



## CORPORATION BOARD Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at 6pm

### **Present**

Nick Handy (Chair);  
Jacqui Canton, Principal;  
Mackenzie Howe Nordal;

### **In attendance**

Jo Milsom, Deputy Principal;  
Michael Chiyasa, Head of Estates and Capital Projects;  
Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal Funding, Planning & Systems Improvement  
Kelly Haddrell, Head of People Services;  
Penny Challans, Head of Finance;  
Mark Lay, Finance Director;  
Ben Rose, Head of Health & Safety;  
Howard Stamp, Clerk

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

## **1. Opening Comments**

### **1.1 Election of Chair**

This item was deferred to the following committee meeting.

### **1.2 Apologies, new declarations of interest and matters to be raised under AOB.**

Apologies had been received from Alan Bark, Jessie Weavers-Medina and Edward Collett. The meeting was quorate. There were no matters to be raised under AOB. No declarations of interest were made.

The Chair welcomed Ben Rose to their first meeting as the new Head of Health and Safety for the college.

## **2 Minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2023**

### **2.1 Public Minutes**

The committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

### **3 Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points**

The Clerk presented the actions for the previous meetings. There were no actions outstanding.

The committee noted the report.

## **4 Policies – Covering Paper**

### **4.1 Reserves Policy**

The Finance Director outlined the policy as a renewal of the existing policy, with minor changes to reflect the new year. One change was highlighted to the committee to recognise the change in financial borrowing processes.

The committee recommended the policy to the Board.

### **4.2 Staff Relocation Expenses Policy**

The Finance Director presented the policy as a new policy for the college, informing the committee of its purpose to support the recruitment of staff and explaining that it conformed to HMRC guidelines in respect of expense allowances. The committee welcomed the policy. The committee recognised that a policy of this type would usually have a 3-year review cycle, however it was agreed that the policy should be reviewed in the first instance after one year in case any amendments be required.

The committee recommended the new policy to Board and requested delegated authority from the Board to this committee to approve any future revisions.

#### **4.3 Revised Family Friendly Policy**

The Head of People Services outlined the revisions to this existing policy in response to changes in legislation.

The committee recommended the Policy to the Board and requested delegated authority from the Board to this committee to approve any future revisions of this policy.

#### **4.4 Revised Flexible Working Policy**

The Head of People Services outlined the revisions to this existing policy in response to changes in legislation.

The committee approved the policy.

#### **4.5 Revised Redundancy Policy**

The Head of People Services outlined the revisions to this existing policy in response to changes in legislation.

The committee approved the policy.

#### **4.6 Fire Safety Policy**

The Head of Estates and Capital Projects presented the policy, confirming that this was a new policy for the college.

The committee recommended the new policy to Board and requested delegated authority to SMT for future revisions.

### **5. Term 2 Update Reports**

#### **5.1 People Services report**

The Head of People Services shared key highlights from the report, addressing the current emphasis on staff recruitment. The committee was briefed on the appointment of the new Talent Acquisition Manager, who recently joined the college. The college remained confident the role would increase applications for roles and some progress had already been evident.

Staff absence was also discussed; both long and short term absence are being monitored and the committee agreed this was being managed well by the college. There was also a discussion around staff wellbeing and the support offered by the college which was linked to the reduction in short term absences.

- **Is recruitment more costly at the moment?** *Some roles can be more difficult to fill and require support from agency recruitment or different types of advertising to ensure we can attract the right candidates who may not ordinarily see educational job postings. We are also offering a technical allowance where appropriate for roles within particular industry sectors.*
- **Are there any changes to EDI Targets?** *This is only currently looked at once a year, however work is always ongoing as part of the recruitment processes to ensure we can attract diverse candidates.*

The changes to the People Services team were discussed, with current work underway to review the People Strategy. The changes in the team structure will allow for growth required by the team by ensuring clear definition of roles and resources.

The committee thanked the Head of People Services for the detailed report and noted the report.

## 5.2 Estates and Capital Development

The Head of Estates and Capital Projects shared key highlights from the report, outlining the current ongoing developments and projects within the college. There was a particular highlight and discussion of the previous issues raised for the T Level Wave 5 animal care project and grant funding, which had now received approval to proceed from the ESFA with a slightly amended project and development.

The new English and Maths hub at the Witney campus was discussed and confirmed as now completed. The committee welcomed this and discussed the positive change and improved use for the space.

The committee also discussed the ongoing planned and preventative maintenance (PPM) and changes to staffing within the team. The committee remained positive regarding the working being carried out by the team and thanked the Head of Estates and Capital Projects for the detailed report.

The committee noted the report.

[The Head of Estates and Capital Projects left the meeting]

## 5.3 Health and Safety

The Head of Health and Safety presented the report, outlining key highlights to the committee, particularly focusing on the appointment of new staff members to support the broader health and safety work at the college. The staff members and their roles will prioritise staff and student safety, recognising that health and safety encompasses more than just physical estate matters. The committee discussed the roles and expressed interest in learning more about their future impact, discussing the possibility of new information and emerging trends that may not have been available previously.

The ongoing review of Smartlog use was discussed with the committee, with the Head of Health and Safety continuing to review the effectiveness of the systems and its use across the college. The Head of Health and Safety also discussed their vision to create a local forum for health and safety experts from other colleges should there be an appetite for it. The committee welcomed this idea.

The committee noted the report.

[The Head of Health & Safety left the meeting]

## 6. Finance Matters

### 6.1 Management Accounts

The Head of Finance presented the Management Accounts for the period to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024. The discussion focused around the accounts remaining ahead of the planned budget for the year and highlighting that cashflow does not present an issue for the next six months. The committee noted that the accounts are currently in a healthy position.

- **Can you explain more about refunds generated by OAL?** *Yes, due to the nature of the provision, some courses do not run if enrolments are low and therefore this may generate refunds. This may also happen where staff shortage means the planned course is unable to run. This is not unusual for adult provision within the community. Often this is within the non-accredited Arts and Leisure courses.*

- **Does this mean the provision offers too much choice?** *We don't believe so. The offer is smaller than when the college took on responsibility for OAL from the local authority, with fewer cancellations. We are continually reviewing the provision to ensure we have the right offer for the community.*

The committee recommended the accounts to the Board.

## **6.2 Mid-year budget review**

The Finance Director presented a strong mid-year budget forecast which included significant increases to two main income areas. Governors were advised that the current mid-year forecast should deliver the college an ESFA financial health grade of Outstanding. The committee recognised this and discussed the forecast presented as a helpful update with a true and fair view of the accounts.

Some key points for discussion were extracted from the report, including the additional in year funding received for the growth in 16-19 student numbers. In addition, the OCC element 3 increased income was also highlighted, with a positive move to regular termly payments, however the committee recognised the turnover of council staff can be a challenge to maintain strong working relationships and continuity and could slow payments down

There was a discussion around the challenges of pay and non-pay and in particular increases in costs of Macintyre due to the increased demand for their provision. The committee welcomed the increase to the college's EBITDA and surplus.

The committee discussed the request for additional minor capital works following on from the discussion held at the Board strategy day. The committee reflected on the previous track record of the college delivering a positive return on investment for these similar works and agreed with the proposal.

The committee recommended the mid-year forecast and the request for additional minor capital works to the Board.

## **6.3 High Level Estimate of following year budget**

The Finance Director presented a high-level estimate of the following years budget, providing the committee with an indication of expectations for the year ahead. It was advised more detail would follow in future committee meetings.

The next steps in the budgeting process would follow the finalisation of curriculum planning process. The current forecast predicts further increases to 16-19 student numbers which would result in a further in year growth payment from the ESFA.

The committee thanked SMT for the work to achieve this level of detail early in the year.

The committee noted the report.

## **6.4 Post Capital Project Investment appraisal**

The Finance Director presented the review of capital projects that had been completed in the last five years, providing a summary of the grant agreements received and the outcome that had been achieved with each of these projects.

The committee welcomed the detail for each of these projects and recognised there should be more frequent post investment appraisal following the completion of projects.

- **Regarding the OxLEP project evaluation, is there any risk or expected clawback on this?** *No, we have not received any communication to that effect, and we are not expecting there to be any risk related to this project.*

The committee noted the report.

### **6.5 DfE refinancing of college commercial loans**

The Finance Director presented the short report on the refinancing of the college's commercial loans into the government, outlining that the "£1.5m Barclays Loan" can be refinanced in July 2024, however other loans could not until there was a break point in the loan agreement..

The change was presented as positive move and would result in the college paying less interest on their outstanding loans. The committee welcomed this and recognised the positive change for the college and associated cost savings.

The committee recommended the report to the Board.

### **6.6 Benchmarking of staff costs**

The Head of Finance presented the report that had previously been requested by the committee. It was highlighted to the committee that although common terminology was used when reporting costs in the FE sector, the categorisation of costs is open to interpretation, leading to potentially inaccurate comparisons. Colleges also often provide information to each other to enable benchmarking to take place, and information had been shared with two other colleges to inform the report.

The FTE and Senior Management costs were highlighted as in line with other colleges from the data available. It was not possible to accurately compare overall staff costs due to the different staffing structures between colleges. This includes where colleges may have different professional services delivered internally or by third parties such as cleaning and catering services. These variables can make it difficult to directly benchmark across colleges.

The committee were grateful for the time and detail that had been given to this report and research. The committee were assured by the detail provided and the comparisons to other colleges presented.

The committee noted the report.

### **6.7 Update on curriculum planning and forecast student numbers**

The Vice Principal for Funding, Planning and Systems Improvement, presented a verbal update and tabled paper on the overall curriculum planning process and current position. The key highlights included the process of forecasting numbers using data from previous years

Following the discussion about the high-level budget, the forecast 16 – 19 numbers were currently likely to generate an in-year payment from the ESFA. The SMT have confidence in this forecasted growth based on previous years forecasts and actual student numbers.

The committee noted the formal update and requested the paper to be presented to the Board.

<b>Action</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
Curriculum Planning update to be included within Board papers	Clerk	March 2024

**7. General Purposes**

**7.1 Freedom of information request update**

The Clerk presented the report, outlining the four Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received since the last meeting. These requests were explained to be typical of the requests received by the college. It was noted two of them remained open within the response timeframe.

The committee noted the report.

**7.2 Update on progress towards delivering the underpinning strategies: operational plans.**

The Principal provided an update on the progress towards delivering the strategic plan and in particular the areas relating to this committee. It was highlighted that the majority of operational plans were progressing as expected. The committee discussed the progress against areas of the strategic priorities.

- **Why is Marketing still noted as red?** Although there is progress being made in this area and there are no fundamental concerns there are some actions that have not yet been completed as planned
- **What is a Jobshop?** *This is intended to be the colleges way to support our students to find part time work alongside their studies, or full time employment or apprenticeship options as progression routes*

The committee noted the report.

**8. Any Other Business**

There were no items raised under AOB.

**9. Future Business**

The next F&GP Committee meeting was scheduled for Monday 10<sup>th</sup> June at 6pm.

Approved for signature: .....14/03/2024.....

N Handy  
10/07/2024 10:13:36  
Signature .....  
*Nick Handy*

Date .....10/07/2024.....



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