

CORPORATION BOARD FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a virtual meeting held on Monday 1 March 2021 at 5.30pm

Present

Jacqui Canton, Principal
Howard Dodd
Nick Handy, Chair
Roger File
Sean Wellington

In attendance

Mark Lay, Finance Director
Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal
Stuart Hay, Head of Finance
Michael Chiyasa, Head of Estates & Capital Development (to end of item 6)
John Revis, Head of Occupational Safety & Health (to end of item 4)
Jenny Lowe, Clerk & Governance Advisor

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

1. Opening comments, apologies for absence and new declarations of interest

The chair welcomed members to the meeting, held virtually because of the third national Covid-19 lock-down. There were no new declarations of interest. Apologies had been received from Roger File who would join the meeting slightly late. The meeting was quorate.

2. Minutes of the meetings

Members approved the public and confidential minutes of 23 November 2020 as accurate and appropriate to sign.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda, and Action tracker

No additional matters arising were raised. The paper was noted.

4. Occupational Health & Safety: Key issues and concerns

John Revis introduced his report. Updating the Covid-19 information, he noted that there had been a steep rise in cases after Christmas, but that levels were now back down to nil. Updating governors on progress since the report had been circulated, he noted that the percentages of completed risk assessments had increased.

- Governors asked whether appropriate safeguarding referrals had been made following the incidents of self-harm referred to in the report. *The incidents took place off site but were reported and appropriate referrals were made to offer support to the students concerned.*
- What is the protocol for transporting students home following a positive lateral flow test? *Isolation rooms are available on each campus and parents will be called to collect students.*
- What happens if students refuse to be tested? *Testing is not mandatory for students or staff. They are not obliged to undergo testing and it is not permissible to refuse them entry to college for lessons/work if they do not wish to be tested.*

The Principal gave further information about the mass testing plan for staff and students. Students were to be offered 3 lateral flow tests on campus followed by home tests. Some on site testing would remain available for those students unable to self-administer home tests. Students would then be returning to campus week commencing 15 March.

Governors thanked the Head of OSH for the report.

5. HR: Key issues and concerns

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An outline of key issues in the report was given by the Principal. There had been a decrease in staff absence during the lockdown period.

- Have there been an increase in concerns around mental health issues for staff during this lockdown? *There has been a slight increase, but a more substantial increase has been seen in students.*

Governors noted the report.

6. Estates & Capital Development Update

The Head of Estates and Capital Development introduced his report. He updated the Committee that planning permission was awaited for the external signage at the Bicester Construction Skills Centre. A decision from the local planning authorities was also anticipated regarding the Abingdon Green CSC by the end of April.

Governors considered a confidential report.

The Head of Estates and Capital Projects was thanked for his report.

7. Construction Skills Academy Update

The Principal introduced the report. The first apprentices had now been enrolled at Bicester. The numbers were lower than projected, due to the lockdown, but they are rising, and commitments are now being made for September.

- Why has the five year forecast has been substantially revised in later years? *Due to the length of programmes, some would be impacted for 3-4years. The forecast had also been adjusted to take account of the impact of Brexit and the lower levels of funding which had been confirmed for some apprenticeship courses.*
- What proportion of the apprenticeships are the longer 3-4 year programmes? *Approximately 1/3.*
- What number of apprenticeships was the college projecting before Covid? *30 in the first year, rising to 250 in year 5.*

Governors noted the report.

8. Capital Projects Pipeline

The Principal introduced the report, updating Governors on the various sources of funding for Further Education capital projects which are currently available. These include:

- OxLEP
- Oxfordshire County Council
- ESFA Transformation Fund
- ESFA T Level capital

The timing of the various funding applications for capital works has meant that capital funding needs have been considered prior to the development of the new College Strategic Plan. Some of the bids require financial commitment from the College to support the projects. Bids would be brought back to the Corporation Board, if granted, to approve before proceeding with any commitment.

Governors noted the report.

9. Finance Key Issues and Concerns

9.1 Management Accounts

Governors discussed the management accounts to 31 January 2021.

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The Head of Finance confirmed that overall the College made an operating deficit of £17k compared to a budgeted deficit of £106k primarily as a result of the sale of Avenue One. Cash holdings at the end of the year were significantly higher than forecast, largely due to the sale of Avenue One, the timing of capital projects, and the delay in some supplier invoices being received due to the Covid lockdown.

The Management Accounts were recommended to the Board

9.2 Update on 20/21 Budget

The Finance Director introduced the report and noted that the College is on track to achieve the budgeted surplus set for 2020-21.

Cash holdings at the year end are forecast to be significantly above budget. The improved cash balance leads to an improved forecast Financial Health Grade of "Good", and bank covenants will continue to be met.

The updated Budget was recommended to the Board.

9.3 Lloyds Loan

The Finance Director introduced the report and noted that there had been a discussion at the November Audit Committee meeting regarding whether there is any benefit in retaining the loan or clearing it, with the recommendation that the F&GP Committee review the position.

On balance, and in light of the ongoing nature of the impact of Covid, the Committee agreed that they would not recommend repayment of the loan at this stage.

9.4 Reserves Policy 2021-22

The Finance Director referred to the report and noted that the College is an 'exempt charity', meaning that it is regulated by the DfE (via the ESFA) rather than directly by the Charity Commission. The FE Accounts Direction does not specifically require a Reserves Policy, and a number of colleges operate without one, but it is required under the Charities SORP and therefore good practice to have one in place.

- How is the College's pension liability dealt with? *It was agreed that the definitions paragraph should be amended to clarify that pension asset/liability will be treated separately from other reserves.*

Subject to amendment to the definitions paragraph regarding Pensions, the Reserves Policy was recommended to the Board for approval.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Amend definitions paragraph to expressly deal with Pension asset/liability separately.	Finance Director	Immediate
Add Reserves Policy to Board agenda	Clerk	For March 2021 meeting

10. Annual review of the college marketing plan

The Principal updated the report and outlined the planned reporting cycle.

- When will the strategy be reviewed? *The marketing strategy will be brought in line with the strategic planning cycle but it would be appropriate to review whether the marketing strategy remains appropriate each year.*

- It would be advisable to map stakeholder groups (eg the LEP County Council, Employers) and ensure that we understand our key relationships and networks and that the right messages are being presented to those audiences. *The marketing strategy has detail around this, it will be circulated to F&GP Committee.*
- It was noted that one reported impact of Covid is that some households have made significant savings. Is the College making plans to appeal to this market? *There is an expectation that the demand for 'leisure and pleasure' courses could increase. OAL is being reviewed in light of this. There is also the possibility that there will be a growth in demand for courses from people looking to re-skill due to changes in the job market.*
- How does the College market ambition to young people? *The College emphasises careers rather than courses and the focus is always on motivating and inspiring young people.*

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Circulate current marketing strategy to F&GP Committee	Principal	Immediate

11. Policies

The refreshed policy on Flexible Working was approved.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Publish Flexible Working policy to O365	Clerk	Immediate

12. Freedom of Information

The report was noted.

13. Any other business

It was agreed that meetings should have a start time of 6pm rather than 5.30pm.

14. Future Business and reflection

Governors agreed that the virtual meeting had gone well and recognised that it should soon be the case that face to face meetings would be allowed.

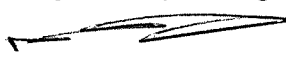
Governors requested that, as per the previous year, a budget "drop in" meeting is held prior to the next F&GP meeting. The meeting should be open to all governors with a particular interest in assisting with the budget process. It was suggested that the Committee meeting should be moved back to allow time for this.

The proposed business was noted.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Reschedule Summer term F&GP meeting and arrange a pre budget meeting prior to F&GP.	Finance Director & Clerk	As soon as possible

The meeting closed at 7.25pm.

Approved for signature (meeting date) *N HANDY*

Signature 

Date *28/7/20*

Action Points arising from the F&GP Committee held on 1 March 2021

Item & Title	Action	By whom	deadline
9.4 Reserves Policy	Amend definitions paragraph to expressly deal with Pension asset/liability separately.	Finance Director	Immediate
	Add Reserves Policy to Board agenda	Clerk	For March 2021 meeting
10 Marketing Strategy	Circulate current marketing strategy to F&GP Committee	Principal	Immediate
11 Policies	Publish Flexible Working policy to O365	Clerk	Immediate
14 Future Business & reflection	Schedule Budget meeting and reschedule Summer term F&GP meeting	Finance Director & Clerk	As soon as possible

