

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE
Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on
Monday 15 March 2021 at 5pm
Conducted via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT

Mr Mark Taylor (Chair)	Ms Nisha Rai
Mr Clarence Crosdale (Vice Chair)	Mrs Amanda Tomlinson
Ms Alison Shannon	Ms Emma Bull
Mr John Bradford	Mr Mal Cowgill
Ms Sally Slater (Staff)	Mr Ian Fegan
Mr Trevor Dutton	Mr Yankho Songwe (Student)
Mr Phil Leivers	

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Peter Merry	- Vice Principal Business Success
Ms Louise Fall	- Vice Principal Student Engagement
Mr Ian Browne	- Vice Principal Student Success
Mrs Elizabeth Ball	- Clerk to the Board of Governors
Mr Rob Lawson	- Consultant ETF (Item 5)

17/21 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)

Apologies were received from Mr Mike Hastings.

Alison Shannon, Mark Taylor, Phil Leivers and Ian Fegan declared a conflict of loyalty as employees of the City of Wolverhampton Council.

Sally Slater declared an interest in the report on staffing.

Governors agreed that they should remain and take part in the relevant discussions.

18/21 INDEPENDENT BOARD REVIEW (ITEM 5)

The Chair welcomed the ETF Consultant to the meeting and reported that the final report and draft action plan had been circulated to Governors in advance of the meeting.

The Consultant thanked the Board of Governors for their co-operative and collaborative approach to the review and advised that once the Board had approved the report it would be submitted to the ETF.

In relation to the action plan, the Chair requested that the Consultant and Governors consider whether there were any gaps or any additions/comments and if so, that details are provided to the Clerk. It was reported that an update on the action plan would be provided to each meeting of the Board of Governors.

Governors stated that they did not have questions in relation to the report as they have had various opportunities to comment and had been kept up-to-date with progress. As a result, there were no further comments or questions and Governors said that they were pleased that no extraordinary points had been recorded.

The Chair commented that it was disappointing that the report did not contain an overall conclusion about Governance at the College. Whilst the DfE did not currently allow such a conclusion to be included it was noted that the College will have the opportunity to provide feedback about the review which would be that an overall conclusion would enhance the process.

The Chair indicated that the report was technically confidential between the ETF and the College, but asked whether Governors considered that it should be put into the public domain.

Governors considered that there was nothing in the report that they were significantly concerned about and that the report and action plan should be made available for public inspection. It was noted that it could be published along with the non-confidential minutes of the meeting.

It was resolved:

- **That the report from the Independent Board Review be approved.**
- **That the draft action plan be endorsed with updates being provided at each meeting of the Board.**
- **That the report and action plan be made available for public inspection with the non-confidential minutes of the meeting.**

19/21 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING (ITEM 2)

Minutes

The non-confidential and confidential minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2021 and the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2021 were approved as a correct record.

Matters arising

Governors noted that at the meeting on 28 January 2021 there had been a suggestion that students may be recognised for their support during the difficult period of the pandemic, and asked if this had been considered further.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that at the moment students are being welcomed back, but that there is a student celebration each year where this could be specifically recognised.

20/21 REPORT ON OUTSTANDING ITEMS (ITEM 3)

The Board of Governors noted the report and that some of the outstanding actions linked with the Independent Board Review, with others being deferred, ongoing or considered as part of the meeting.

The Principal reported that at the meeting in December 2020, it had been agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to consider action to be taken in relation to the staff profile. However, he considered that this should be revisited and requested the Board to agree to the initial work being carried out by the Executive Management Team.

It was noted that this would align with the recommendation that a report on succession planning be made to the Board, which was being deferred until July 2021.

It was resolved that the report on outstanding actions be noted and updated for the next meeting.

Governors noted the FE Commissioner's letter dated 22 February 2021 which had been circulated to all Chairs and Principals of Further Education and Sixth Form College Corporations.

It was noted that the letter included revised FE Commissioner Financial Benchmarks and the Vice Principal Business Success advised that he would be providing a report to a future meeting of the Board.

Yankho Songwe joined the meeting.

22/21 REPORT FROM THE CAMPUS TRANSFORMATION OVERSIGHT GROUP (ITEM 6 (a))

The Board of Governors received the confidential minutes of the meetings of the Campus Transformation Group which took place on 18 January 2021 and 1 March 2021.

It was noted that at the meeting on 1 March 2021, the group considered the draft Property Strategy which was endorsed for approval by the Board of Governors.

It was also noted that the Committee had considered its terms of reference and was recommending a minor change to the membership requirements.

It was resolved:

- **That the minutes of the meetings held on 18 January 2021 and 1 March 2021 be received.**
- **That the updated Terms of Reference for the Group be approved.**

23/21 PROPERTY STRATEGY (ITEM 6 (b)) (CONFIDENTIAL)

24/21 LOCAL RECOVERY STRATEGY (ITEM 7)

The Principal presented the Local Recovery Strategy which had been developed to identify how the College is responding and supporting local economic recovery.

Governors were reminded of the sessions they had attended to consider and review the College's strategic options and that ultimately this will lead to the final Strategy

Development Implementation plan in July which will be underpinned by the annual budget.

Key elements of the plan were highlighted including:

- The role of the Wolverhampton Anchor Network.
- The importance of Place Based Intervention.
- Data relating to the current local economic context and the College's current market share.
- The Wolverhampton Pound and getting more value for money.
- Funding Opportunities including funding for the development of Sector Workbased Academy Programmes.

It was emphasised that the College has a large role to play in supporting the local economy and the importance of Place Based Intervention was highlighted in targeting activity by area/street to reduce unemployment, low incomes and fuel poverty. The Principal confirmed that a postcode analysis of three constituencies linked to the CLQ development is taking place to identify how to best use resources.

Governors supported the emphasis on Place Based Intervention and highlighted the different types of data that is available for analysis, including that collected by the LEP.

The Principal confirmed that the College does work closely with organisations including the DWP, Job Centre and LEP, but that if Governors had access to further local intelligence he would be pleased to receive it.

The Board of Governors specifically noted the ongoing development of the College's response to Covid and the post lockdown recovery and that questions facing the Board and the strategic discussions will continue in advance of the presentation of the final Strategic Development Implementation Plan in July 2021.

It was resolved that the Board of Governors support and endorse the Local Recovery Strategy and its continuing development.

25/21 COLLEGE REPORT (ITEM 8)

1. Student Engagement

College re-opening

The Vice Principal Student Engagement presented the report which detailed the support provided for students during the lockdown period post-Christmas 2020 and the arrangements in place to support the return of students from 8 March 2021.

This included retaining the previous COVID 19 safety protocols and procedures and the updating of risk registers, together with ongoing liaison with Trade Unions who are supportive of the action being taken.

Governors noted the intention for approximately 500 students each day to be on campus and the rationale for deciding who should return first. It was reported that having reviewed the data between 75 and 80% of those students expected to return have come back into College, with others continuing to be supported virtually.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that since writing the report there had been one further positive case of COVID 19 involving a student. Public Health England had been advised and the student is receiving appropriate support.

Governors were advised that asymptomatic testing has taken place at the Wellington Road Campus since January and that since 8 March a centre has been established at Paget Road.

Testing remains voluntary and so far, approximately 40% of students are engaging with the process, with 48% of staff taking advantage of home testing kits.

Governors asked whether there were any incentives that could be used to encourage students to take a test. The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that students are given every encouragement to take up the offer of testing, however, the College would not wish to disadvantage a student who does not want to participate.

Governors noted that testing centres have been established at Wellington Road and Paget Road, but that it had been decided not to have a centre at Metro One. They asked why this was the case as although the campus is in close proximity to the testing centre at the Civic Centre, it may encourage more students to be involved.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement advised that the Metro One Campus did not open to students until last week and that the number of students returning would remain low until some of the service industries re-opened.

Governors thanked the Vice Principal Student Engagement for providing copies of the emails that are being sent to staff in relation to the College re-opening.

They noted that staff were being required to carry out tests twice per week, but that in fact testing remained voluntary. They asked whether staff testing is being logged.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement confirmed that testing is voluntary for staff and at this stage testing was not being monitored, although a record is being kept of the testing kits that are going out.

It was resolved that the Board of Governors note the planning to support a safe phased return of students, apprentices and staff from w/c 8 March 2021.

Higher Education Review of Compliance with Consumer Credit Legislation

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that all Higher Education providers had been requested to undertake a review of compliance with consumer law (condition C1 of registration) during the first half of the spring term.

Having undertaken the review, the Vice Principal Student Engagement confirmed that the College has provided new or returning students with appropriate and relevant information and that no compliance risks have been identified.

It was resolved that the Board of Governors note the assurance of ongoing compliance with condition C1 as determined by the Office for Students.

Full Time Student Recruitment Campaign

The Vice Principal Student Engagement presented animated slides which showed the College's refreshed marketing campaign aimed to attract full time students to the College.

It was reported that the campaign was aimed at increasing the College's market share and builds on the existing purpose of 'defining futures', also linking with the City Council strapline of 'out of darkness cometh light'.

It was noted that the campaign is also being personalised for different curriculum areas and that real students and case studies are being used to promote programmes, including apprenticeships.

The Vice Principal Student Success advised that in relation to curriculum planning there is a vision for technologies and future jobs and that presentations had been made as part of the Curriculum Planning meetings that are being attended by Governors.

Governors suggested that once the relevant information had been pulled together it would be helpful for this to be presented to the Board.

The Principal indicated that there is a significant amount of activity taking place in relation to Curriculum Planning and that it was important that this be captured and reported to Governors.

Governors asked whether, there was scope to involve students by obtaining their views on the marketing campaign. It was also emphasised that if the College wished to enrol more apprentices it was important to identify the avenues students would use for enrolment.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement confirmed that the College does have a Student Council and that this is a way of engaging with and getting feedback from students. She confirmed that the College is also making more use of Google Analytics to find out where students are coming from.

The Principal reported that in relation to the City Learning Quarter there is an intention to involve students and use social media to obtain input about what the development could mean for our students and the future of the College.

It was noted that during Apprenticeship Week, the College has also used several case studies to promote the provision.

Governors asked whether the College was able to highlight what it does better than other local colleges and encourage students to choose this institution.

They were advised that the College is able to use its high success rates and promote its USP to encourage students to enrol. It was emphasised however, that it is often our staff that 'sell' the College

It was resolved that the Board of Governors noted the report.

2. Student Success

Learner Engagement

The Vice Principal Student Success presented the report which outlined the activity during the lockdown period to engage with students, including on-line live teaching sessions, recorded sessions, other on-line activities and self-directed study.

Governors noted the levels of student engagement in each faculty and that this was particularly high in relation to A level provision, the faculty for Technology, Creative and Academic Studies and the Faculty for Professional, Leisure and Service Industries.

Areas hit hardest included the faculty for English and Maths and Foundation Learning, due to barriers to learning for many discrete adult learners, and the faculty for Employer Responsive as a result of the restrictions placed on learners and recruitment.

As reported, Governors noted that there was a phased return of students based on the urgency of the need for intervention. Phasing will continue until Easter when it is anticipated that 100% of students will have returned.

Governors asked whether students who did not have appropriate devices were accessing the College to use the facilities. The Vice Principal Student Success advised that some students do have a lack of connectivity or an appropriate

device to use and where the College has not been able to provide these, students are accessing the College and using the computers on site.

Governors also asked whether any students had expressed concern about their level of progress and whether any additional support was required.

The Vice Principal Student Success advised that many students had expressed a concern about this and how they would be able to catch up. Whilst those that have engaged on line will not be so far behind, in most practical areas there was less engagement than if students were on site and as a result these students have been prioritised for return.

Governors asked if students had provided any feedback following the National Apprenticeship Week. It was reported that feedback from the event was very encouraging, but that it was difficult to measure how effective it had been apart from the views provided by the apprentices and employers.

Governors also asked about the theme of mental resilience and wellbeing and asked how this is tracked by the College and how students can be identified and supported.

The Vice Principal Student Engagement reported that even before the pandemic, the College had a health and wellbeing page on the website and that all safeguarding referrals were monitored closely. It was noted, however, that the Counselling service had been accessed more during lockdown and staff are continuing to use different ways of keeping in contact with students and providing support.

It was agreed that in the next report information would be included about the number of students seeking support.

Action: Vice Principal Student Engagement

It was resolved that the Board of Governors note the continuing high levels of student engagement and innovation in learning during COVID 19.

3. Business Success

January Management Accounts and Cash Position

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that the Management Accounts indicate an improving position with an operating deficit on a management accounts basis which is below budget.

He highlighted the key variances and stated that whilst there was a reduction in income, primarily as a result of the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic, there had been significant savings in relation to non-pay costs.

As a result, there was an improvement in the forecast overall operating deficit for the year and it was anticipated that this would be improved further.

It was noted that the College had been partially successful in its case for in-year growth funding and that additional income was available from the Government COVID Response Fund which should be recognised in-year.

Whilst there remained risks around income recognition there are many positives including the discussions with the WMCA in relation to Plant, Rail and Electric Vehicles.

The Vice Principal Business Success highlighted the cash flow graph in the report and that the additional income, and an agreement from WMCA to 'flatten' the profile of payments, meant that the College was less likely to access its overdraft in the March/April period.

Governors thanked the Vice Principal Business Success and his colleagues for their efforts in improving the College's position.

It was resolved that the Board of Governors note the January management accounts and cashflow.

2019/20 Financial Statements

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that the College was waiting for the Bank to issue two letters, the first being a waiver letter in relation to the breach of covenant and the second relating to a deed of variation.

It was noted that the Financial Statements had been approved at the meeting of the Board of Governors on 24 February 2021, subject to final review by the Chair and the Chair of the Audit Committee. However, there was a need for the Board of Governors to formally approve the deed of variation. If possible, this would be included for consideration at the Special Meeting of the Board on 29 March 2021.

Value for Money

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that the College's procurement function provides an excellent service and drives value for the College.

He highlighted that the report includes detailed information relating to the processes for ensuring value for money and the significant activities that took place during 2019/20.

Governors welcomed the report and asked whether there was any opportunity for the College's social value to be reflected, even though this may be difficult to quantify.

The Principal advised that this is something that is being discussed as part of the Anchor Network and other sub-group meetings.

Contract approvals

The Vice Principal Business Success reported that there were two additional matters that he wished to bring to the attention of the Board of Governors for approval.

The first related to the tender for the College's new Firewall and Governors were advised that this had been via the standard procurement process, with the recommendation being that the contract be awarded to the lowest priced tender Nike Consulting.

It was resolved that the contract for the new Firewall be awarded to Nike consulting.

The second matter was related to the EV launch that had taken place recently and the intention of the College to partner with DBS, an external organisation, in order to deliver the provision.

Governors were advised that further information will be provided in the next report on sub-contracting provision as the value had yet to be fully quantified.

Action: Vice Principal Business Success

It was anticipated however that this would provide a significant return for the College.

The Board of Governors approved that the College enter into a sub-contracting agreement with DBS and that the value of the provision be reported as it is quantified and as part of the next sub-contracting report.

26/21 CHAIR'S ACTION (ITEM 9)

The Chair reported that at the last meeting of the Board of Governors two recommendations relating to the awarding of contracts had not been approved as relevant information had not been provided.

In view of the need to move quickly to award the contracts however, it was noted that the information had subsequently been provided to the Chair who had approved the contracts in accordance with the Financial Regulations.

It was resolved that the Board of Governors endorse the approval by the Chair that:

- **the contract for the installation of rail training tracks at Wellington Road be awarded to Stoke Alliance Services Ltd.**
- **the contract for the supply and installation of CCTV and access control equipment be awarded to Sitewatch Fire and Surveillance Ltd.**

27/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 10)

Clerk to the Board of Governors

The Clerk offered to leave the meeting, but was requested to remain unless there was any discussion and was asked to do so.

The Chair referred back to the report of the Independent Board Review and the recommendations in relation to the Clerk to the Board of Governors.

These were that the title of the Clerk be changed to Head of Governance which better reflects the importance of the role, and that the working hours be increased to three days per week.

It was resolved that the title of the Clerk be changed to Head of Governance and that the working hours of the Clerk be increased to three days per week.

28/21 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 11)

It was agreed that the following should remain confidential and not be made available for public inspection:

- Confidential Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Governors held on 28 January 2021.
- Confidential minutes and report from the meeting of the Campus Transformation Group.
- Report and minutes relating to the Property Strategy.
- Report on People Engagement.

29/21 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 6)

26 April 2021 at 2pm – Governors Strategy Session

26 April 2021 at 5pm – Board of Governors meeting.