

**THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE COLCHESTER
MEETING OF THE CORPORATION BOARD
HELD AT 5.30PM ON MONDAY 29TH JANUARY 2024
AT THE COLLEGE**

MINUTES (PART A)

MEETING 147

The core functions of the corporation board include:

- *Preserving and developing the college's educational character*
- *Setting and communicating the college's strategy and goals*
- *Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance and quality of the college, and for the performance of staff*
- *Exercising effective control to ensure that funds and assets are protected, the organisation remains solvent and legal obligations are met*

Business commenced at 5.30pm.

Meeting closed at 8.06pm

The meeting was quorate.

Governors Present:

Community Governors: Mike Atherton (Chair), Gyorgyi Callegari, Susan Coding (Vice Chair), Kevin Finnigan (Vice Chair), Joanna Johnson, June Leslie (Virtually), David Morran, John Owens, Lindsey Russell, Joanne Tallentire, Ian Vipond, Ian MacNaughton (Principal)

Staff Governors: Jane Sadler, Dan Stebbings,

In Attendance:

Assistant Principals: Jo Cadman, Graham Rayner (*from 6.10pm*), Adrian Frost, Sarah Prince, Scott Townsend, Tim Harrison (*until 6.49pm*).

Naomi Goldsmith, Finance Manager

Sarah Williams, Senior Manager (HR)

Sophie Gardiner, Wigan Governor Services, Clerk to the Corporation.

147.0 Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed Sophie Gardiner from Wigan Governor Services as the new Clerk to the Corporation.

Jane Sadler, newly elected Support Staff Governor was also formally welcomed to the Corporation.

147.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received in advance from Michael Sherer and were **accepted** by the Corporation. June Leslie joined the meeting via MS Teams. Newly appointed Student Governors (Chinedum Onunkwo and Bill Midzi) were not in attendance (an omission had been made to invite them to the meeting).

147.2 Any other business

No additional items were included for discussion on the agenda.

147.3 Declaration of interests

No declarations were made. Staff members would withdraw for item 147.10.

147.4 Minutes of the previous meeting

Approved and Authorised for publication pending correction to attendance – Ian Vipond was in attendance. Amendment **agreed**.

Confidential Minutes – addressed at item 147.10.

ACTION 1: Charlotte Bowen to amend minutes.

147.5 Matters arising

146.6 – Cyber Security / Business Recovery Plan

It was noted that the action for this item had not been recorded and an amendment to the minutes was **agreed**. The item would however be addressed through item 147.7 (within the Principal's report).

ACTION 2: Charlotte Bowen to amend minutes.

147.6 Introduction of new clerk/clerking service

The Chair invited Sophie Gardiner to present a demonstration on *Governor Hub*. This would be the new secure platform that would support the administration of Governance across the Corporation. It was agreed that *SharePoint* would remain accessible for two months to assist with the transition.

Governors were asked, following receipt of a registration email, to input their own personal contact details and to complete declarations of interest.

ACTION 3: Clerk to register Governors on Governor Hub.

ACTION 4: Governors and invited staff to complete personal details and declarations.

147.7 Principal's strategic matters

The Principal's report had been previously circulated and was taken as read. The Principal highlighted the following salient points:

- Resourcing – ESFA funding allocations due mid-February which was later than in previous years.
- Electricity – update on contract provided. Obtaining quotes and negotiations underway with brokers re new suppliers from 01/10/2024. The current electricity contract (2 years to 01/10/2024) has involved a high tariff – and more favourable rates expected.
- Current gas contract was for three years with favourable prices.

6.10pm – *Graham Rayner arrived.*

Q Was there a ballpark figure considered to be a substantial reduction?
A Yes and we are still in receipt of the government subsidy, which was due to end.

Q Was the company increasing the standing charge?
A Naomi Goldsmith (Finance Manager) explained the differences between the quotes re contracts that could be provided by various suppliers.

The Principal continued; Pay awards – the government was trying to discipline the 2024/2025 public sector pay awards to between 1.5% and 2%. This would result in a significant negative impact on the real level of resources and the potential for the need to lower staffing establishments.

Q Do you have a sense as to how this would be received or if there was an appetite for further industrial action?

A Some industrial disputes across the public sector continue over pay – and this is likely to be continuing unhappiness if further real terms reductions in salaries are instigated for 2024/25.

- Two new trainee teachers had been employed for next year (in Economics and Business and in English). Future recruitment would be limited and targeted.
- Governors' attention was drawn to the impact of the continuing strike industrial action on the local train services. Students had been adroit at finding ways to ensure attendance but inevitably there would be some disruption.
- UCAS – there had been a much higher proportion of earlier applications than would normally be expected. The college had been proactive in contacting parents in the Autumn. The result was also a positive impact on more spreading of staff workload.
14 offers for Oxford or Cambridge had been received by students (on average this would be around 10 or 12 per year).
- Applications for 2024 entry to the College were fractionally above last year's level. It was noted that more Year 11 GCSE students seemed to want to wait until they had the results of mock exams and target grades before applying and indicating their course choices.
- College remained within the Ofsted window.

Graham Raynor provided an overview of the impact of 'de-funding' on some courses. Discussions continued with exam boards over the AG de-funding situation Food and Nutrition offer.

The Principal drew Governor's attention to the lobbying role of the SCFA (Sixth Form College Association) and the recently published Manifesto.

ACTION 5: Clerk to circulate via Governor Hub.

Adrian Frost confirmed that the new college website was scheduled to be launched on Monday 5th February.

Q Did the increase in the number of UCAS applications mirror a national trend and how do we rank compared to the national trend?

A Lyndsey Russell explained that UCAS was expecting a 2.5% increase nationally. Some students waited until clearing without going through the application process.

The Principal confirmed that there were more young people in the age cohort and that this was also true for Colchester. There were also more students double and triple applying – increasing the overall number of students applying. Final enrolment may differ.

- Q Regarding applications, can we expect other sixth forms in schools to follow?
A There were an increasing number of schools with small sixth forms who were struggling because of the impact of the real terms funding cut. Several schools with sixth forms in the local areas had been affected.
- Q What about our main competitors?
A Their numbers were bigger. It was very hard to see how a small school sixth form could break even, even by cross subsidising.
- Q Ofsted focus on one-word grades but do you know if attention was given to matching Inspectors to particular institutions i.e. avoiding primary school Inspectors visiting a college?
A Evidence from within the FE sector did not support this, The inspection teams were not matched to an A Level provider (and were likely to come from vocational and technical backgrounds).
- Q Could we object?
A We could try to discuss this with Ofsted.

Governors discussed the notification and inspection process.

- Q Would the Financial Studies course be 'de-funded'?
A It was planned to be, and the awarding body had pulled out earlier than expected. Next year, the continuation certificate at diploma level would be available and there were just over 200 students enrolled.
- Q What would be the alternative?
A We could possibly run the course with the resources we have, but without the formal qualification, or we could look for alternatives but there was no easy replacement.

147.8 Operational & statutory reports

(i) Property (2024-2026 property strategy)

The Principal confirmed that there were some slight updates and amendments to the previous strategy which had been shared last year and the year before. There were no significant changes to note.

(ii) Information Learning Technology (2024-2026 ILT strategy)

- Q Was there a risk of data breaches from third party systems?
A Tim Harrison confirmed that there was always a minimal risk and assured the corporation that all certificates and safeguards were in place. Data was stored on servers on site and subject to college security. The risk was minimal due to cyber essentials being in place.
- Q Do you experience difficulties with android devices connecting to the college Wi-Fi?
A Not usually with android devices, sometimes with Apple devices as they did not recognise certificates. This would be investigated.
- Q Regarding the property assets held as the college potentially moves towards academisation, was there a strategy in place in terms of assets?
A The Chair confirmed that this would be addressed as part of the process.

Q The college *Linked In* account sounds like a good use of social media, but this felt like an exception in the list, please tell us more about the ownership and what resources this required?

A Graham Raynor explained that this work was in progress. The reasons for using *Linked In* was not to advertise for students but to keep in touch with ex-students and to invite them to become guest speakers. It was also used to advertise vacancies, particularly ones that were challenging to fill. It was resource light and had so far gained 700 followers. College would assist students in creating profiles to support future employment.

Q Do we do anything to stay in contact students as they graduate?

A When a student receives their results, it was not known if they actually attended their chosen place. We use what data is available but do not have the resources to support a former student network.

6.49pm Tim Harrison left the meeting.

Jo Cadman provided a verbal overview and responded to questions, assisted by Lead Governors.

(iii) Curriculum Offer & Educational Quality

a) Update of College QIP and departmental QIPs and SARS (individual documents made available via SharePoint)

The Autumn review had been completed. Governors' attention was drawn to the progress against action plans. Senior Leaders were generally pleased with the progress.

Governors felt assured by the outcome of the progress report as this provided a positive picture.

Kevin Finnigan confirmed that this process had been reviewed by Lead Governors.

Jo Cadman provided context; SAR panels had been held with Heads of Department and Assistant Principal links. Any areas of concern within departments had been identified. How each department contributed to the college was also reviewed, by way of the number of entries for qualifications. An alternative way to measure this would be to look at the number of full-time equivalent staff hours and the number of delivery hours.

Q The former measure is one of student experience, given Ofsted criteria, would the better measure be to use staff provision?

A We would consider how to use both. Using just the number of qualifications did not provide measures around student experience.

Joanne Tallentire explained how lead governors worked with senior leaders to review progress prior to corporation meetings. Governors' attention was drawn to the clear correlation between the subjects with lower grades and areas where performance was down on last year. The annual process of SAR showed where weaknesses within a department may be evident, in turn, this department then appeared in the QIP. This year Philosophy and RS appeared in the QIP due to a significant drop in grades. In the Autumn term, Performing Arts was emerging as requiring additional support. Lead Governors review these documents with Assistant Principals on behalf of the Corporation. All information was available for Governors to review.

The Chair thanked the lead Governors and concluded that it was comforting to know that the issues were identified, addressed, and mitigated.

- Q From the common elements identifiable across both departments what conclusions can be drawn?
- A Jo Cadman explained that there were very different reasons for how departments were graded. For example, Philosophy and RS both had lots of great work and lots of initiatives to help students access further support but recognised that the pass rate had plummeted. Other departments may experience this from student voice, by their level of satisfaction and wider experience for students.
- Q Was there a system in place to identify the key variables affecting how a department may be graded?
- A Kevin Finnigan explained that the responses varied, in some cases this was down to how staff approached some of the challenges, which varied, therefore responses varied.

The Principal explained that the impact of COVID, grade inflation/deflation and Teacher Assessments had affected grades. Performing Arts had been affected by COVID due to the lack of practical work opportunities and the cohort of RS students had a weak average GCSE point score (evidenced through TAG) and a high number of SEND and school avoiders etc.

- Q There were lots of grade two's and three's and the report does not make the college look like it matches it's self-assessment of 'outstanding'. The quality of students should not be the reason why a department would be downgraded should it?
- A Jo Cadman responded - Ofsted would review the SAR and QIP alongside student grades and student experience. The reason for highlighting RS (good with some features but requires improvement). This was actually the departments' own decision. The fact that some students achieve low grades in some departments was not always a sign that the college was not outstanding.

There was a lengthy discussion.

Joanne Tallentire concluded that, through meetings with Assistant Principals, lead Governors were assured that there were effective monitoring processes in place. The college took a sophisticated and nuanced approach to quality assurance, and it was positive to see that leaders were not taking a reductive approach and were not just looking at grades. The quality assurance process also considered qualitative student voice and considered the culture within departments. The process was being used by managers to invest resources and energy.

Kevin Finnigan added that the forensic nature of the quality assurance process was impressive, and that lead Governors were assured that leaders had a robust process in place.

The Principal thanked Governors for the debate.

b) SEND update

Sarah Prince drew Governors' attention to the following salient points from the previously circulated document:

- High level need student numbers were decreasing at national and Essex level resulting in an impact on funding. The number of EHCP's fell as students turned 16 (due to having developed skills and also due to the Essex banding system). Almost all students were prohibited from accessing the funding and the college did not receive Pupil Premium.
- High level needs students will have a separate Ofsted rating.
- High level needs students had good rates of retention and good outcomes.
- One to one and small group mentoring was provided, and students could sign up but

attendance was not as high as the sign-up number.

- Outcomes for high level needs students and traditional SEND students were in-line with expectations based on GCSE results (demonstrating that students meet or exceed their full potential).

c) Government Curriculum reforms – update

This item was covered by the Principal's report (item 147.7).

iv) Health & Safety Report for the 2022-2023 year

Graham Rayner invited questions and comments on the previously circulated report.

The Chair invited Governors to consider volunteering for the position of lead Governor for Health & Safety. No volunteers were forthcoming.

v) Finance (December accounts)

Naomi Goldsmith (Finance Manager) outlined the reasons for an overspend (£98,000) on staffing, attributing this to several staff being on maternity leave. Timetables had been covered from September and costs had been 'front loaded'. Savings would be expected, and the budget position would be reversed in the later part of the year.

- Gas and electricity – savings made against budget but the government subsidy would be lost from April 2024. Negotiations underway with new suppliers. The electricity had previously been overcharged (due to the VAT) and the refund equated to somewhere between £30,000 and £40,000).
- Cash – £5million in the bank, £3million in short term deposits. On track to return £100,000 of bank interest.
- ESFA rating – comfortably within good, even though was lower than target (just under 1% current year) but score maximum points on the other two metrics.

Susan Codling (lead Governor) provided a verbal update from discussions at Audit Committee and assured the Corporation that these were within the ESFA's acceptable tolerances. The Audit Committee were comfortable and were aware of the reasons behind this.

Q What was the reason for the overcharge in electricity?

A The energy company had overcharged VAT and applied an incorrect rate.

Q Were we certain that this had now been corrected?

A Yes but this would be confirmed.

147.9 Governance and Committee matters

(i) Update on the Multi-Academy trust application

The Chair confirmed that the application had been submitted this week and that a response was anticipated by March. Four Governors had expressed an interest to form part of the MAT Trust Board and these four names, had alongside four names from Long Road College had been put forward.

Q May we know who these are?

A Mike Atherton, Ian Vipond, Susan Codling and Kevin Finnigan from The Sixth Form College Colchester. Unknown from Long Road.

To ensure that the Board of Trustees and governance infrastructure would be in place within the correct timeframe, a shadow Board of Trustees must be established, and the first task would be to elect a Chair and Vice Chair. It was envisaged that there would be a separation of roles from the Local Governing Boards as the DfE were keen that the layers of Governance remain separate. The DfE remain supportive and had provided guidance. Governors would be kept apprised of any progress. If the DfE grant permission to proceed, the grant would be issued to cover set up costs.

140.8 Membership matters to January 2024

(i) To receive a report on resignations, retirements and proposed appointments

There were no updates to report.

Sarah Williams confirmed that the vacancy for the Parent Governor election would be run imminently.

7.43pm Jo Cadman, Graham Rayner, Adrian Frost, Sarah Prince, Scott Townsend, Tim Harrison, and Naomi Goldsmith withdrew from the meeting.

Staff Governors were invited to remain in the meeting.

147.10 Confidential matters

This item was deemed confidential and reported in Part B minutes.

Dates of forthcoming meetings:

Governor Visit Days – Spring and Summer to be confirmed

Remuneration Committee – Thursday 15th February 2024 at 1.30pm (MS Teams)

Search and Governance Committee – Friday 8th March 2024 at 11am (MS Teams)

Corporation Meeting – Monday 25th March 2024 at 5.30pm (In college)

Audit Committee – Thursday 9th May 2024 at 11am (MS Teams)

Corporation Meeting – Monday 20th May 2024 at 6pm (In college)

Search and Governance Committee – Friday 28th June 2024 at 11am (MS Teams)

Corporation Meeting – Monday 24th June 2024 at 6pm (In College)

There being no further business to discuss, the Chair thanked all in attendance for their contributions and closed the meeting at 8.06pm.

MEETING ACTION POINTS

Action	Item	For Who	When
1.	147.4 – Minutes of meeting 146 – amendment	CB	Post meeting prior to publication
2.	147.5 – Matters Arising Minutes of meeting 146 - amendment	CB	Post meeting prior to publication
3.	147.6 – Set up Governor Hub	Clerk	Post meeting
4.	147.6 – Governors and staff to register and complete personal contact details and declarations of interest on Governor Hub.	Governors/Staff	Post meeting
5.	147.7 – Circulation of SFCA Manifesto via Governor Hub	Clerk	Post meeting
6.	147.10 - Confidential Minutes (Part B) of meeting 146 - amendment	CB	Post meeting