budget drop-in meeting had been scheduled for June

- Given the shape of the budget for next year had been reviewed by this Committee, could the informal budget drop-in session be used to consider financial aspects and data not routinely discussed in order for governors to obtain a clearer picture of operational matters? *It might be helpful to spend time discussing funding and curriculum planning.*
- Could the following questions, for example, be considered? Is there anything on review of the strategy one year on that has changed and would lead us to re-evaluate? What is the College's direction of travel with STEM? Could the HE decline and budget review be further discussed? What are the implications moving forward to capitalise on the success of the growth in 16-18? *These are appropriate questions which would sit well with the Board Strategy Day.*
- Was it identifiable whether the College's Construction provision had been more popular due to the green element? Was student reasoning for their choice of course logged? *Choices for applications to specific courses were not recorded. It was thought that the reason for the provision's popularity was primarily due to an increased interest in the Construction industry.*

The Committee reflected on the meeting and the reports presented.

The next F&GP Committee meeting was scheduled for Tuesday 20th June 2023 at 6pm.

The meeting closed at 7:07pm.

Approved for signature:
June 20th 2023
N Handy
23/01/2024 16:50:48

Signature
Nick Handy
23/01/2024

Date



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