



THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 122
28th September 2020

[Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

Members Present: I MacNaughton (Principal), M Atherton, I Vipond, R Wilson, J Owens
S Carmel, N Gerrard, C Goldsworthy, J Johnson, S Okpattah, D Morran, P Barker,

In

Attendance: E Gibson, J Harker, S Williams, J Cadman, A Johnson, G Rayner,

Clerk: T Johnson

[The numbering of the minutes reflects the order of discussion]

The Chair opened the meeting by publicly thanking the Principal, senior managers and all staff at the College for their 'amazing work', during what continues to be a very difficult and extraordinary time for the College, its staff and students. The Corporation will continue to ensure that at the heart of every decision and process undertaken, is the service provided for students both present and future. The Chair, advised that the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the uncertainty of the situation should not be underestimated.

122.1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Corporation Members (governors): M Perrin, P Loveard and observer A Frost.¹

122.2 Any other Business

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and informed those present of the following membership matters:

- Prior to induction, E.Stock had given notice that due to a change in work circumstances, she would not be able to continue as a Member of the Corporation. The formal resignation process will be completed, including the relevant non-disclosure and confidentiality declarations.
- Due to governor availability the Search & Governance Committee meeting will take place on 09.10.2020

122.3 Chairs Action

The Chair reported that he had not taken any emergency action, on behalf of the Corporation.

122.4 Declarations of Interest

None

122.5 Confidential Items

¹ Retrospective apologies were received from A Beatty who had been unable to attend due to illness.

It was noted that the section of the Principal's report regarding future college arrangements, should remain confidential until communication with stakeholders has been completed.

122.6 Minutes of Previous Meetings²

122.6.1 The minutes of the following meetings were agreed as a true record.

- Corporation meeting No.122 held 13.07.2020

122.6.2 Matters Arising

There were no urgent matters arising.

17.40pm J Owens joined the meeting

122.7 Principal's Strategic Matters

Governors considered the report prepared by the Principal, including information detailing the impact of Coronavirus (Covid19) on the College, staff, students, the wider college community and future operational proposals.

122.7.1 Coronavirus Pandemic

The Principal informed governors that in the context of the exponential growth in the number of cases of Coronavirus (Covid19) reported by the Government and its health & scientific advisors, the national alert level now raised from 3-4 and recent Government announcements re further restrictive measures in England, senior leaders have reviewed the estimated timescales of the agreed, 3 phased operational plan.³

In response to governor questions the following points were elucidated;

Stakeholder feedback re Phase 1: Feedback indicates that Phase 1 arrangements have been working relatively well for the vast majority of students and staff, underpinned by an understanding that the College is, providing a calm, supportive and relatively safe teaching & learning environment, despite the ongoing situation.

Staffing Phase 1: Phase 1 arrangements involve providing more classroom teaching than staff would normally (pre Covid) provide. Staff have large numbers of students to support arising from the high level of enrolments and overall staff are working exceptionally hard to support their students' teaching and learning and offer wider support. For example, in addition to direct teaching, staff are also supporting students with independent learning, undertaking more marking and assessments and where staff are absent, colleagues are or will need to be, covering additional lessons. Therefore, in general, staff do not now have the time to undertake interactive remote learning, as they did during the partial re-opening phase in June/July. Despite these pressures, staff wherever possible, continue to prepare Teams or YouTube videos and in some subjects live streamed lessons.

Staffing levels: At the present time only, a handful of staff have been tested for Coronavirus or have been required to self-isolate. To date no student or staff has tested positive for coronavirus [that the College has been made aware of]. There is a general Government expectation that even if further restrictions, including partial lockdown arrangements (local or national) were introduced, schools and colleges will remain open. However, as transmission rates are increasing and the number of institutions locally,

² Governors are reminded that following each meeting, action point summaries are shared via SharePoint

³ In July it had been agreed that Phase 1 would continue until 5 October with governors agreeing at that time that there should be flexibility in the actual date of moving from phase 1 to phase 2 [Minute No.121]

known to have positive cases also increases, it is likely that in the coming weeks/months staffing levels at the College will be significantly impacted. It seems inevitable schools and colleges (particularly smaller institutions) will find it difficult to remain open.

Testing Kits: At present testing kits supplied to the College are being prioritised for staff. The initial 10 kits have been supplemented by a further 50 and the College expects to be provided with additional testing kits on a routine basis.

Teaching & Learning Environment / Health & Safety: At the present time weather has been good and therefore ventilation has been maintained through leaving open windows and doors. However, as the term progresses and temperatures dip, maintaining a safe environment through adequate ventilation, whilst also ensuring a satisfactory teaching and learning environment will become more of a challenge.

Funding [see also enrolments]: The Government has confirmed that it is unable to alter its routine funding methodology until January 2021 and as no additional funding has been confirmed the College, in the context of already scarce resources, is taking a big risk on expending on remote learning and associated resources. Governors agreed with the proposal that communication be drafted highlighting 'the sustained and systemic unfairness, bias and discrimination regarding the Government levels of per capita resourcing of 16-18 students attending non-academy Sixth Form Colleges in England' and that the communication be sent to the Secretary of State for Education, Education Select Committee, Equality Commission, local MPs and others on behalf of the Corporation. (Appendix A)

Mental Health & Wellbeing: governors expressed concern for the accumulative effect on the mental health & wellbeing of staff and the impact that the move to blended learning has and will continue to have on students with additional needs and other vulnerabilities. The Assistant Principal (Pastoral), explained that although resourcing is in general incredibly difficult, the student support budget is 'boyant' and therefore funding continues to be available to support vulnerable students, including funding for the purchase of laptops for identified students. Some anxious students have found the change to increased independent / home learning to be a significant benefit, and some students, suffering from social anxieties continue to thrive during this time.

The College pastoral support systems are functioning as usual and are freely available to all students who choose to access the services. Face to face support is available, and students can access the welfare hub as normal. Students meet with their tutor at least once a week face to face and LSA support is operating normally.

College Premises [see also Teaching & Learning/Health Safety]

Although the College is operating successfully and within the context of the pandemic, is providing students with the best possible learning and teaching environment, this is only being achieved by operating the phase 1 conditions i.e. restricting numbers to c1400 students on site, and for example, allowing for a good level of social distancing between students in classes (usually exceeding 1 metre plus), staggered start, break, lunch and finish times. However, the current arrangements, would not work well with all 3000 students on site. The narrow corridors, toilets, social and study spaces, entrances and exists to buildings, and the entrances and exits to the site itself would be of significant and concern not least as social distancing and the other public health requirements could not be adhered to.

The College is aware and planning for the possibility that during the winter period the Government may decide that there is a need for a local or national 'lockdown' and again close schools and colleges and therefore, full remote learning arrangements will return.

Taking all available information into account, including the reported rising levels of infection and increased transmission rates amongst young people nationally and locally and in the context of maintaining the safety, health and wellbeing of students & staff, whilst striving in exceptional circumstances to meet the College's mission and provide students with the best possible educational experience, **governors agreed** that the realistic option is for the **College to remain in phase 1** with the situation to remain under review.

122.7.2 **2020/21 Exams and Assessments**

The UK Government has still not announced the timing and further detail re the summer 2021 qualifications (2020/21 exams and assessments). The Secretary of State, Gavin Williamson has now stated that there will be no decision made until October. At this point, it is expected that College assessments including mock exams will continue as planned. Governors recognised the considerable stress that this is causing staff and students both in the College and for prospective students currently in Year 11 at secondary school.

122.7.3 **Enrolments**

There has been a rise in the number of students enrolling at the College for the 2020/21 year. To date, there are 3,135 students on roll - approximately 160 students more than at the same point in 2019. The Year 1 to Year 2 progression rate, is also significantly higher than normal. In part this may be due to the limited post 16 options now available to students e.g. reduced number of apprenticeships and employment opportunities largely due to the impact of the Coronavirus.

Subject pressure points prevented the College from enrolling more students (15 'closed' A level courses) and therefore the College has not been able to offer a significant number of late applicants' places where they wished to study one or more of these closed courses within their programme.

In the context of Lagged funding⁴ James Kewin (SFCA Deputy Chief Executive) has informed the College that he believes that due to the growth in student numbers for the 2020/21 exceeding the ESFA criteria for an in-year funding adjustments, the College should realistically expect a funding adjustment of approximately £300k. However, this will not be confirmed until January 2021. The extra funding is essential, not least to support the extra costs of employing additional teaching staff, the allocation for in-year growth in student numbers is only funded at just over £2.1k per 'additional' student.

122.8 Finance & Premises Matters

122.8.1 **Cost Centre Review July 2020**

In addition to the documentation circulated in advance the meeting, the Finance Lead Governors provided a verbal report on the current budgetary position, noting that governors should be very satisfied with the position; compared to many colleges in the FE sector, the finances are stable and positive.

Governors noted that the cost centre review did not include the LGPS operating charge for the pension fund loss/gain. The cost of college closure 20.03.2020 onwards resulted in reduced income and increased costs totalling £100k, mitigated by a credit received from the AQA examination board for £55k (due to the summer exams not going ahead).

⁴ Lagged funding - funding based on the previous year's census.

A total of £52,158 had been paid out for cancelled trips. £46,842.75 has or is to be recovered either by cash refunds, ABTA backed credit notes (repayable 31/03/21) or insurance claims. Therefore, the variance for Trips (written-off) was £5,315.60.

The cash investments and loans report were noted. The balance sheet shows the cash and bank balances at 31 July 2020 of £3.15m against the budget figure of £3.66m – predominately due to the repayment of the long-term loan. The variance of £509k is mainly due to the early repayment of the loan £498k.

It was noted that although the accounts are as yet unaudited no material changes to the accounts are expected. The College's self-assessed financial health grading remains 'Good'.

122.8.2 Local Government Pension Scheme Report

The operating charge has increased to £525k added to the £1.3m liability gives a total of £1.8m It was noted that as this is an accounting entry it does not alter the College's financial health rating.

122.8.3 DfE 16-19 Tuition Fund⁵

On September 9th the ESFA revised the eligibility criteria re students supported by the 16 -19 tuition fund to '*students who did not receive a grade 5 in their GCSE English or Maths*'.⁶ The College will predominately use the funding to reduce class sizes in English and maths for these students.

122.8.4 Regularity Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire

The Corporation reviewed the requirements within and responses to the Self-assessment Questionnaire (SAQ).

It was noted that for the 2019-2020 year, the ESFA have added an appendix to the SAQ. The supplementary annex has the same status as the Accounts Direction and Post-16 Audit Code of Practice and introduces a number of additional requirements⁷. Its aim is to help the Corporation identify matters arising from the COVID-19 pandemic which may impact on the Corporation's accounts for the year 2019 to 2020.

The Regularity and Propriety Self-Assessment questionnaire (SAQ) and supplementary annex for the 2019-20 year, were approved.

122.9 Strategic Priorities 2019-2020 and 2020 -2021

122.9.1 Governors considered the end of year review of the 2019 -2020 strategic priorities. In response to governor queries the following points were expanded upon:

A governor expressed the view that the College's self assessed grade of 'Outstanding', aligns with the evidence presented. In addition to corporation scrutiny in meetings, Lead governors will be exploring the College's evidence for the grading during their visits to the College over the ensuing year.

122.9.2 Strategic Priorities - 2020/21

⁵ 'The funding is being provided to support small group tuition for 16 to 19 students in English, maths, and other courses where learning has been disrupted. Although the actual tuition does not need to be for GCSE English or maths, the students supported all need to be those who had not achieved grade 5 or above in at least one of those subjects at this level by age 16' <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-16-to-19-tuition-fund>

⁶ We have amended the eligibility criteria in the summary section to state that the students supported by the 16 to 19 tuition fund all need to be those who had not achieved grade 5 or above in English and/or maths

⁷ Compliance with the Audit Code of Practice and SAQ is a condition of the funding agreement.

Governors considered the draft 2020-21 Strategic Priorities, which will be populated with targets and key performance indicators prior to the next meeting.

Action: College

The Assistant Principal (Curriculum and Quality Assurance) reported that achievement of the 2019-2020 Strategic Priorities had been significantly hindered by the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic and therefore many of the priorities and targets had been carried forward to the 2020-2021 year, retaining the thread of maintaining standards and improvements.

In response to governor questions the following points were considered:

Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs): A huge amount of staff time had been expended producing and quality assuring the 2020 Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs). College managers are confident that the CAGs, were an accurate representation of student attainment / quality of education and improvement at the College and that there was no significant grade inflation. The CAGs had also been externally moderated by Six Dimensions before final submission to the DfE.

Pastoral: A governor suggested that in the context of the medium and long-term impact of the pandemic and the rising tide of mental health and other pastoral challenges that students present with, a clearer focus on maintaining the pastoral support areas of the College post Covid, could be expanded upon within priority 3. In this context, a governor also suggested that the mental health and wellbeing of staff and the increased workload for teachers could also be more evident. Governors were assured that these matters will be covered when the priorities are populated for presentation at the next meeting.

Action: College

Staff workload: The Principal reported on the measures taken to reduce staff workload including communication with the ESFA re the very burdensome ILR returns. In the context that senior managers and teaching staff are 'very stretched' and determined to retain their focus on supporting students, the Principal asked for the assistance of the Corporation in reducing bureaucracy, particularly in relation to self-assessment reporting. Governors acknowledged the comments of the Principal and the response of the Chair; 'in the coming months, there will be a need to achieve an appropriate balance. The Corporation will need to receive sufficient information from the College to ensure that it is able to effectively maintain strategic oversight whilst not over burdening senior managers and detracting from their role in looking after the welfare of our staff and students'.

122.9.3 Early SAR Summary

Governors received the Early SAR summary. It was noted that the documentation reflects the latest information available. The summary was deferred for discussion at the next meeting.

Action: All governors/College

122.10 Pastoral Matters

The 2020-21 **child protection policy**, circulated in advance of the meeting was **approved**.

122.11 Governance Matters

The Governor Visit Day scheduled for November 19th has been cancelled. The Clerk will provide governors with reminders of other development opportunities including prior webinars and ETF training modules.

All Corporation meetings will be held on Teams until further notice (expected to include the meeting to be held January 2021).

Date of the next meeting October 19th @ 6.15pm

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 19.00

*These minutes were approved by the Corporation on 19.10.2020
[Minute No. 123.6(i)]*