



THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

**Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 131
18 October 2021**

[Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

Members Present: A Beatty, M Atherton, S Codling, J Tallentire, I Vipond, J Harker (Acting Principal)
H Hallworth, M Hyslop, D Morran, D Stebbings, J Johnson, J Owens,

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

Clerk: T Johnson

The minutes reflect the order of discussion

131.1 Apologies for Absence

131.1 Apologies were received and accepted from governors, J Leslie, M Waring & H Skeggs.

131.2 The Chair informed the meeting that in response to a request from a governor the Clerk had been looking into the options around governors taking a leave of absence for a defined period. Although there is no issue in principle, a formal arrangement would need to be prepared and the impact on quorums, decision making arrangements and reported attendance rates would need to be carefully considered.

131.2 Any Other Business & Chair's Action

131.2.1 No other business was requested.

131.2.2 The Chair reported that he had not been required to implement chair's action since the last meeting.

131.2.3 The Chair reminded those present that action point summaries are shared with governors and managers via SharePoint.

131.3 Declarations of Interest

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

No governor or attendee declared any interests.

131.4 Minutes of Previous Meetings

131.4.1 The minutes of corporation meeting No.130 held on 27 September 2021 were agreed, as a true record of the meeting.

131.4.2 Matters arising

None- all matters arising were identified on the agenda

131.5 Principal's Strategic Matters

131.5.1 Governors considered the report, prepared by the Acting Principal, including detail of the enduring impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on teaching & learning, staff and student wellbeing and the impact on the wider community.

The Acting Principal updated governors on the following matters:

131.5.2 **College operational arrangements:** The phase 3 timetable arrangements, with the full range of additional studies and extra-curricular activities, continues to operate well. However, the negative impacts of Covid on the current Year 12 cohort of students is very apparent. In addition to the fundamental lost learning, broader issues such as skills deficits, due to minimal student/teacher face to face contact during the 2020/2021 year, has required college staff to 'upskill' students at pace e.g. how to sit formal assessments and examinations. In all aspects of college life, student welfare issues remain significant with teachers being required to deal with an increased number of students presenting with learning support and mental health needs.

131.5.3 **Appeals:** only 7 stage 2 appeals for review of grades awarded in summer were received by the September deadline

131.5.4 **2021/2022 qualifications:** Ofqual has published their plans for the award of qualifications in summer 2022. They confirm that assessments will be modified in response to the disruption to education caused by the coronavirus pandemic. Grading will be adjusted for GCSE, AS and A levels back down to 2019 levels in a stepped approach over 2 years (half way between 20121 and 2019 in summer 2022). Therefore, in 2022 the College's overall grades should marginally increase compared to the 2021 grades as the CAG/TAG methodology adopted by the College used 2019 data as a benchmark as required by DfE/Ofqual.

As usual students are sitting formal assessments, at key points, to record and monitor their progress. These assessments will also be used in the event that the DfE deploy their 'Plan B /Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) arrangements, should examinations be disrupted in summer 2022.

17.40 S Codling joined the meeting

131.5.5 **Resourcing- Income & Costs:** The Comprehensive Spending Review announcements will be critical to the College's medium-term planning.

If the ESFA apply the same methodology for in year growth funding as for the 2020/21 year, the College can expect to receive £48k funding during the year. The budget reflects the anticipated funding and the Teachers' Pension grant is to continue to end July 2022. Additional funding amounting to £15K is expected for Taking Teaching Further, lateral low testing grants and HLN administration.

However, these positives are off set against several additional costs due to accommodation and resource repairs and upgrades, teaching staff pay increases (support staff negotiations are ongoing), increases to National Insurance employer contributions and the requirement for matched funding for the Performance Studio heating/plumbing replacement.

131.5.6 **Sustainability:** The College is currently investigating the provision of electric car charging points at the bottom of the site for which a grant may be possible. The ESFA Condition Survey Team have highlighted several areas where sustainable improvements could be made, including boiler replacements, double glazing and LED

lighting. Bids including a decarbonisation bid, are being prepared by Ingleton Wood. Match funding will be required for most of projects.

- 131.5.7 The new education secretary has stated his intentions to 'bring forward a white paper outlining plans to tackle innumeracy and illiteracy and drive-up standards'. A fundamental part of this will be the delivery of 500,000 teacher training opportunities, and a roll out of the existing revamped [National Professional Qualifications](#) programme and at post-16 level the government are funding colleges to deliver a further 2 million courses, 'with the aim of T Levels becoming as famous as A Levels'¹.

7.47pm J Tallentire joined the meeting

- 131.5.8 **A governor asked**; whether in relation to the rise in numbers of persons with Covid in the local area this had been replicated within the staff or student body. The Acting Principal was pleased to report that since September the numbers reporting Covid have decreased and the College had not witnessed any internal spread. Arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the College's open evenings can go ahead in person, and in a way in which both staff and visitors feel safe. Unfortunately, this has included reducing the number of student helpers that would normally support the evenings.

Strategic Planning

- 131.5.9 The Acting Principal introduced the strategic headline summary of the issues that need to be taken into account when reviewing the medium (3-5 years) and long term (5-10 years)² strategic plans for the College. Governors noted that senior staff had been working to identify the likely growth in student numbers in 2022/23 and beyond and what options might be available to accommodate further growth using existing accommodation [see strategy paper and minute no. ...]

The Acting Principal asked governors to consider the recommendations within the report regarding the increase to the September 2022 student enrolment numbers, advising that the increasing student numbers by 100 could be accommodated by adjusting existing college frameworks. It was agreed that governors would give the recommendation further consideration during the governor visit day planned for November 12th with a final decision made at the next meeting.

Action: Governors

- 131.5.10 **Governors indicated** that there is a vast array of positive and negative issues that need to be taken into account when considering the longer-term strategic plan for the College. Foremost, will be the fulfilment of the mission in the context of meeting the needs of current and future students, staff and members of the local community. Governors concurred that strategic plans must be realistic, flexible and where appropriate costed.
- 131.5.11 **Governors asked**, in the context that the current plan prescribes a maximum capacity of 3,500 students, whether there would be other institutions prepared to take up the extra demand, if the college did not expand beyond 3,500 students. A governor expressed concern regarding the extent to which other the grammar schools in the local area could expand their sixth form provision if the College were not able to meet the demand for A Level places.

The Acting Principal responded, that potentially any school could expand having first obtained the required funding. However, there are many variables impacting the decision to expand such as the numbers of students wishing to study A Levels against

¹ Education Secretary's speech at the Conservatory Part Conference in Manchester

² Point at which the demographic increase in the number of 16 year olds locally is set to end

a backdrop of T Levels and apprenticeships, the delay of withdrawal of applied general qualifications, and the potential for more students needing to take an Advanced Foundation Programme. The Acting Principal also advised governors that bidding for expansion funding or funding for new builds, is not currently an option for the College, due to alternate government priorities. The SFCA are lobbying the DfE with the view that capital expenditure would be better invested in existing Sixth Form College's that have the space to expand alongside demonstrable student outcomes and success, than investing in new builds.

Further updates on the withdrawal of Applied General courses and capacity funding will be given at the next meeting.

Action: College

131.5.12 **A governor advised** that in the context that the current estates strategy does not look beyond maintenance planning, an urgent decision on expansion is required in order that where applicable, planning consent and/or building regulations for new builds or site changes can be obtained and, in the context, that schedules are constrained in terms of when site work can be undertaken.

131.5.13 **A governor suggested** that the board needed to be very clear about what demographic area the college/mission is serving, alongside the variables of the level of student demand (although this may be impossible to accurately predict). Working with a clear but flexible strategy will provide an opportunity to look at the future and reflect facts. New builds or restructure accommodation is a long-term strategy whereas, if the increased demand is only for a set period, the College may be better served by rented accommodation providing the flexibility required.

In response the Assistant Principal (Admissions), reported that as numbers rise, students who may be refused a place under the current admissions policy, are unlikely to be local students served by the College's current mission. If the College became oversubscribed those affected, would be the students making the commitment to travel to the college as their aspirational choice.

131.5.14 **A governor requested** that information on the flexibility available within the existing accommodation e.g. room utilisation and capacity of non-teaching areas and the impact of alternative timetables/blocking be provided in advance, to fully informing strategic discussions around the potential to admit above 3,500 students.

131.5.15 **A governor asked** the College to comment on other options considered to manage an increased number of students such as; expanding the current college day and building on the positive aspects of the teaching and learning experience during the pandemic, including; a blended/hybrid delivery model and pre-recorded, teaching, thereby reducing time spent onsite and increasing the capacity to accommodate additional students.

In response, the Assistant Principal (Examinations) explained, that the College does not have the autonomy to implement a blended delivery model as the current governments' requirement is for face to face teaching.

The staff governor provided examples of how staff have sought to maximise teaching and learning including, where appropriate providing a pre-recorded lecture in advance so that the face to face teaching can be used for maximum benefit.

The Assistant Principal (Pastoral), reminded governors that because 16-18 education is poorly funded students all ready have less contact time with teachers than in most other countries and due to funding the timetable/blocks had already been reduced, with most students now studying 3 A Levels. Therefore, any model that gave students half of the current contact time or less, would seriously damage the student experience and have a detrimental impact on the 'college community'. The Assistant Principal

(Performance and Quality) provided information on that the government's funding rules in relation to planned learning hours. At present this is set at 540 hours of face to face teaching / learning per student per year. All students at the College all meet this requirement with many receiving 600 hours or more. However, hours over the 540 are unfunded.

The Assistant Principal (Admissions) provided governors with examples of feedback from students demonstrating how they had felt about their teaching and learning experience during Covid. The majority of students had indicated that they prefer a full-time traditional experience, rather than a part time and/or a blended learning approach. Additionally, it is clear from discussions in feeder secondary schools and with other stakeholders that students are attracted by the full-time experience that the College offers.

131.5.16 Governors agreed that there is a pressing need for detailed consideration of the strategic direction of the College, incorporating the annual review of the mission and vision.

131.5.17 The Chair confirmed that the recommendations within the report regarding the September 2022 student enrolment numbers, would be considered further following the strategic planning session scheduled as part of the November governor visit and development day. During this session the content of the College's strategic paper, alongside the variables will be explored in greater detail. Subsequently, volunteers will be sought to form a working group tasked with a full review of the strategic plan.

Action: governors/Clerk

131.5.18 The strategy lead governor reiterated the importance of all governors and senior managers engaging with the review process and being provided with ample opportunities to input and comment.

131.6 Strategic Plan and Priorities

Strategic discussion re overall effectiveness and 2021-2022 strategic priorities

131.6.1 The Assistant Principal (Performance & Quality) presented the early SAR summary: review & discussion of previous years Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) targets and achievements in context of Strategic Priorities. The Assistant Principal, provided a verbal overview of the headline summary, received in advance of the meeting, reminding those present that due to the pandemic, there are no external quantitative and qualitative benchmarks and key guidelines.

In response to governor questions the following points were expanded upon:

131.6.2 Overall the College is confident that the government's plans for the 2022 examinations and redressing any grade inflation that may have occurred in the school and college sectors, will show the College in a very good light. The College's 2020 and 2021 results were in line with the 2017 & 2019 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). In early 2020 evidence was showing that many departments had already made substantial improvements. The College is therefore confident that if the government were to 'claw back' any over inflation, the College would not see a dramatic change in its grade allocations and overall student outcomes. Governors were reminded that the full detail will be included in the Cross-College SAR, which will reflect the 2020-2021 strategic priorities feedback and further analysis of data showing how the 2020-21 Quality Improvement Plan was met.

- 131.6.3 The Assistant Principal explained the importance of including within the monitoring and review summary, the Covid context and reference to the amount of government vacillation and changes to statutory and advisory guidance that the college, its staff and students had been required to react to, often at very short notice.
- 131.6.4 **A governor asked for clarity** regarding the target for improved GCSE results in the context that the English & Maths GCSE results were already very good. The Assistant Principal highlighted those GCSEs where further improvements could be made and also explained how, for example, the achievement rate (retention) impacts a departments' overall outcomes.
- 131.6.5 One of the lead governors for curriculum offer and educational quality suggested that the critical areas for consideration in the forthcoming year will be the assessment strategy and a focus on individual student support, both academic and pastoral. Additionally, in relation to staff and student surveys, governors need to be assured that the data is valid i.e. enough responses are obtained to make analysis statistically valid before results from surveys are used to inform critical thinking.
- 131.6.6 The **Chair provided** an overview for new governors of the expectations of Ofsted in relation to governor knowledge of the College's strengths and areas of improvements. Highlighting that the SAR and QIP are key sources of this information. The Assistant Principal advised governors that Ofsted is expected to visit until 2024/25.
- 131.6.7 **A governor expressed concern** that the grade inflation reported within the private school sector, had resulted in a negative impact on the higher education opportunities available to the College's students, as demonstrated by a drop of 4% in the numbers of students securing and accepting university offers.
- The Assistant Principal responded by; providing background information on the cohort including the context that the cohort had been larger than the historical norm and elucidating that the drop from 95% - 91% referred to the percentage of those that had applied in 2020 and highlighting that the data reflects student choices e.g. some students applied for university places but ultimately took up the offer of degree apprenticeship or other pathways outside of the UCAS scheme.
- 131.6.8 **A governor asked**, in the context of Ofsted inspections focussing on safeguarding; if it is clear within the document about what the college does, what it is aiming for and any areas of focus or improvement, thereby demonstrating an awareness and understanding and the high priority that the college and the board give to safeguarding. In response the Assistant Principal referenced the area in the report showing physical health & wellbeing and reported on the personal development programme that had been delivered during Covid and the Assistant Principal (pastoral) highlighted the peer on peer staff training and feedback that will feed into the student personal development and tutorial programme. [see also pastoral report 131.7.2]
- 131.6.9 **The Chair suggested** that in the context that Ofsted will grade safeguarding as effective or not effective, the message within the narrative should be strong and loud.
- It was noted that departmental headline SARS will be circulated to governors after the meeting.
- Action: College/Clerk**
- 131.6.10 The Chair led thanks to the Assistant Principal for the summary report and to all staff for the standard of teaching, learning and pastoral support that was maintained over the year in very difficult circumstances.

131.7 Cross College Operational & Statutory Reports

131.7.1 Finance

Funding Updates: there were no updates to report [see minute 131.5.5/6]

Audit Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Annex B: The Chair of the Audit committee provided an overview of the documents and the revisions made since the last meeting. In future years the audit committee will consider the responses to the SAQ prior to submission at the relevant corporation meeting.

A governor queried the status of the anti-fraud strategy. The Clerk confirmed the agreement that treasury management policies were being developed as the priority piece after which, the anti-fraud strategy will be finalised.³

The Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire and Annex B were unanimously approved.

131.7.2 Pastoral

The Assistant Principal (Pastoral) provided a verbal update on pastoral and safeguarding matters, including an update on how relevant college staff stay up-to-date with current and emerging Prevent related matters.

Prevent: light of the recent, tragic events in Southend, **a governor raised a query** regarding the flow of information between schools and colleges and asked how the College would be informed if a student had been flagged as a cause for concern under the Prevent strategy prior to joining the College⁴ The Assistant Principal responded, by explaining that despite there being no issues within the College, there is a general acceptance (as there is in all colleges) that a situation could occur and therefore all staff remain vigilant. Inter-agency working and the detail contained within safeguarding files, received from schools and the collaborative work with other institutions would flag if a student had previously been a cause for concern. Ordinarily only a handful of files show that a student has demonstrated intolerant views such as making homophobic or racist comments or looking a guns using school IT facilities.

Peer on Peer Abuse: **A governor enquired** whether peer on peer abuse tutorial materials will cover teaching around misogynistic incels? The Assistant Principal explained that at present the materials are draft pending student input but that this suggestion would be worked into the materials, at present the tutorial materials are in draft pending student input

Harmful sexual behaviours: Over 200 members of staff have completed the online training, the next step is to hold student forums. Ofsted had indicated they were seeking schools who were willing to hold single sex forums. However, the College's student body is more diverse than male/female and therefore the College will be having 3 forums including 1 forum for trans, nonbinary and LGBT students in recognition that these students can face very specific and different issues relating to harmful sexual behaviours and sexual harassment etc. It is hoped that the forums will provide insights into the kind of issues that are concerning students and will further inform tutorial materials. [See also minute 131.7.3 re student led support group]

Mental health: **In response to governor questions** regarding the pressures on staff. The Assistant Principal explained that every teacher is dealing with higher levels of mental health difficulties that usual. Almost all teachers have learnt how to deal with panic

³ After the meeting it was clarified that the strategy was being developed by governors and will be presented at the next Audit Committee meeting

⁴ The aim of the Prevent strategy is to reduce the threat to the UK from terrorism by stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. In the Act this has simply been expressed as the need to "prevent people from being drawn into terrorism".

attacks. Using the mental health first aiders to provide time out for students, is being explored as an additional resource.

In response to the number of students presenting with the highest level of mental health difficulties, [governors asked](#) whether data was shared with other relevant institutions in the Colchester and Essex areas and subsequently whether the data showed the college to be an outlier.

[See also confidential minute 131.7.2]

A [governor queried](#) how the College's e-safety/ online student training supports students' mental health and whether online safety advice is given to parents.

The Assistant Principal responded, highlighting that many students now have two parts to their lives; IRL (In Real Life) and online. For the benefit of new governors, the Assistant Principal described the safeguards that are in place to prevent students from accessing inappropriate material while on site and the safeguarding process that follows when the College's SmoothWall picks up that a student has, for example, been looking at a site dealing with anorexia.

131.7.3 Student Governor Report

The Chair of the Student Council provided an overview of the activities of the College council, including progress made on driving forward the three main targets. Governors were pleased to note that the winter ball is sold out and the student council committees are all running and meeting regularly with many committees being oversubscribed. The Council executive are currently considering the suggestions made by the elected tutor representatives during the first meeting of the academic year. The most prominent issues included: the catering of dietary requirements (particularly those who have a gluten intolerance and catering for different worldwide cuisines); increasing seating capacity during lesson times for those who have free periods and increasing LGBT bathroom inclusivity, with more access to gender neutral toilets and having sanitary bins in male toilets to cater for transgender men.

With the support of the College, a student-based support group, for survivors of domestic and sexual abuse has been established.

131.7.4 Cross College

[Social media/communications working group](#): The Assistant Principal (Admissions & Marketing) informed governors that a meeting with staff governors had taken place and a meeting with the relevant community governor will be arranged to discuss matters further.

The staff governor reported on the initiative to create a staff Instagram user group, set up to review what works well and to develop common standards and policies. An update on any further activities of the working group will be given at the next meeting.

Action: Governors

[GDPR & Freedom of Information](#): the HR Manager reported on the compulsory GDPR INSET for staff and reported that the number of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests received during the academic year 2020/21 was very low. All were answered appropriately and within the required timescales.

[Quality of Teaching & Learning](#): the Quality of Teaching & Learning Report incl. lesson observation summary and effectiveness of improvement measures was deferred to the next meeting.

The Acting Principal reported that governors had been provided with a range of updates at various points during the pandemic, these updates covered the changes

and adjustments that staff were required to make to teaching and learning and the subsequent analysis and reporting of the impact of the changes and adjustments, as requested by governors.

The Assistant Principal (Curriculum & Staff Development) reported that the Central observation group (COGS) has returned to the pre-pandemic systems and are currently in the process of observing colleagues.

131.7.5 Personnel

Human Resources Strategic Summary: the Human Resources (HR) Manager presented the annual report which included an overview of the impact of Coronavirus (Covid19) on resources, working practices, staff workload, stress and staff morale during the academic year.

Areas of strength and areas for improvement were identified in six key areas:

- retention and recruitment
- training and development
- performance management
- employee wellbeing/engagement
- remuneration.
- equality and diversity

There were no questions or matters arising from the report.

The Chair thanked the HR manager for the report and the accompanying summary.

Staff Code of Conduct: governors were advised that the staff code of conduct will be deferred.

Teacher's Salary Policy: the policy was unanimously agreed

Staff Disciplinary Procedures: It was agreed that the revisions to the updated staff disciplinary procedures will be made and subsequently circulated to governors via email for approval.

Governors were asked to send any questions or comments on the draft policy to the clerk in advance of circulation of the policy for approval.

Staff Survey: the Acting Principal informed the meeting that in the context of the abnormal circumstances of the pandemic, the staff survey had been constructed differently this year with an emphasis on obtaining an understanding of how staff felt they were coping at work and whether they felt sufficiently supported by the College. Although there had been a very low response rate, the results had been used to inform the actions implemented by the College to improve staff welfare, this has included further highlighting the support mechanisms available both in college and externally, including the welfare assistance programme.

The HR Manager reported that one of the staff induction days, is now focussed on wellbeing and welfare, and ensuring that the new members of staff are aware of the sources of support available.

19.27 At this point observers were invited to leave the meeting. All observers and students left the meeting

131.8 Governance Matters 2021/22

131.8.1 Remuneration Committee

The Minutes of the meeting No.4 held on September 17th 2021 were noted.

Matters Arising: The Chair reported that the SFCA workforce survey had been published and made available to governors.

The annual report of the Remuneration Committee was considered. There were no questions and no matters arising. It was agreed that the entirety of the report should be published as the Corporation's annual remuneration statement.

Action: Clerk

131.8.2 Search and Governance Committee

Standing Orders: The recommendation of the Search and Governance committee to approve the revisions to the Standing Orders was unanimously approved.

Action: Clerk

Terms of Office: A governor suggested, that further discussion should be held regarding the issue of placing restrictions on the number of terms a governor can serve, as mentioned in the Remuneration committee minutes and at the last meeting.

Action: Governors

131.8.3 Appointment of Community Governors

The recommendation of the Search and Governance committee to appoint Eve Calderbank as a community governor for a period of 4 years was unanimously agreed.

The recommendation of the Search and Governance committee to appoint Bingxing Liu as a community governor for a period of 4 years was unanimously agreed.

In accordance with the Corporation's agreed recruitment procedures the term of office of the new appointees will commence on the date that DBS clearance is received.

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

131.9 Confidential Matters

131.9.1 Confidential minutes of meeting No.128 held 12.05.2021 were unanimously approved.

131.9.2 The Chair provided a verbal report on the performance management outcomes for senior post holders (Principal and Clerk). The recommendations of the Remuneration Committee were approved. [See confidential minutes 131.9.2]

Action: Chair

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting at 19.40

*These minutes were approved by the Corporation on 13.12.2021
[Minute No. 132.4]*
