



CORPORATION BOARD Finance & General Purposes Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 10th June 2024 at 6pm

Present

Alan Bark (Chair)
Jacqui Canton, Principal
Edward Collett
Mackenzie Howe Nordal

In attendance

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

1. Opening Comments

1.1 Apologies and matters to be raised under AOB.

Apologies had been received from David Walker and Jessie Weavers-Medina. There were no matters raised for AOB.

1.2 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were received.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 14th March 2024

2.1 Public Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 14th March were reviewed and approved as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

3 Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points

3.1 Matters arising, written resolutions and action points

There was one matter arising from the previous meeting which had been completed.

4 Reports

4.1 Estates and Capital projects report

The Head of Estates and Capital Projects provided a detailed update on the current status and future projections of the estates department and capital projects. Key points included efforts to improve environmental sustainability in new and existing projects, incorporating green technologies, and ensuring energy efficiency in new constructions as part of the institution's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.

The new facilities project at Abingdon for the Creative And Design (Media) T level is progressing well and is on track for completion by the end of August. However, the Animal Care project has encountered some challenges due to the need for specialist advice following the identification of bats in the Equine building. An additional survey is now planned to determine what mitigating actions the college can take to ensure the project remains on time and within budget. Despite these challenges, a contractor has been appointed, and work is expected to continue as planned. In addition to this the extension to the main block,

which is currently in the planning application stage is anticipated to be straightforward once planning approval is granted.

It was also explained that the college is working with a transport assessor to build a case for planning applications for additional parking spaces at the Common Leys campus. The current parking capacity is 20 spaces, and the goal is to double this to 40 spaces to accommodate increased demand.

The progress made was explained to the committee regarding the electric vehicle (EV) charging stations which are being installed across all campuses, with completion expected by the end of summer. This initiative supports the college's sustainability goals and responds to the increasing demand for EV infrastructure.

- **Do we capture the value for money information and reporting for other areas of the college?**
 - o *Not in this way. The capital team are the only team that have these high value procurement items. IT also have high value procurement however we are limited on providers we can use due to the education sector needs.*
- **The increased parking at Common Leys, will this solve the problem?**
 - o *We hope so, we anticipate the total of 40 spaces will mean we are able to stop people parking where they shouldn't and improve health and safety of the parking.*
- **Why did Bicester gas usage rise in 2024?**
 - o *Speaking with the supplier, there were some invoices in the previous year that were lower than they should have been. This is just to balance the account.*
- **Do you have any concerns regarding the current Capital and Estate team and project?**
 - o *Nothing particularly. We work well as a team, we are open and raise any issues early for discussion.*

The committee noted the report.

4.2 People services report

The Head of People Services presented the People Services report, highlighting key areas of recruitment and policy updates. It was explained to the committee that recruitment efforts have shown significant progress, though certain areas remain challenging. Short-term sickness rates have decreased, which is a positive development. However, long-term sickness continues to be a concern and is harder to manage proactively.

The impact of upcoming legislation on the college's policies was also discussed, particularly around employment rights and sexual harassment. The college has already made amendments to address these issues. Additionally, the college is exploring the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) usage by staff and is working on relevant policies to ensure responsible and effective use.

The wellbeing survey results showed an increase in staff discussing their wellbeing with managers, which was highlighted as a positive outcome and indicated a growing culture of openness and support within the college.

- **Do you have a sense of how AI is being used by staff?**
 - o *We understand some staff are using it, but we are still trying to understand the extent of this. Some staff members are already using AI to improve efficiency. However, a strategic approach across the organisation is still in development.*
- **Are there any sector data sets that we are able to benchmark some of the KPIs provided against?**
 - o *It is something we are trying to look at, however, different institutions measure KPIs differently and there is no requirement to use a set method making it difficult to directly benchmark.*
- **Regards the long term absence, we spoke before about private healthcare, has that progressed?**
 - o *We did initially look into it, however with the reclassification of colleges, we would like to take some further advice. It is still on our radar but not something we feel we can implement without taking some advice and speaking with other colleges.*

The committee noted the report.

4.3 Health and Safety report

The Head of Health and Safety provided an update on health and safety matters, including the addition of a Student Health and Safety Advisor, enhancing the college's capacity to address concerns. Both advisors are working towards the NEBOSH General Certificate.

It was noted that there have been zero RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) reports since the last meeting. However, 80 accident and incident reports have been logged, which include 34 accidents, 42 incidents, and two near misses. The difference between accidents and incidents was explained.

- **Could you clarify the difference between a RIDDOR report and a health and safety report?**
 - o *Yes, a RIDDOR report is a specific type of injury report that must be sent to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). This includes incidents like a break or loss of consciousness which are considered high-level serious incidents. Whereas accidents can involve minor physical harm and incidents generally being more behavioural and do not require high level intervention.*
- **And how does that compare year on year on year?**
 - o *The number of health and safety incidents is fairly consistent year on year, with some variations but no significant changes or trends*

Several planned improvements are underway, including establishing dedicated first aid rooms across all campuses to provide better medical facilities. There are also changes in minibus training requirements and the increased auditing of community partners to ensure compliance with health and safety standards.

The risk assessment process is ongoing, with consistent numbers reported. The continuous improvements in staff safety training and equipment provision, which are crucial for maintaining a safe working environment, were highlighted.

- **You mentioned planned improvements. Could you elaborate on the evacuation chair training and fire evacuation testing procedures**
 - o *Yes, four staff undertook the 'train the trainer' training for evacuation chair use. The next stage is to train all Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). There have also been enhancements to fire evacuation testing procedures, which are designed to improve safety protocols.*
- **Regarding the safety management system, what progress has been made in finding a better alternative to the current system?**
 - o *The review of the safety management system is underway, with the college evaluating new options to replace the current system. A decision is expected by the end of July.*

The committee noted the report.

5. Policies Cover Sheet

5.1 Financial Regulations

The Finance Director presented the updated Financial Regulations policy, noting significant changes in section five to enhance usability and compliance. The adjustments reflect the college's status as a public body.

The committee agreed to recommend the policy to the Board.

5.2 Health and Safety Policy

The Head of Health and Safety presented the revised Health and Safety Policy, noting minor adjustments to job titles and formatting. The content remains largely unchanged.

The committee agreed to recommend the policy to the Board.

5.3 Revised 24/25 Tuition fee policy

The Finance Director presented the revised Tuition Fee Policy, which required adjustments due to changes in government funding. The community learning grant has been replaced by tailored learning, necessitating updates to the policy to reflect this change. The revised policy includes a charge for tailored learning, although the rate is set high to ensure that most users will continue to access the services free of charge.

The committee agreed to recommend the policy to the Board.

5.4 Staff Safer Recruitment and Selection Policy

The Head of People Services outlined the changes to the Staff Safer Recruitment and Selection Policy. The revisions included clarifying responsibilities, separating procedural details, and adding sections on volunteers and talent pools.

The committee approved policy.

6. Finance matters

6.1 Management Accounts to 30 April 2024

The Head of Finance provided an overview of the management accounts for the nine months to date. The report was consistent with previous trends, with income significantly

ahead of budget, and both pay and non-pay costs higher in absolute terms but lower as a percentage.

It was explained to the committee that a full review of fixed assets had been completed during the year, with phase two involving aligning the fixed asset register with the accounts.

The committee commented there continued to be no surprises with consistent reporting.

The committee recommended the management account to the Board.

6.2 Curriculum planning update

The Vice Principal for Funding, Planning, and Systems Improvement presented the curriculum planning for the next academic year, forecasting significant growth in 16 to 19 enrolments and apprenticeships. Teaching costs are expected to increase by around 10% due to this growth. Detailed projections and the basis for these forecasts were explained.

- **Does the change in AEB to ASF alter our cashflow in any way?**
 - o *No, this will not change our cash flow. The payments will continue to be received in the same way.*
- **How does that compare with similar-sized colleges locally or nationally?**
 - o All colleges are growing in 16-19 however our growth at the moment seems to be higher than that of others, particularly at Abingdon.

The committee noted the report.

6.3 2024/25 budget and pay award

The Finance Director outlined the proposed budget for 2024/2025, detailing a turnover of £37.5 million with an operating surplus of just under £400,000. Significant increases in income from 16 to 19 funding, high needs income, and apprenticeships were explained.

Proposed changes to the current budget include an increased minor capital budget to support student number growth. No adjustments have been budgeted for the LGPS pension provision. Pay and non-pay budgets also reflect student growth and cost increases.

A proposed pay award of 3.5%, comprising a 2.5% increase from 1st August and an additional 1% in December (subject to achievement of enrolment targets), was explained. This approach balances rewarding staff with ensuring financial stability. The competitiveness of the proposed pay award was discussed.

The committee recommended the proposed 2024/25 budget and pay award to the Board.

6.4 Draft ESFA Financial Planning Model

The Finance Director explained the requirement to submit a financial plan to the EFSA, derived from the current year's forecast, next year's budget, and projections for the subsequent year. These projections become more speculative further into the future due to potential changes in government policies and other variables.

The EFSA uses this model to identify colleges potentially heading towards financial difficulties. The college's financial health grade is expected to remain stable. The 2023/2024 forecast places the college at approximately 230 points, with a slight expected decrease in the following year, but the college is anticipated to maintain a good financial health grade

The committee recommended the report to the Board.

6.5 Repayment of Lloyds Loan

The Finance Director presented the financial implications of the existing variable rate on the Lloyds loan. It was proposed to make an early repayment of the loan, which would incur a small early repayment charge, but overall savings from stopping the interest charges would benefit the institution's financial health.

The committee agreed to recommend to the Board that repaying the loan early would be a prudent financial decision.

6.6 Squash Club lease

The Finance Director presented the report outlining the current lease arrangement with the Squash Club at Abingdon due to be reviewed as it approaches expiration in 2027. It was proposed to renew the lease for an additional 20 years to maintain the longstanding positive relationship with the club. The committee discussed the potential benefits of this renewal, such as continued rental income and community engagement.

The committee requested a map to be added to the paper for presentation at the Board to help identify the location on the Abingdon campus.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Paper to be updated with a map prior to Board submission	ML	June 2024

The committee agreed to propose the renewal of the lease to the Board.

7. General Purposes

7.1 Freedom of information requests update

The Clerk presented the report, outlining the six Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received since the last meeting. These requests were typical of those received by the college, often from companies seeking information to potentially gain business from the college, such as recruitment agencies.

The committee noted the report.

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

The Principal provided an update on progress towards delivering the strategic plan, particularly areas relating to this committee. Most operational plans are progressing, though some face challenges, such as progress against sustainability objectives. The college is now working with an external advisory company to support this work.

A review of internal committees is underway, with the SMT team assessing the effectiveness of the committee system, recognising that it was important to ensure that all committees were an effective use of time. This will be reported back to the committee in future reports.

The committee discussed the progress against areas of the strategic priorities.

- **Are there any specific barriers that are limiting progress?**
 - o *There is nothing specific*

The committee noted the report.

8. Any Other Business

There were no items raised under AOB.

9. Future Business and reflection

9.1 Proposed Cycle of Business 2024/25

The Clerk presented the draft cycle of business for the next academic year, noting no significant changes from this year.

The committee approved the report.

The next F&GP Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 1st October 2024.

A Bark
26/Feb/2025 13:08:00

Signature 



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Envelope Details

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Envelope Created on	Sun, 23 Feb 2025 21:44:03
Envelope ID	1f0ffec1-0e44-4583-a7c5-7791317cd077

Document Details

Title	02.1 draft f gp minutes june 24.pdf
Digital Fingerprint	0009409a-4bd5-4183-a54e-def14c77ce9d

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Name	Alan Bark
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Status	SIGNED at Wed, 26 Feb 2025 13:08:00 GMT(+0000)
Signature Fingerprint	f49de54a-020b-49ee-8871-1c0c2f319f14



Document History

Wed, 26 Feb 2025 13:08:00	Alan Bark Signed the Document (IP: 82.17.75.70)
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