



THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 138

Monday 17 October 2022

[Meeting held at the Sixth Form College, Colchester]

Chair: M Atherton,

Members Present: A Beatty, S Codling, J Tallentire, I Vipond, I MacNaughton (Principal),
D Stebbings, J Owens, K Finnigan, M Sherer

In Attendance: Assistant Principals: J Cadman, S Townshend, I Fraser
S Williams (HR & Admin Manager) N Goldsmith (Finance Manager)

Clerk: T Johnson

Members of the Corporation are both governors and trustees. For the purposes of these minutes and with the acknowledgement that minutes are published on the public website, the generic term 'governor' has been used, where it has been deemed appropriate to do so.

138.1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from members, J Johnson, H Hallworth, A Banarse, O Pearson, J Leslie, D Morran, B Liu, H Skeggs and attendees A Frost and G Rayner.

138.2 Any other business & chair's action

138.2.1 One matter of any other business was requested by the Chair of the Search and Governance Committee. It was agreed to discuss this item under 138.8(ii) Governance Matters – reappointment of members

138.2.2 The Chair had not been required to implement any emergency action since the last meeting.

138.3 Declarations of interest

138.3.1 No interests recorded on the registers held by the Clerk, related to any of the matters proposed for discussion.

138.3.2 M. Atherton declared an interest in the matter of any other business – 138.8(ii) relating to the reappointment of members.

No other Member of the Corporation or attendee declared any other interest in any matter itemised on the agenda.

The Chair reminded governors that declarations must be returned to the Clerk within the required timeframe. The Chair highlighted that 3 governors had not completed their annual returns including declarations of interests.

138.4 Minutes of the previous meeting

138.4.1 The minutes of Corporation meeting No.137 held 26 September, 2022 were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

138.4.2 Matters arising

Re awarding of grades during the Covid period: Members discussed the concern re some institutions/sectors 'gaming of results' noting the response to the letter sent, on behalf of the Corporation to the Education Select Committee. The response indicated that an investigation is taking place.

138.5 **Principal's strategic matters**

138.5.1 The Principal's report, circulated in advance of the meeting was taken as read. The report covered college and sector issues including; resourcing 2022/23 and 2023/24, SFC sector pay awards, Covid related matters and the impact of the railway industrial strike action on the college community.

The Principal provided updates on the following matters:

138.5.2 **Resourcing 2022-2023**

Due to the government increase in the 16-19 level of funding per student in 2022- 2023, the College's 2022 to 2023 resourcing per student, in real terms, is broadly at a standstill position at present.

The Principal reported that the College is still awaiting the detail of the government's 6 month (November to April) financial support for higher energy costs arrangement – to help colleges partly mitigate the increases in energy costs. Following today's 'mini-budget', it is now not expected that the support arrangement will extend beyond the 6-month period.

138.5.3 **Resourcing 2023-2024**

The government's 'mini budget' provided some clarity re future resourcing – namely that it is expected that 16-18 resourcing will be 'very tough' for the next financial/academic year. As expected, in a context of high levels of inflation there will be a real terms decrease in the level of 16-18 funding per student for the 2023-2024 year and the likelihood of a continuing real terms decrease over the next two to five years. This will influence the strategic planning work that is being undertaken by members and managers (work initially started in autumn 2021 at a time when the government, through the 2021 CSR, promised a real terms improvement in funding for the 3 year period from 2022).

While the College has cash reserves it can draw from and can therefore maintain the quality of the education it provides for students in at least the short term, only 15 or 20 from circa 400 colleges across the country are understood to be in a similar financial situation. In response to a [governor question](#) regarding the maintenance of academic and pastoral quality in these colleges, the Principal explained that for many within the college sector any further reductions in real terms funding and rising energy costs places will potentially place them in a dire situation. Some Essex colleges are currently considering reducing college hours per day or reducing student contact from five days a week to four or three, not least due to rising energy costs

In response to a [governor query](#) regarding national insurance and provision within the budget for staff pay awards, the Principal informed governors that the government is not reinstating the former increase in the level of employer's national insurance contributions.

The support staff pay award offer of between 5% - 7% (average cost of approx. 5.5%, with tapered increases ranging from 7.7% on the lowest scales to 5% on the highest scales) is currently being considered by the unions. The two teaching unions are

balloting members for strike action. It is expected that other public sector unions will also follow.

Governors were reminded that there is no further potential government allocated 'top up' funding for pay awards - colleges are expected to meet the budget for the increases from the existing allocations.

The Human Resources Manager highlighted that staff and unions are very clear that their dispute is not with the schools and colleges but with the government. Staff recognise that the pay claims are difficult for colleges and that the level of funding is not adequate.

[Governors discussed](#) with management, the impact of strike action on teaching & learning.

A [governor queried](#), in the context of the reductions in real terms resources, whether the assumptions underlying the draft Strategic Plan 2022/23-2025/27 should be revisited. In response, the strategy lead governor explained that the Strategic Plan is necessarily flexible - it provides a framework for where governors and management want the College to be in future years, without the rigidness of determining in what year things should be completed. Testing/risk analysis of the strategic plan's objectives are scheduled activities for the November 2022, governor visit day.

Linked to the [strategic plan](#), and in the context that a critical element of the property strategy is the maintenance of the College's existing buildings and the maximum capacity accommodation (of 3,420 full time students in the 2022/23 academic year) and also an increase in potential student numbers through to 2033, the Principal reminded governors that looking forward, strategically, the College has strong cash reserves which enables the College to continue to submit bids to for government funding that require match funding contributions e.g. the Condition Improvement Fund and 16 to 18 Capacity Fund.

138.5.4 [Covid levels](#)

Although Covid levels nationally have been rising, local Covid levels and those specifically within the College remain very low. The Human Resources Manager informed the meeting that the College is as confident as it can be that staff are still testing as the small surplus of Covid testing kits, remaining from when the College was required to be a testing centre during the pandemic, are being taken by staff for use at home.

138.5.5 [Rail strikes](#)

The rail strikes which started in June 2022, recommenced recently and have caused some disruption affecting both students and staff (approx. 40% of students travel to college by train). More railway strikes are expected which will potentially further impact college operations.

138.5.6 [College events](#)

Governors have been notified of and invited to a range of events occurring over the autumn term, including the Reunion and Rewards evening to be held on the evening of December 19th 2022.

The Principal was thanked for his report.

138.6 Strategic Plan and priorities

138.6.1 Quality Improvement Plan

Governors considered the 2021-2022 (RAG rated) Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) final review. Lead governors were pleased to report that following recent meetings with the Assistant Principal (Pastoral, Safeguarding and Quality) and despite the difficulties arising from the 2020- 2021 pandemic impacting the achievement of some targets and the lack of national benchmarking data, the narrative evidences that the core principles of sustaining and making further improvements had been achieved.

The Assistant Principal highlighted the areas targeted further improvements: **Student Retention** had dropped slightly from previous years, (98% to 95% in-year, retention). Although in-year retention had dropped, progression from the end of year 1 to year 2 remained high at 98%. Governors discussed the direct and indirect impact of the pandemic on individual course retention including, reduced time at school, mental health, preparedness for Post 16 study and Centre Assessed Gradings (CAGs) at GCSE level.

Applied General Extended Certificate pass rates. 2022 was the first year all the Applied General (reformed) courses received results. Additionally, the average GCSE point score on entry of Applied General applicants fell below 5.0 for the first time, despite CAGs grade inflation, (from 5.4 in 2019). Therefore, there was an increased proportion of students with low prior attainment studying Applied General courses.

138.6.2 Headline Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The Assistant Principal provided governors with an overview of the Headline Self-Assessment Report (SAR) including the self assessed gradings aligned to the Ofsted criteria.

Governors discussed the range of information contained within the Headline SAR, including the performance indicators, the post Ofsted improvement report, SAR narrative including key strengths alongside the five key areas to be targeted for improvement 2022-2023.

Post Ofsted Action Plan: In response to **governor question** re the post Ofsted action point - *monitoring the achievement rates of students on different courses to ensure that all students achieve their qualifications and make good progress from their starting points*, the Assistant Principal explained that changes have been made to quality assurance practices at every level. As a result, leaders, managers and governors are now better able to identify any areas of weakness and monitor closely the progress made towards improvement targets.

The Assistant Principal highlighted, the evidence used to make the self-assessed judgements for 2021 -2022 and explained the reasons why managers are confident that the judgements made are an accurate reflection of the College. The 1/2 grading for Personal Development was noted as a reflection of the lower levels of student attendance and retention due to Covid related issues including; illnesses, isolations and students' preparedness for Post 16 study.

Self-assessed gradings, including the overall effectiveness grading will be discussed further at the next meeting when the full SAR/QIP is presented. Governors were reminded to refer to the Ofsted documentation previously provided by the Clerk.

Skills needs: with reference to attendance at a recent SFCA webinar, a curriculum lead **governor asked** colleagues to consider whether, as a Corporation, the risks associated with the government's focus on skills, and the potential impact this could have on Ofsted inspection outcomes have been considered. A **question was also raised** regarding the Board's strategic review of the curriculum plan. For example, have there been board level discussions around the impact /risks of continuing to offer Applied General qualifications alongside A Levels. A lead governor added, that a **further question would** be 'how far and how effective are we at addressing the skills of our learners'?

In response, the Principal reported that during the SFCA summer conference the Deputy Lead of Post 16 Ofsted, had made it very clear that the College's would be assessed on skills applicable to their mission. Therefore, it is expected that Ofsted's approach and skills expectations (work related learning and employability) in a sixth form college with a mission to provide a full-time general education programme (90%+ A Level curriculum and approx. 4% Applied General courses), will be significantly different to that applied to a General FE College, with a full programme of BTECs.

The strategy **lead governor suggested** that whilst it is recognised that the core of the College's work is as an A Level provider and preparing information for the Ofsted skills inspector will be part of this work, it is nonetheless imperative that the governing body completes its statutory duties, including the requirement to review, every 3 years local skills needs (separate to the Ofsted remit but will be of interest to Ofsted as part of their review work). The Principal, in agreement with the view, highlighted that the College makes a small contribution to the short-term labour market whereas long term the College's A Level students, in particular the vast number that progress to HE, make a significant contribution to the national labour market.

In response to **governor questions**, the Principal provided information on the 2022 review of student engagement with work related learning and employment. The review showed that at the end of 1 year at college 89% of students had undertaken work experience, holiday work, part time work or volunteering.

Through the curriculum a significant amount of work is undertaken on ensuring students develop relevant skills, employer and community engagement. A staff governor highlighted how employability skills are discreetly taught within A Level programmes and how the development and recording of these skills is being made more explicit through new teaching & learning practices e.g. how lesson content is linked to the world of work, is now considered during observations.

138.6.3 Departmental Headline Summaries

The Assistant Principal (Pastoral, Safeguarding and Quality) informed the meeting that all departmental headline SARs have been received, discussed and are now being finalised.

In response to a **governor question**, the College confirmed that there are a small number of departments currently self-assessing as 2 (Good) with the vast majority, 1 (Outstanding) or 1/2 (Outstanding/Good). In response to further questions, it was noted that some of the departments self-assessing as 2 have been 'modest' with their self-assessment and therefore, following moderation it is expected that some will convert to a 1/2 Outstanding/Good. In a minority of cases 2 represents an improvement on prior years.

Governors thanked the Assistant Principal for the reports

138.7 Cross college operational & statutory reports

138.7.1 Pastoral & safeguarding

Student reports: the student governor report was deferred to the next meeting

Pastoral and safeguarding updates: the Assistant Principal (Pastoral, Safeguarding and Quality) provided a verbal overview of the pastoral and safeguarding update report, received in advance of the meeting. In response to **governor questions**, the following points were expanded upon:

Safeguarding

- Minor adjustments have been made to HR protocols for peripatetic staff
- Neither of the confidential matters reported in the supporting paper, carry a reputational risk.

Pastoral

The early progress review on the 2022 – 2023 pastoral development plans shows good progress is being made. Further developments around the mental health support for students includes CAMHs working more closely with the College.

The new Additional Studies courses 'Understanding Mental Health' and 'Neurodiversity', have been very popular, requiring additional provision to two classes of each course.

138.7.2 Finance

The Finance Manager provided a verbal overview of the report provided in advance of the meeting.

Changes to the 2021 -2022 year-end accounts

An additional accrual for £20k of repairs and maintenance invoices - new process will be put in place for the 2022-2023 year to reduce the likelihood of late notice invoices occurring in the future.

An additional prepayment of £1.8k for an HR consultancy subscription

Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) operating charge of £763k - an annual accounting adjustment, not a cash payment.

LGPS actuarial gain of £7,188k resulting in a net surplus for the pension fund of 1,084k. This results in a doubling of net assets on paper – not a cash sum.

In response to a finance lead **governor's questions**, the Finance Manager explained that until the Actuary report is received, the LGPS operating charge is not known and therefore this it is not shown in the annual budget. At the request of governors, it was agreed that an estimated sum will be included in the 2023-2024 budget.

Treasury Management: in the context of rapidly moving interest rates, and in consultation with finance lead governors it had been agreed to place the cash surplus of £4.5m in a 32-day notice, interest bearing account with a view to moving this to a longer term (and higher interest bearing) deposit, if and when, interest rates go up.

138.7.3 Teaching & Learning and Staff Development

The Assistant Principal (Teaching & Learning and Staff Development) gave an informative presentation regarding the developments to the arrangements for

improving both teaching and learning and staff development. Following the presentation governors asked the following questions:

Teaching & Learning (T&L)

In what areas have you found teachers have needed support most?

Teachers are busy people and therefore, providing the latest T&L theory and how this might be applied to maximum benefit in their curriculum area is very welcome.

Lesson observation summaries 2021- 2022, in a context of Covid disruption which required blended teaching and significant post-pandemic 'readjustment' for teachers in terms of face-to face lesson activities - 99.4 % of lessons graded were graded outstanding/good.

This is an extraordinarily high percentage - do you have any anxiety around evidencing this to Ofsted?

We are confident that the evidence is there for all judgements made. Although Ofsted have not used lesson gradings for some time, the College has retained the practice. In this context, it is unlikely that that an inspector will be that interested in the gradings. Ofsted inspectors will not conventionally observe lessons. It is more likely that they will want to test, for example, whether colleagues know the T&L priorities in their own curriculum area and how these correspond to the broader strategic priorities.

If Ofsted gave you a choice, which areas would you take them to see?

The level and quality of enrichment and student support at the College is Outstanding. In many Colleges enrichment and pastoral systems have been cut due to budgetary restraints what the College have managed to preserve is a great testament to and strength of the College.

What does diversity in the curriculum mean – can you explain more about this?

Many curriculums have been designed by white males and are not very reflective of society. Our lead practitioner will be looking at ways to enhance diversity in the curriculum and bring alive shared experiences for students in the class room e.g. departments looking to diversify content (without detracting from the curriculum).

The numbers of staff participating in the teaching and learning meetings is high - is this the usual number?

112 colleagues voluntarily participated in the first teaching and learning community meeting. It is recognised that the key will be to maintain this level of engagement. Previously average attendance was circa 20 persons.

Are Lead practitioner given additional time to undertake their roles?

Lead practitioners are appointed for a 3-year term and are allocated additional time where fast paced change is required, or additional pay where a slower change or transition is required. Themes can and will change as local and national priorities change.

Staff Development

Predominately due to increasing student numbers and staff retirements, there have been more new staff recruited this year, than in previous years.

Can you give examples of the the impact of the outcomes of the staff survey?

Through the rebranding and enhancing of existing staff development roles, the College has been able for example, to provide trainee teachers with an inhouse

'fundamental of teaching' programme, prior to starting their university course and further support staff well-being through whole college strategies - positive feedback has already been received.

Staff satisfaction survey outcomes

- 92% of respondents agreed that senior managers *are 'proactive in responding to emerging national developments'* This is a significant strength when compared externally against similar sixth forms.
- 95% of respondents would recommend the college as a good place to work – higher than the average in other CENBASE colleges
- Workload continues to be a concern although this is by no means a localised issue

Staff retention is well above national averages. Teacher retention rate of 96% (figure excludes retirement) for the 2021-2022 academic year. From the 8 members of staff who did resign for reasons other than retirement, none mentioned or gave stress/ fed up with teaching as the reason.

138.7.4 Human Resources

Performance Management policy

The HR Manager introduced the policy and explained that following consultation with staff and unions the college had recently updated and renewed its performance review system. In light of these changes a new Performance Management policy had been drafted to reflect the changes to process and practice.

Subject to a minor wording change the policy was unanimously approved.

Support Staff Salary Policy

The HR Manager introduced the policy reminding governors that College wishes to ensure that all support staff are paid a salary commensurate with the duties that are undertaken, within a local context and within a national collective bargaining framework and funding context. No changes to the policy were being proposed.

The Support Staff Salary policy was unanimously approved.

Freedom of Information (FOI) and GDPR Report

The HR Manager introduced the report.

Compulsory GDPR and Information Security training is given to all staff on induction

5 FOI requests were received for the academic year 2020 – 2021, all were answered appropriately and within the required timescales.

2 GDPR / Data Protection incidents had occurred. Both were related to emails sent in error, to internal recipients. None required notification to the Information Commissioner.

No subject access requests had been received.

Governors noted that for an institution the size of the College, these were very small numbers.

19.40 At this point attendees left the meeting.

138.8 Governance matters

138.8.1 Policy and Procedures – schedule of delegation

The delegation limits recorded within the policy and procedures schedules, were considered and approved.

*19.49 At this point M Atherton declared an interest and left the meeting.
K Finnigan acted as Chair for the duration of the next item.*

138.8.2 Appointment of Members

Governors unanimously agreed to re-appointment M. Atherton as a community governor, for a 4-year term of office commencing 28.01.2023. It was noted that this would be M Atherton's second term as a community governor.

*19.58 At this point M. Atherton re-joined the meeting.
The meeting resumed with M Atherton in the Chair.*

138.8.3 Meeting Review

The Chair asked governors to review the meeting and the impact of the decisions made.

Discussion relating to commitment, the high attendance recorded at virtual meetings, quoracy issues experienced during face to face meetings, and the general commitment of some governors, led to a decision to offer remote attendance for all 2021-2022 scheduled face to face meetings.

The Clerk was asked to draft revised meeting protocols for hybrid meetings including the requirement for cameras to be switched on. The protocols will make clear that remote attendance is only acceptable in cases where face to face attendance is not possible. The Clerk advised, that if large scale hybrid meetings are to be a long-term option and to ensure the smooth running of meetings, the Board should consider investing in meeting hardware such as omnidirectional microphones and cameras.

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 20.05

These minutes were approved by the Corporation on 12.12.2022 Minute No. 139.4
