



## THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE, COLCHESTER

### Minutes of Corporation Meeting No. 132

13 December 2021

[Virtual Meeting held via Microsoft Teams]

Chair: K Finnigan

Members Present: A Beatty, M Atherton, S Codling, J Tallentire, I Vipond, I MacNaughton, N Gerrard, M Waring, J Leslie, J Tallentire, H Hallworth, M Hyslop, D Morran, D Stebbings, J Johnson, J Owens, E Calderbank

In Attendance: Assistant Principals: J Cadman, A Johnson, G Rayner, S Townshend, J Harker, E Gibson (Finance Manager) O Pearson (Vice Chair of the Student Council), A Banarse (Chair of the Student Council), T O'Connor (Corporate Services Partner, Scrutton Bland LLP)

Clerk: A Johnson

*The minutes reflect the order of discussion*

#### **132.1 Apologies for absence**

In the absence of T. Johnson, Clerk to the Corporation, A Johnson was appointed Clerk for the duration of the meeting.

None were reported

The Chair welcomed the new Chair and Vice Chair of the Student Council, a new Community Governor and a representative from the External Auditors (Scrutton Bland)

A note of thanks to the outgoing Student Governors and a Community Governor (recognising their work particularly on remuneration)

#### **132.2 Any other business – None.**

#### **132.3 Declaration of interests**

None declared

#### **132.4 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of corporation meeting No. 130 held on 18 October 2021 were agreed, as a true record of the meeting.

Matters arising

None - all matters arising were identified on the agenda

#### **132.5 At this point it was agreed to discuss agenda item 132.8(i) Audit matters**

The Post 16 ACOP requires Audit requirements are such that there is now a requirement for external auditors to report their findings directly to the Corporation.

The Audit Partner (Scrutton Bland) reported that there were no significant issues arising from the audits – clean audit opinion and clean accounts.

Findings: No procedural concerns – however, the College needs to be mindful of Fraud:

- Cyber risk – cyber security
- General Fraud – normal fraud linked to procurement etc.

Increases observed generally during Covid. Need for robust systems/ training, penetration testing.

Question from a governor – can the College do more?

Heavy investment in cyber security, continuing focus and training (including basic training – not to click links, etc)

The Principal informed the meeting of College's 2021 Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation (one of the first colleges in the country) and IT department's constant vigilance to possible cyber-attacks.

The Finance Manager reported that the finance team undertake regular fraud webinars with Lloyds Bank and that other training materials and resource are being researched.

The Acting Principal outlined to Governors that an all staff training programme is to be rolled out.

A governor and the Chair passed on congratulations to the finance team for the clean audit and the team were thanked for their audit work. The Audit Partner was also thanked for their work.

## 132.6 Student Reports

### (i) Annual Report from the Student Council

The outgoing Chair of the College Council outlined the work of the Council, their goals and achievements.

Ongoing issues:

- Restructuring of the College day to finish 5 minutes earlier
- Improve inefficiencies
- Water fountains to be located on floors 3&4 South Site
- Further improvements in the refectory to meet a wider range of dietary requirements
- Greater access to Desk top computers outside of lesson times

The Acting Principal responded:

- The College day may need to be restructured, possibly even slightly lengthened, in the near future given the Governments suggestion/ requirement for another 40 hours of learning to be added back to students' programmes of study (approx. 1 hr per week). We are awaiting detail from the Government.
- The catering manager and staff are working hard respond to a wide variety of dietary requirements and are always open to suggestions
- Card vending machines may not be possible given high installation and running costs
- The College is acutely aware of pressures on study space and PC access – but does have a stock of loan laptops (for students with need). Many students bring in their own devices. Over the summer the Foyer in the IT Centre will be equipped with PC stations to expand capacity.

A Governor reported that in conversation with students on the Governor visit day issues raised included:

- Availability of student study space
- Use of cheques by College
- Other finance and general admin e.g. need for Yr. 2 students to complete reenrolment paperwork

The Vice Chair of the College Council reiterated the work of the Executive in rekindling a student identity and student engagement (particularly proud of the Winter Prom success). The Chair thanked the outgoing student governors for their work and initiated a round of applause for their excellent work.

**(ii) To appoint the new student governors for a term of 1 year commencing 01.01.2022**

The Chair reported that prior to the meeting the Clerk had confirmed that declarations of eligibility had been received. A. Banarse, Chair of the student council and O. Pearson, Vice Chair of the student council, were appointed student governors for a term of one year commencing 01.01.2022

## **132.7 Principal's Strategic Matters**

(i) The third, autumn term report of the Acting Principal was received and discussed

In addition to the report the Acting Principal updated governors on:

- Covid cases in College – as of 13 December 2021 – College has 35 positive cases (including 2 staff members) – numbers were higher last week and down again this. College operations however – generally unaffected.
- Year 2 mocks scheduled for January 6 – 14<sup>th</sup>
- We will look out for changes to government guidance over the Christmas vacation and may need to ask for governor approval of College management responses/ decisions
- Aware of changing national and local picture re Covid - College will be holding vaccination sessions on 15 & 16 December – 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and booster jabs.
- From 13 December – government guidance for schools and colleges remains unchanged – mitigations – wearing masks in communal areas. However, College has taken the decision to ask everyone to mask up in all areas – to preserve Christmas – appreciating that this cannot be mandatory
- College has received the report from the ESFA/ FEC – following the **recent** Strategic Conversation that took place (remotely) on 2 December.
  - The College in the meeting emphasised unfair funding to the SFC sector - recurrent and capital including the Government use of a one year time lag model that acts perniciously when there are periods of demographic and enrolment growth.
  - Government committed to growth funding but important detail/clarity still needed.
  - However, College is considered to be financially secure and judged to be doing its best.
  - Support was offered by the Commissioning Group re Governance support.
  - Going forward – plan for similar annual conversations
  - The area ESFA representative was keen to visit College to consider the estates plans and strategies for growth.
  - The Chair reported that the meeting had been a genuine dialogue
- There is a general push from Government for more 16-18 capital support – but currently favouring vocational/skills-based work/courses (via 16-18 Expansion Fund).
- The Secretary of State for Education has indicated that further change is possible
- College is having to continue to work in very challenging and changing times

### **Questions and responses from Governors:**

In relation to the increase in UCAS applications what proportion of the cohort does this represent?

- The increase in applications is possibly related to student perceptions of lack of realistic alternatives e.g. jobs with training
- Approximately 80% of the cohort go on to HE (not all direct entry)

The College stance on masks was welcomed by the student governors.

Questions about next terms arrangements and the possibility of a return to changed teaching arrangements e.g. Phase 1

- Currently no changes planned – Government guidance is for the requirement of face to face in person teaching
- Also, situation changed from last year – staff and students vaccinated – a subtle change.

### **(ii) To receive and discuss the Acting Principal's Annual Report**

The Chair commended the report as thorough, with a clear context and comprehensive picture of performance – an excellent report.

Key strengths and areas for improvement are outlined in the narrative (first 6 pages) and the explanatory notes give an overview of abnormal circumstances and the inherent difficulties with benchmarking measures on a 3-year trend.

Governors were reminded of the trend in finance per head of student – which has meant that the College over time has been forced into making efficiencies and becoming more effective and optimise economies of scale opportunities.

Other governors endorsed the report.

There was a suggestion that it could have highlighted and recognised more strongly the work of Senior Staff and other staff.

Under the circumstances, the exceptional College achievements are noteworthy and praise should be offered to all.

An observation was made of the dilemma/dichotomy of continuing to make sustained improvement against a background of diminishing resource funding – can this trend continue?

The Principal and Acting Principal outlined that the aim of the College is still to return to Ofsted outstanding. The College is clearly on the right trajectory and better placed within the new EIF.

The paradox and dilemma of declining resources and maintaining quality has been on the governments' agenda since 2016. There are Government concerns about the declining financial health in the FE sector but there are currently no central resources being made available to fix it! The report illustrates a very strong performance against significant financial constraints.

## **132.8 Strategic Plans and Priorities**

**(i) Cross-college and departmental SAR 2020-2021 and QIP 2021-2022** [deferred to January 2022]

**(ii) To receive & discuss the 2020-2021 headline departmental self-assessments**

No questions or comments from governors – the Assistant Principal (Quality) therefore commended the reports as a worthwhile read to gain an appreciation of the range of challenges faced by different departments and curriculum areas, their relative successes and plans to sustain improvements.

## **132.9 Operational and Statutory Reports**

### **(i) Audit**

(a) The Audit Committee's Annual Report for the 2020/21 year was received

The Chair of Audit reiterated the clean audit sign off

Key features of the annual report:

- o The committee has self-assessed as good
- o Decision for 3 meetings per year

- Changed format for the risk register – Vice Chair and Assistant Principal (Risk) working on documents which will have a stronger focus on the Governors Strategic overview.

(b) To receive, discuss & approve the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31st July 2021

The Chair of audit thanked the Finance Manager and the Finance Team for their work on producing the report – given pressures of audit and staff absences.

**Approved**

(c) To receive, discuss & approve the reconciliation of Financial Statements to Management Accounts

The Finance Manager highlighted differences between the July cost centre review and the figures in the report. i.e. in July £16k of income was realised and the impact of the LPGS accounting measures (a gain in 2020/21) - but as reported in September.

**Approved**

### **Cross college reports by lead Governors**

#### **(ii) Finance**

To receive and approve the Treasury Management Policy

**Approved**

The lead Governor highlighted clause 3 of the policy – opening of an account with an alternative bank and to keep £1m as security – cover for cyber-attacks, etc – mitigation of risk. This is a new policy which is likely to evolve over time.

The lead offered thanks to the Finance Manager and other Governors for their keen eyes and input.

#### **(iii) Curriculum Offer & Educational Quality**

(a) Teaching & Learning Self Assessment Review (SAR)

The lead governor referred to a useful part day spent in College with the Chair and the APs Curriculum and Quality.

The style of the report was commended – challenging targets and forward thinking (given current Covid circumstances).

The (new) Assistant Principal (AP) Teaching and Learning, thanked the AP (Quality) and Acting Principal for their input in reflecting on targets for the previous year. He commented on the how the outcomes clearly reflect on the resilience and brilliance of staff at College. The fact that College received no challenges to the TAGs/ CAGs grades submitted from Awarding Bodes or Ofqual is again indicative of the skill and professionalism of staff.

Retention of the Teaching and Learning Group through lockdown was paramount in promoting excellence in teaching and learning.

The report was endorsed by the staff governor in terms of targets for capturing the best practice from remote and active learning.

A governor asked questions about some of the terminology used around skills strategies/ dual coding, etc. The AP explained that these centre around retrieval strategies for accessing prior learning, improving and developing student's exam skills and technique.

In terms of educational quality, the lead governor commended the College Assessment Strategy to all governors.

*The AP curriculum to distribute the paper and also present an outline at the January meeting.*

**Action: College /Clerk**

b) To receive & discuss the Staff Development SAR

The AP indicated that the SAR reflects the effort made cross-college during the pandemic. A focus on staff wellbeing (also part of a national conversation). The SAR reflected on the importance of face to face delivery but built on outcomes from remote learning and the strategic link with student progression.

The Principal referred to the College's outstanding HESA data – a clear and strong indicator of College's role and success in preparing young people for their next steps and life beyond college.

#### **(iv) Health and Safety**

To receive & discuss the Health & Safety report for the 2020-2021 year

The AP (Health and Safety) reported that the main, ongoing challenge is Covid

Other developments:

- Appointment of a Health and Safety Officer
- Introduction of lone worker tracking systems
- Department risk assessments
- Capital bids e.g. Fire doors
- Other operational activities

A governor asked a follow up question regarding the reporting of an incident involving lighter fuel – querying College approach to bringing flammable materials onto College premises.

#### **(v) Pastoral**

**(a) Protection from Bullying and Harassment policy** -introduced by the AP Pastoral

Background:

- A student policy
- Initiated by the College E&D coordinator
- Reviewed by other parties including the Chair of the College Council and feedback incorporated
- Staff policy updated last year

Governor feedback/ observations:

- Generally, an extremely comprehensive policy
- There could be greater emphasis on political and religious aspects (footnotes)
- Clearer use of 'protected characteristics' terminology
- Opportunity to address freedom of speech issues
- Need for clearer outlines of the process and complaints procedure
- Suggestion that the policy could be reviewed more widely by different groups of students e.g. a female view?

The AP indicated that the policy dovetails with other policies e.g. E&D and Harmful Sexual Behaviours. In terms of detail the important work of the policy is its realisation through tutorial activities and student and staff relationships (Personal and Senior Tutors) – promoting a culture where students feel able to report and have confidence that they will be heard and action taken. Consensus from governors was to defer the policy to the next meeting – giving governors the opportunity to explore the policy's relationship with others and for further work to be undertaken by the College.

**Action governors /college**

#### **(b) Safeguarding update**

The AP pastoral reported an increasing trend of reporting of harmful sexual behaviours (encouraged by movements such as 'Everyone's Invited')

College currently dealing with 3 cases of sexual assault – happened at parties – 1 case involving the police.

Accusations of sexual harassment at College are being addressed/ dealt with through College disciplinary policies.

Forums discussing harmful sexual behaviours have taken place. Notes from the meetings highlighted levels of concerns and an acknowledgement that there is an understanding of where and how to report concerns. Universally reports from the groups indicate that the situation/ incidence was much worse at school. Students reporting that the low-level harassment often a feature of schools is not experienced at the College.

#### **(vi) Personnel**

Staff Code of Conduct – deferred to the next meeting

Disciplinary policy – deferred to the next meeting

**Action: College**

### **132.10 Governance Matters**

#### **(i) Search & Governance Committee**

a) Minutes of the meeting held 08.10.2021 and the self-assessment benchmarking reports (supporting documents available to governors via SharePoint from 02.10.2020 including Code of Good Governance and efficiency & performance benchmarking)

The Chair reported that the first of the 3 yearly external reviews was anticipated for early 2023  
No further comments.

b) The key performance indicator targets for 2021-2022 were **approved**

c) The vice chair's role descriptor was **approved**

d) Search and Governance and Remuneration committees' membership

The following governors were appointed:

Search and Governance Committee – J Tallentire and S Codling

Remuneration Committee – S Codling

#### **(ii) Governor Visit Day November 2021**

The Chair reported that the day had presented an excellent opportunity to meet with students and teaching colleagues.

#### **(iii) Strategic planning working group**

The terms of reference for the Strategic planning working group were **agreed**

The Strategy Lead Governor indicated that the working group would have their first report by Easter 2022. Agreed that the Principal and the Chair should join the group – but not initially.

Areas of exploration include:

- The role of technology
- Student numbers/ growth
- Accommodation
- The student experience

Senior Management representation from the College to include the APs for Curriculum and Pastoral.

The lead governor reiterated that all governors and senior staff should feel able to contribute and that the group needs to be inclusive.

Question from governor unable to attend the College visit day – could outcomes/ ideas be shared more widely?

Suggestion that the terms of reference for the working group need to be clearer and developed in consultation with the Governing Body<sup>1</sup>

#### Chair's Closing remarks

The Governing Body were wished a Merry Christmas

The Chair offered thanks to Governors for their work. Also, to the Acting Principal and the Senior Team for their work and welcomed back the Principal.

The Principal reminded governors that the Acting Principal would be retiring at the end of term having already delayed their retirement twice (2020 and 2021). The Acting Principal has been at the College since 1987 (its inception) has given fantastic service. She was thanked for her outstanding service.

The Acting Principal addressed personal thanks to a number of key governors stating that it had been a privilege to look after the College and thanked Senior Managers and other staff for their efforts in ensuring nothing went wrong.

At this point observers, students and staff governors left the meeting

#### **Part B Confidential Matters**

##### **132.11 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The confidential minutes of meeting No.131 held on 18th October 2021 were approved as a true record.

##### **132.12 Operational and Statutory Reports**

###### **Remuneration Committee**

See confidential minutes No.132

There being no other business the Chair closed Part A of the meeting

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*These minutes were approved by the Corporation on 24.02 2022*

*Minute No.133.4(i)*

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<sup>1</sup> Terms of reference are an agenda item at governing body meetings to allow governors to discuss and shape the terms of reference.