

## CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

### Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Monday 29 January 2024 at 5pm via Teams

#### PRESENT

Mr Mike Hastings - Chair	Mr Mal Cowgill – Principal and CEO
Ms Ioana Axinte - from 5.10pm	Mr Simon Evans
Ms Dionne Barrett – from 6.05pm	Mr Ian Gardner
Mr John Bradford	Ms Wendy Harris
Ms Jane Carter	Mr Darren Shaw
Mr Sam Duru	Mr Scott Thompson – from 5.05pm
Mr Trevor Dutton	

#### IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs Alison Buick	Head of Governance
Mr Paul Davies	Interim Director of Finance
Mr Mike Dixon	Assistant Principal
Mrs Louise Fall	Deputy Principal
Mr Peter Merry	Deputy Chief Executive
Ms Lynn Parker	Assistant Principal

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Governors for attending.

#### **36/24 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)**

Apologies were received from Mrs Amanda Tomlinson, Mr Mark Taylor and Ms Hshaana Knight.

There were no declarations of interest in any agenda items.

#### **37/24 MINUTES (ITEM 2)**

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2023 be **approved**.

#### **38/24 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS (ITEM 3)**

Governors reviewed the actions from the previous meeting and noted the following:

- The Principal was continuing to discuss the Anchor Group activities with other stakeholders. A meeting was scheduled with Mr Evans later in the week.
- Destinations data was still being collated and would be brought to a future meeting.
- The link to the Express and Star article had been provided as agreed.

#### **39/24 CHAIR'S ACTIONS (ITEM 4)**

None.

#### **40/24 CORRESPONDANCE (ITEM 5)**

None.

## 41/24 STRATEGY (ITEM 6)

### Property, Rail and CLQ

It was noted that CTOG had met on 15 January and received a full update on all aspects of the campus projects. Draft minutes of the meeting had been circulated with the papers for this meeting. The slides from the meeting were shared on screen. Two additional slides had been included for this meeting.

Photos of the work in progress for ATAC were noted.

### Rail Operations

- The lease for the Aston property had been signed and the equipment was being installed.
- There had been some issues with the arrangements for the proposed site in Coventry and it had been decided not to progress further with this.

(Ioana Axinte arrived at 5.10pm)

The college remained committed to the provision in Coventry and alternative options were being sought.

- The West Midlands Mayor would be opening the Signalling Academy at BCIMO on 20 February. Invitations would be issued to Governors.

### CLQ

- A meeting with the Council had been held in the previous week to discuss the next steps in relation to CLQ. The Council was keen to complete the legal agreements as soon as possible. There were some VAT concerns that they were seeking advice on.
- An increase of £2m in DLUHC funding had now been confirmed.
- Discussions had started in relation to the disposal of Paget Road. A link to the recent Council meeting where this had been discussed had been included within the slides.
- There were seven legal documents that needed to be finalised with the various interested parties and a summary of the position with each was given. The purpose of each document was as set out on the slides. Not all of the documents needed to be signed by the college as some were between other parties:

1. *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Council and college.*

This dated back to 2018 as part of the Transaction Unit agreement. It had been updated for 12 months in December 2022 and required a further update. Governor approval to sign this was needed.

2. *Development Agreement between the Council and the college*

The Council had some VAT concerns on this and was taking advice.

3. *Funding Agreement between the Council and DfE*

The Council also had some VAT concerns regarding this.

4. *Clawback Agreement between the Council and DfE*

The college was providing comments to the Council on this.

5. *Back to Back Letter between the college and DfE*

The college was reviewing the wording relating to a leasehold charge against Metro One and also in respect of how income generated from CLQ may be viewed in relation to the grant.

6. *Legal Charge*

The college was proposing changes to wording to more accurately reflect the actual financial position with the agreed funding.

7. *Loan Amendment*

The wording was being reviewed as it was not currently compatible with the Development Agreement.

More details of the documents would be brought back for information or approval as they were finalised.

Questions and comments were invited.

The Chair noted that discussions indicated that a fuller update of the MOU may be needed but that a short term version was to be agreed now. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that there was nothing in the current version that caused concern.

**Resolved:** That Governors approved the signing of the updated Memorandum of Understanding with the Council.

The Chair suggested that a short tour of the new ATAC building be offered to Governors ahead of the next Board meeting in March, and this was agreed. Action: Deputy Chief Executive/Head of Governance.

Vision 2030: Action 2025 Update

The Deputy Principal reminded Governors that the draft document had been discussed at the Strategy session in October. All feedback from that, as well as that received from staff, had been reviewed and the final document was now presented for approval.

A Governor asked how management intended to ensure that there was staff awareness and buy in to the strategy. The Deputy Principal outlined the ways in which the details were shared, including through the termly College Roadshows.

**Resolved:** that Governors approved the Vision 2030: Action 2025 document.

College Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

The Deputy Principal presented the QIP with details of progress made in term one. There were no areas RAG rated as red. Some were green, which was excellent progress for the time of year, but many were amber as work continued to be in progress or were too early within the data cycle to be assessed as complete.

A Governor noted their planned attendance at curriculum planning meetings this term and asked who would provide input on students with SEND needs. It was confirmed that there would be a variety of attendees, including curriculum and support managers. SEND was part of the Student Entitlement department, which worked closely with curriculum colleagues to offer support for SEND. The college was recruiting a Sendco.

## **42/24 COLLEGE UPDATE (ITEM 7)**

### **Student Engagement**

#### SAR Executive Summary

The Deputy Principal had provided a summarised version of the SAR in response to comments from the Chair at the last meeting. This highlighted the strengths and key areas for improvement. It was for information only as the detail had been considered at the previous Board meeting.

#### Safeguarding Referrals – In Year Update

The report showed the referrals for term one. It was noted that if numbers continued at the current rate, by year end the college would have had its highest number of referrals in four years. However, Governors were reassured that the college had a dedicated and fully staffed team to manage the workload. Data showed that there were still high levels of mental health and Child in Need (CIN) cases, and that homelessness was being seen more frequently.

A Governor commented on the number of assaults and asked whether this was high compared to other colleges. It was confirmed that this was being reviewed and that there appeared to be a peak at the start of terms.

A Governor asked whether staff were seeing changes in safeguarding trends. The Deputy Principal responded that there were some, and also some changes to behaviour. Staff had been trained on 'trauma informed' responses to managing incidents. There had also been a review of tutorial activities to ensure that appropriate topics were being covered. A youth workers group was also supporting specific groups where there were behaviour issues.

### **Student Success**

#### Attendance and Retention – In Year Update)

The Assistant Principal (Lynn Parker) commented on attendance and the following were noted:

- Attendance last term was 85% compared to 86% in 2022/23
- 16-18 attendance was currently 84%, similar to last year, and adult attendance was 86%, 2% higher than last year.
- DfE were reporting that attendance was a significant concern nationally and that levels of persistent absence were much higher since Covid.
- Attendance at Maths was 74%, similar to last year, and for English was 77%, 2% higher than last year. There were many interventions in both subjects to try to improve attendance.
- Attendance rewards and certificates had been introduced.

A Governor commented that lower attendance was a national issue also in schools. There was evidence that some parents did not value attendance at school and college, and that this had impact.

The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) commented on retention and the following were noted:

- Retention for classroom based students was 98.8% in term one, compared to 95.2% at the end of 2022/23.
- The split across levels of study showed that retention was higher at all levels.
- High retention was a positive indicator for achievement and success.

- In 2022/23 there had been a material gender gap in achievement and retention, but current data indicated that this would reduce this year.
- There had also been gaps in achievement for BAME and disabled students in 2022/23, but again, current data indicated that these were expected to reduce in the current year.

Governors discussed withdrawal rates, noting that most occurred in term one or very early in term two.

A Governor commented that male retention was good and asked if this was similar to other colleges. The Assistant Principal confirmed that attendance and retention had been particular areas of focus in some of the more traditionally male subject areas such as Construction and Automotive. It was not possible to comment on the position at other colleges as such data was not available.

## **People Engagement**

### **Re-Structuring Update**

A short re-structuring update was provided. This gave areas with posts at risk and timescales. The rationale for the changes was explained.

## **Business Success**

### **Management Accounts – December 2023**

The Interim Director of Finance presented the report and highlighted key points including variances in relation to income and pay and non-pay budgets.

Governors noted the following:

- The figures showed that the year to date trend was similar to previous months. There was a deficit compared to the budgeted surplus at period 5. The main underlying reasons were shortfalls in adult funding and apprenticeships income, partially offset by savings in staff costs and overheads. Some of these savings were timing differences compared to the phasing of the budget or due to current staff vacancies. Management were confident that partnership delivery would enable income budgets to be met, although there had been an adjustment to expected apprenticeship income.
- The forecast to year end had been updated.
- The HE position was improving.
- Advanced learner loans had reduced due to an increase in the threshold for funding meaning that less learners were eligible.
- The 16-19 programme funding uplift that supported the agreed 6.5% pay award had been included in the budget.
- The budget included anticipated additional pay costs, reflecting the pay award from 1 February and the 5% increase to employers' contributions for TPS. Some grant funding towards the TPS costs was expected.
- Non pay costs included a contingency for potential partner costs for under delivery of out of area adult provision.

The narrative within the report showed further detailed analysis of the current and forecast positions, including for financial health.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked about the contingency for partner costs and this was explained.

The positive cash position was noted.

There was a discussion about the re-structuring of the Barclays loan and how the impact of future repayments would be modelled. The Public Works interest rate would be a key factor in this, and was due to be published on 1 April.

### **The Board of Governors received the Management Accounts to December 2023.**

#### Treasury Management Update

The policy had been reviewed and was presented for approval. There were no substantive changes. The college currently had no money market investments.

**Resolved:** that the Treasury Management policy was approved.

(Dionne Barrett arrived at 6.05pm)

#### Bidding and Projects Update

The update on bidding activities for the year to date was provided for information. This included opportunities considered but not progressed by the college. The bids were wide ranging and with a range of funding bodies including DfE and WMCA.

The Chair commented on the successful bid in relation to digital skills. He was involved in work in this area with his own employer and felt that there was scope for organisations to work together collaboratively in this area. It was agreed that this would be discussed outside of the meeting. Action: Chair and Principal.

A Governor added that there was potential to work more closely with businesses to develop AI. The Deputy Principal stated that the college had put forward a project to work with SMEs on AI, so this was a definite area for development. There were also opportunities to work with the Anchor Network in this area. The Principal would pick up these areas in planned meetings with Governors in coming weeks.

#### Partnerships Update

The financial position for each of the current partnership arrangements was set out in the written report. This included for all rail provision as discussed earlier in the meeting. The Signalling Academy in Dudley was due to be officially launched in February 2024.

Two partners were performing particularly well and approval was sought to extend their contracts further in year. Governors asked whether management was confident that expected outcomes would be achieved and this was confirmed.

**Resolved:** that the Board approved the increased contract values for NIS and BlackRook as set out in the written report.

#### Health and Safety Assurance Report

Management felt that the Board should receive more regular updates on Health and Safety so this was the first of a new report that would be presented termly.

The next Governor Development Session, on 5 February, would also be focused on Health and Safety, including Governor responsibilities.

In general, Health and Safety was well managed, although there were some areas for improvement in terms of compliance and ensuring that identified actions were closed down promptly. These did not pose unacceptably high risks and there were a number of areas noted where improvements had been made. The report appendix showed the breakdown of types of health and safety incident recorded.

The Chair commented that Governors had particular responsibilities in this area and that it was important to be aware of this as the college continued to extend its range of activities and delivery locations, especially in rail.

#### **43/24 GOVERNANCE UPDATES (ITEM 8)**

The Head of Governance commented on three items that required Board approval. These related to:

- Governance Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) – which had five key elements for Governors to review. This had been drafted following the completion of the Governance self-assessment last term, which had been considered at the previous Board meeting. It was intentionally brief, to allow for focus on priority areas and was expected to be reviewed as part of the External Governance Review currently being scoped.
- AOC Code of Good Governance – which had been substantially reviewed and streamlined by AOC. This had been reviewed in detail at the Search and Governance Committee in November 2023; and
- Committee memberships, which required updating following the appointment of the new Chair at the last meeting. Some suggestions for change had been made and comments were awaited from those Governors involved.

A Governor noted that he had provided details of a Board portal system and the Head of Governance confirmed that this had been considered. A paper on evaluation of possible portal systems would be presented to the next Search and Governance Committee in March. Several were being reviewed.

The Chair added that there had been a review of Governor involvement with committees and task and finish groups, with a view to involving more Governors and spreading the workload. It was hoped that those Governors invited to participate would agree.

**Resolved:** that the Board approved the Governance QIP and AOC Code of Good Governance.

The Head of Governance also gave a short verbal update on the External Governance Review. A scoping meeting had been held earlier in the day. Details would be circulated when available as Board approval for this was also needed. Provisional dates for the reviewer to attend a Board and other meetings, and also to meet individually with selected Governors, in May, were shared. It was emphasised that as the review was mandatory, participation by Governors was necessary.

#### **44/24 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 9)**

The minutes of the following recent meetings had been circulated:

- Audit Committee 6 December 2023
- Apprenticeships Task and Finish Group 7 December 2023
- Campus Transformation Oversight Group 15 January 2024.

There were no recommendations from any of these meetings that had not already been considered earlier or at the previous Board meeting in December.

**The Board of Governors received the committee reports.**

**45/24 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 10)**

A Governor noted that the Chamber of Commerce was running a programme to encourage business start-ups and asked if the college had links into this. The Principal would raise this at his next meeting with the Chamber's Chief Executive  
Action: Principal.

**46/24 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 11)**

**It was resolved that the following reports would remain confidential:**

- Rail, Property and CLQ Update

**47/24 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 12)**

Board of Governors – Monday 11 March 2024 at 5pm at Wellington Road

The meeting ended at 6.45pm.