



THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 133

Monday 24th January 2022

[Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

Members Present: A Beatty, M Atherton, S Codling, J Tallentire, I Vipond, I MacNaughton (Principal), H Skeggs, H Hallworth, D Morran, D Stebbings, J Leslie, J Johnson, J Owens, E Calderbank

In Attendance: Assistant Principals: J Cadman, A Johnson, G Rayner, A Frost
E Gibson (Finance Manager),

Clerk: T Johnson

The minutes reflect the order of discussion

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming those present and thanking staff for their continued hard work. The Chair welcomed governor optimism that as living with Covid has become a normal part of everyday living, it is sincerely hoped the College will soon be able without any mitigations and adjustments.

133.1 Apologies for absence

133.1 Apologies were received and accepted from governors, A Banarse and O Pearson and invited attendees; S Townshend and S Williams.

133.2 Any other business & chair's action

133.2.1 No other business was requested.

133.2.2 The Chair had not been required to implement any chair's action since the last meeting.

133.3 Declarations of Interest

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

133.3.2 I Vipond declared an interest in item 133.8(ii) relating to the reappointment of governors. No other governor or attendee declared any interests.

133.4 Minutes of previous meetings

133.4.1 The minutes of Corporation meeting No. 132 held 13 December 2021 were agreed, as a true record of the meeting.

133.4.2 Matters arising

- (i) The ESFA Annual strategic conversation; the ESFA letter and summary paper providing governors with an overview of the current position regarding the Further Education diagnostic assessments and National leaders of Further Education, and the position was circulated to all governors in advance of the meeting was noted. There were no matters arising.

- (ii) 132.5 Cyber Essentials Plus: the Assistant Principal (Examinations and Risk) reported on the security work that is ongoing. Jisc will be undertaking another penetration test soon.
- (iii) 132.6 Length of the college day: former student governors had reported that council members had asked for consideration be given to shortening the length of the college day, predominately to enable more convenient access to public transport for some students. The Principal informed the meeting that the government initiative to fund an additional 40 learning hours per student, per year, from September 2022 (detail expected February 2022) would make shortening the timetabled day very problematic and therefore unlikely. However, despite the increase in hours, the College would do everything possible not to increase the length of the day.
- (iv) 132.6 Student study space and access to technology: the Principal reported that an additional 18 desk top computers are to be installed in the IT centre and 2 new laptop trollies have recently been purchased for use in the Cock & Pye building and the 2nd floor of the Main Building (chemistry area).

The staff governor reported that a survey undertaken of library study space found that even at peak times, individual study spaces were available. A self-issue laptop safe machine is to be installed in the library – student cards will be used to book and borrow a laptop for use in the library or in any other study space in the College.

The Principal informed governors that fifty-six laptops have recently been received from the government as part of the government's 'Get Help with Technology' initiative. The machines are relatively low spec and students would have benefited most had these been available during 'lockdown'. Governors were reminded that during lockdown and beyond, the College had been able to support students by loaning college laptops to those without access at home.

133.5 Principal's strategic matters

Governors considered the report, prepared by the Principal, including Covid related matters, 2021/22 updates. 2022/23 re-current funding and staffing updates.

The Principal updated governors on the following matters:

133.5.1 College operational arrangements - Covid

The levels of staff and student absences due to Covid have been very low and are continuing to fall. Current levels are well below the reported national average levels. Since the Christmas break there has been significantly less disruption to the general running of the College and to teaching and learning. The College's main mitigation measure of ensuring good ventilation throughout the College has undoubtedly contributed to these low levels and although it is, at times cold, students and staff cope relatively very well.

The government now requires students unless 'exempted', to wear face coverings in classrooms as well as inside the buildings. During the last week of the autumn term the College had asked students to wear face coverings in classrooms and therefore the latest government changes have only served to add weight to the College's existing arrangement.

A [governor asked](#), in the context that the government have indicated that they may remove the requirement for masks in classrooms, will the College follow this or make its own decisions based on local /College Covid rates?

The Principal responded, stating that the College would at present continue to encourage students to wear masks in classrooms. The Assistant Principal (Examinations and Risk) drew attention to; the expectation that from 27th January the government would totally remove the requirement to wear masks and the awareness of staff to an element of 'mask fatigue' within the student body. College management will be discussing their response to any government announcements in due course

133.5.2 Summer 2022 examinations

The government is planning for summer 2022 external assessments to be through public examinations held in May/June with some exceptions including, for example, some of the A level Art assessments. The government has indicated that it will not confirm the required detail of the 2022 assessment frameworks until early February (now expected to be 7th February) and therefore, it is still possible that Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) could form part of the assessment methodology and in the event of a Covid rise TAGs could be used more substantially.

As usual students are sitting formal assessments at key points in the year, to record and monitor their progress. These assessments will also be used if Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) arrangements are deployed. The College will continue to do what is necessary to ensure students are prepared for all eventualities. Following the government announcements, it is expected that the exam boards will release more subject specific details, including for each course, 'revision aids'. Governors will be kept updated with the details. [further information is contained in the section on student assessments]

Action: College

The Assistant Principal (examinations and risk) reported on a recent meeting attended with the examination boards. Reassurance regarding grade allocations had been given although there had been no significant, new information obtained from the meeting.

133.5.3 Staffing

The Principal informed governors that it has been noticeably harder to recruit to vacant teaching posts this year. The level of teachers' salaries and the reluctance of many people to relocate are believed to be significant factors.

A [governor queried](#) the boards role in staffing matters and in-particular board discussions around the whole college staffing structure and the boards input to decisions such as the recent addition of another Assistant Principal post. A [question](#) was also asked regarding how the board retains oversight of staff recruitment to senior posts. Having recently attended safer recruitment training, [a governor queried](#) why the staff recruitment policy was approved by senior managers without any recourse or discussion by the board.

The [Chair responded](#) to these questions advising new governors that the board is accountable for Senior Post Holders (SPH), there is a constant review within the College of the structure, staffing numbers and responsibilities. In this context, the Chair reported on his staffing discussions with the Principal in December (part of the weekly Chair/Principal meetings) regarding future staffing needs. The Chair highlighted that as Assistant Principals are not senior post holders they do not need to be endorsed by the Corporation.

The Vice Chair and Lead Governor for Curriculum Offer and Educational Quality provided a verbal overview of recruitment in the College and reminded governors that it has always been the practice of the College to invite the Chair or one of the Vice Chairs to be part of the interview panel for **more** senior post appointments (Assistant Principal and above). The Vice Chair reported on the comprehensive selection process and in the absence of the HR manager, reported that equality and diversity and fair recruitment practises are monitored and reported within the annual HR report. The Principal reminded those present that any governor taking part in the recruitment process is provided with safer recruitment training.

A **governor asked** for clarification regarding the staffing/recruitment reporting cycle. The Principal outlined the reporting opportunities including updates contained within each of the Principal's reports presented at meetings of the Corporation, the annual HR SAR provided to governors in the autumn term reflecting on the prior year and the Principal's annual report containing staffing reports and further data.

The **Chair requested**, in addition to those recorded in the policy and procedures schedules, that governors are made aware if any of the staffing or recruitment policies are changed

133.5.4 September 2022 cohort

As anticipated, applications for the September 2022 intake are (approximately 120 applications 'up') on the same point last year. Unfortunately, this indicates that the oversubscription criteria will be applied and some applicants will be disappointed.

In response to a **governor query** the Principal explained that as numbers rise, students who may be refused a place under the **Admissions Policy** criteria, are unlikely to be local students served by the College's current mission. The oversubscription criteria predominately affects, students making a commitment to travel to the College as their aspirational choice.

133.5.5 Growth funding

In the 2021/22 year, the College expects to receive growth funding for 99 of the 199 students enrolled (student growth above the number enrolled in the prior year) as the funding methodology only 'kicks in' after extra numbers have risen above 100 students. Next year's allocation (2022/23) should reflect the student growth in 2021/22 and therefore the College expects to receive funding for 199 students.

Governors wishing to receive further information on the governments lagged funding model were advised to contact the clerk or refer to the information available on SharePoint.

Action: governors

133.5.6 SFCA Conference

Staff and governors attending the recent conference were very pleased to hear the FE Commissioner's definition of an outstanding college, which College managers are confident currently fits the profile and student outcomes of the College (see 133.7.3). The FE Commissioner had also expressed the view that A level dominated colleges meet local needs by servicing the employment and HE markets and therefore, sixth-form colleges should have no difficulty in evidencing their role and place in the local skills plans.

The commissioner was also very clear that SFCs should be able to standalone and not necessarily academise /join Multi Academy Trusts (MATs). The Education Secretary, speaking during the conference, also made references to MATs,

expressing the government position that if sixth-form colleges were to academise, it should be by joining or forming a MAT.

133.5.7 October 2021 A Levels

In response to a [governor question](#). The Principal clarified that the 2021 October A level assessments were taken as examinations only. 30% of students nationally increased their grades.

133.5.8 Grade inflation

[A governor asked](#), in the context that the government have said that in summer 2022 they will do a graduation exercise and this years' grades will be half way between summer 2019 and 2021 grades are there any risks for the College, around appeals and the costs associated with this?

The Principal responded by explaining that the College had not had the substantial grade inflation at A level that had been witnessed elsewhere in the sector - which had been 'driven up' by small school sixth form providers in both the public and private sectors.

As the College's 2020 and 2021 results were in line with the 2017, 2018 & 2019 public examination results and the predicted improvements in student outcomes that had been anticipated prior to the start of the pandemic (within the norm distribution of 3-year improvements) if the graduation takes place, the College's expects its aggregate grades in 2022 to go up (assumes there are no other variables). Therefore, overall, the College is confident that the government's plans for the 2022 examinations and redressing any grade inflation, will show the College in a very good light - and in this context the risk of appeals above those that might, ordinarily be expected is minimal.

133.5.9 Estates Strategy

In the context that an estates/property strategy is high on the governors' strategic agenda, [a governor challenged](#) whether there were plans to bring the estates/property strategy to the board?

The Principal informed governors that Ingleton Wood, had been recently commissioned to help in the preparation of a bid for the 2022 16-18 Capacity Fund, for a new build of up to 9 classrooms and preparation of a 10-year estates strategy. In addition, to the 16-18 Capacity Fund expects that an Estates Strategy will also become a requirement for future bids to the De-carbonisation and Condition Improvement funds. The headlines and fundamentals of the strategy will be determined by the College, taking into account the outcomes of governor property and expansion discussions re the 3-5 year strategic plan, that [have](#) been taking place over the preceding months.

The Chair reminded the meeting that the strategy lead governor will be the board's main lead on the governance elements of the estates strategy. The strategy will come to the Corporation as and when required, when strategic judgments or decisions needed to be made.

The strategy lead governor advised the meeting that capacity is a key consideration of the 3-5 year strategy and the complex issue of student numbers v college capacity is a key consideration and fundamental element of the strategic plan.

133.6 Student assessment

132.6.1 The Assistant Principal provided a presentation on the 2021/22 Assessment Strategy including information for new governors and a summary of the key points and issues

including: 2021/22 challenges, adjustment to assessment methods, standardised subject assessments, timelines, benchmarking of student progress and achievement, benchmarking target grades against government data and the additional work required due to the enduring potential for CAGs to be part of grade allocations and the format of student reports. The text relating to the key points and an anonymised, sample student report, will be provided to governors.

Action: College

133.6.2 [A governor queried](#), in the context of the increased numbers of students reporting mental health issues, what students know and understand about the assessment processes and whether for example, the higher level of controlled subject assessments would add additional stress to students.

The Assistant Principal (Examinations & Risk) explained that there was the potential for concerns however, departments have very skilfully managed the situation, and therefore, even during the January mocks there was not the level of anxiety that might otherwise have been expected.

The Assistant Principal (Pastoral) reminded governors that this cohort of students have had very little examination preparation. Due to Covid they did not sit mocks or GCSE exams and therefore, increasing their experiences of control assessments, is a positive benefit both in helping to settle rather increase nerves.

The Principal, added, that at a time when there are enormous pressures on students the College's principles are further supporting student welfare. Students are engaged in personal dialogue at several levels including with their subject teachers, collaboratively setting their target grades and discussing progress.

133.6.3 [A governor queried](#) whether missed learning due to the pandemic would negatively impact students' retention at university and how any gaps in learning that may negatively affect their understanding of elements of their chosen course, would be addressed.

The Assistant Principal (Examinations) advised governors that the College's recruitment to university and the HESA data (university retention data) has historically been very strong. Although universities ordinarily teach skills based due to the disparity between exam boards and therefore any gaps in subject knowledge may not be a significant issue, the concerns outlined are a national problem and universities will have need to have learning strategies in place.

133.6.4 The Chair led thanks to the Assistant Principal for the informative presentation and to all staff for their work in ensuring that students are well prepared for their exams. Governors recognise the challenges of the past 2 years and the potential for those difficult circumstances to be repeated.

133.7 Self-Assessment Review 2020/21 (SAR) / Quality Improvement Plan 2021/22 (QIP)

133.7.1 The Assistant Principal (Performance & Quality) presented the Self-Assessment Review 2021/22 and Quality Improvement Plan 2022/23, providing a verbal overview of the headlines, including the key areas for improvement 2021/22. Governors had received the headlines in the SAR, at the October Corporation noted the analysis of data showing how the 2020/21 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) priorities were achieved or, in the context of the impact of the pandemic carried forward to 2021/22 and the College's self assessed gradings.

133.7.2 In response to [governor questions](#), the additional pressures and difficulties in meeting the targets set out in the QIP and in most areas, undertaking meaningful benchmarking of performance indicators without national data was highlighted as problematic. The

areas for improvement in the 2021/22 year therefore focus primarily on sustaining the emerging improvement trends identified in 2019 (last year that public examinations were held) with the assessment strategy, as presented to governors during the meeting, a key component.

- 133.7.3 The Assistant Principal reminded those present that due to the pandemic, there are no external quantitative and qualitative benchmarks. The impact of the benchmarking data gap i.e. years where the government has not released central benchmarking data (2020 or 2021 assessments) was discussed. The data within the SAR shows that the College is making sustained improvements year on year and is confident that this upward trend will be reflected in the 2022 results.

The SAR and QIP including College's self assessed grading of 1/2 on the Ofsted scale were approved.

133.8 **Strategic Priorities 2021/21**

The Strategic Priorities update circulated in advance of the meeting was noted.

133.9 **Cross college operational & statutory reports**

133.9.1 Finance

The December 2021 finance reports circulated in advance of the meeting had been considered by the lead governors. The Finance Manager reported that overall, the budget is performing in line with expectations, the significant variances include:

- a refund of had been expected from the exam boards due to the Summer Exams not taking place. In the previous year it had been given via a cash refund so that method of refund was used for the preparation of the budget. This year, they gave a credit note instead of a cash refund, to allow for this the forecast for miscellaneous income and exams budgets have been decreased (by the same amount) to give an overall nil effect.
- turnover for both refectories is in the region of 22% above budget. Due to increased volume of trade, staffing levels have be increased.
- the costs of cleaning materials due to Covid has increased
- the newly-appointed Health & Safety Officer is introducing changes which will bring future savings; this has given rise to an updated forecast for Health & Safety costs.
- due to Covid, ventilation throughout College has been increased subsequently leading to increased energy usage.

The Finance Lead [governor asked](#), in relation to the increase in the health and safety budget, what the initiatives are being deployed to save money and enhance practices in the medium and long term? In response the Finance Manager and [the Assistant Principal \(Examinations and Risk\)](#) explained that the initiatives include training for staff so that PAT (portable appliance testing) and elements of the required legionella testing can be carried out in house, reducing the costs associated with employing external contractors.

133.9.2 Pastoral

(i) Safeguarding

The Assistant Principal (Pastoral) provided a verbal update on pastoral and safeguarding matters, including an update on the Ofsted expectation that the College will provide regular reports on harmful sexual behaviours and peer on peer abuse. The Assistant Principal reported that the first term's report has been completed and an

analysis of the outcomes show that students are reporting concerns more than in previous years. As a result of issues highlighted in local schools and general information from Essex Safeguarding Board, the College has considered its own practices and in a small number of areas reporting, reviewing and evidencing practices has been refined.

Although the report itself does not require reporting to governors, the safeguarding lead governor has been supplied with a copy.

A governor enquired whether the increase in the number of incidents reported was due to increased awareness or a rise in the number of cases?

The Assistant Principal clarified that there is a combination of elements contributing to the increased reporting. Students feel comfortable talking to staff about these sensitive issues, students' awareness has been raised considerably by the Everyones Invited platform, the MeToo campaign and associated media and as students reflect on their own experiences, some are realising that they have been victims and are now coming forward, to report incidents and to receive support and guidance.

(ii) Policies

The Chair reported that the student Bully & Harassment Policy will be considered for approval at the March meeting.

133.9.3 Personnel

The Chair reported that a lot of work has been taking place on the Code of Conduct and Disciplinary policy. It is anticipated that both documents will be presented at the March Corporation meeting.

133.9.4 Cross college

Estates Strategy informing strategic planning: see Principal's report minute 133.5

133.10 Governance matters

133.10.1 Strategic planning working group

The lead governor gave a verbal update on the work of the group. Governors were informed that the group had held its first meeting which followed up on the outputs from the November governor visit day and considered on the methodology that might be applied to working out the strategic plan. Notes of the meeting have been shared with all governors.

The key strategic areas informed by discussions and outcomes from visit day, have currently been identified by the group as;

1. Student numbers & capacity of the estate- evidencing numbers and understanding student demand moving forward
2. College offer determined by the culture of the organisation – what we seek to provide and what can be provided
3. Impact of technology – understanding how the College uses technology and how this can be further enhanced across the College
4. Wellbeing of staff and students

The next step is identifying evidence in these areas and identification of which scenarios will be 'planned out'. Stakeholder consultation is also under discussion.

Notes from the working group have been shared with the clerk and uploaded to SharePoint. Regular updates will be provided to governors. [governors are advised to access the information on SharePoint]

19.49 At this point attendees left the meeting.

133.10.2 Search and Governance Committee

The recommendation of the Search and Governance committee to reappoint I Vipond as a community governor for a period of 4 years was agreed. The voting took place confidentially vis MS Forms.

The skills audit has been redrafted and will be sent out to governors after the DfE strengthening governance documentation has been received (latest deferment to April 2022)

19.34 At this point the Clerk and staff governors left the meeting. D Morran was appointed Clerk for the duration of the following item.

133.11 Confidential Matters

Confidential minutes of meeting No.132 held 13 December 2021

The Chair will provide the confidential minutes to external governors in due course. The minutes will be placed for approval at the next meeting.

Action: Chair

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 20.00

*These minutes were approved by the Corporation on 28.03.2022
[Minute No. 134.4(i)]*
