

CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Monday 10 June 2024 at 5pm on Teams

PRESENT

Mr Mike Hastings - Chair	Mr Mal Cowgill - Principal
Ms Dionne Barrett	Ms Wendy Harris
Mr John Bradford	Mr Darren Shaw
Mr Sam Duru	Mr Mark Taylor
Mr Simon Evans	Mr Scott Thompson – until 6.10pm
Mr Ian Gardner	Mrs Amanda Tomlinson

IN ATTENDANCE

Mrs Alison Buick	Head of Governance
Mr Paul Davies	Director of Finance
Mr Mike Dixon	Assistant Principal
Mr Rob Lawson	External Governance Reviewer
Mr Peter Merry	Deputy Chief Executive
Ms Lynn Parker	Assistant Principal

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

Members of EMT were informed that Louise Fall had been appointed as the new Principal and Chief Executive and that Peter Merry had been appointed as the new Deputy Principal and Chief Executive with effect from 1 August 2024.

78/24 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)

Apologies were received from Mrs Jane Carter, Mr Trevor Dutton, Ms Hshaana Knight and Ms Louise Fall.

Mark Taylor made his usual declaration regarding his conflict of loyalty as an employee of Wolverhampton Council. This was relevant to agenda items relating to CLQ and Adult Education developments.

79/24 MINUTES (ITEM 2)

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2024 be **approved**.

80/24 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS (ITEM 3)

Governors reviewed the actions from the previous meeting and noted that the updated Financial Regulations and Accountability Agreement would be covered later in the agenda.

There were no Chair's Actions to report.

81/24 CORRESPONDANCE (ITEM 4)

None.

82/24 STRATEGY (ITEM 5)

Property, Rail and CLQ Update

The slides from the recent CTOG meeting would be shared with Governors. The Deputy Chief Executive gave an update and the following were noted:

Project Manager

A new Project Manager had been appointed to support the work on ATAC and CLQ.

Internal Audit Review

An internal audit of campus transformation had recently been completed and this gave substantial assurance that the control framework and controls in place to mitigate risk were appropriate. The full report would be considered at the next Audit Committee later in the month

ATAC and CLQ

- Work was ongoing and on track for opening in September 2024.
- Members of CTOG would hold their next meeting in July on site at Wellington Road to allow time for a site visit.
- The CLQ finance meeting had been held earlier in the day and the Programme Board would meet in the next week. There was therefore regular liaison between all parties. A meeting was scheduled later in the week to discuss the outstanding legal agreements with the Council's Chief Executive
- Steelwork had started to go up. Site photos were shown.

Paget Road

- There were ongoing discussions with the Council about the disposal. Marketing of the site would start in September 2024.

NAC Disposal

- This was also to be discussed at the Council meeting later in the week.

Rail

- As previously reported, planning permission had been granted for the change of use at Aston. This had triggered a £50k investment from the landlord.

Accountability Agreement

The Deputy Principal had updated the draft agreement for comments received at the last meeting and the Principal presented the final version in her absence. The document was agreed as lengthy but comprehensive in setting out the context, approach and purpose. There had been wide consultation on the contents. Targets had been added, as discussed at the last Board meeting.

The Chair and Principal were required to sign the final version.

Questions and comments were invited. Governors agreed that the Agreement was a positive reflection of the college and contained an appropriate level of detail.

Resolved – that the Accountability Agreement for 2024/25 was approved.

Adult Education

The Principal shared a set of slides and gave a short update. Governors noted the following:

- There was ongoing liaison with senior staff at the Council to discuss high level plans.

- The strategy meeting with the Council on 22 April had been positive and agreed an options review by July 2024 with a view to implementation by July 2025. Since then, the FE Commissioner had recommended appointment of a consultant to lead the review. No decision on this had yet been made.
- Any options review would need to be followed by full due diligence prior to a final Board decision to approve. At this stage it was felt that the Board would be in a position to make a strategic decision at its July meeting on whether to bring adult education into the college, subject to completion of due diligence.

Comments were invited.

Governors commented that merging adult education into the college had been discussed periodically for several years and that it aligned with the current college strategy. It was felt that sufficient preparation work was possible in the next six weeks to reach an 'in principle' decision. Full due diligence was essential prior to the final decision.

It was confirmed that management expected the full process to take a year to complete with the expected move in July 2025.

Resolved – that the Board gave 'in principle' approval for the college to take steps to explore acquiring the Council's adult education provision with effect from July 2025. Final approval would be considered at a later date, subject to completion of the planned detailed work and due diligence.

83/24 COLLEGE UPDATE (ITEM 7)

Student Engagement

Applications Update

- Applications were positive so far.
- The college had 26% of the market share for 16-18 provision. There were 1931 applications to date, an increase of 21% compared to last year. Most curriculum areas had seen growth. There were 24 applications for T Levels, which was below target.
- The college had 33% of the local adult market. So far there were 301 applications for full time courses and 1254 for part time courses. Both areas had increased since the last report but full time applications were down compared to last year.
- There had been 108 HE applications so far, of which 11 were for Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). This was a significant increase on the 26 for the current year. Validation processes with the University were ongoing.

Governors asked how many applications for HE were likely to be successful. The Assistant Principal responded that it was difficult to say at this stage, given the need for them to be assessed through the processes in place with UCAS, the university and the college. Not all would be accepted.

A Governor commented that the applications for T Levels were low compared to target and asked if the current offer was the right one. Staff commented on a range of factors in the decision making. Much would depend on future Government policy, including for defunding of other Level 3 qualifications.

A Governor noted the requirements for T Level work placements and asked how this was progressing. The Assistant Principal responded that more needed to be done but that some areas, such as Digital, had been very successful this year.

Student Success

Curriculum Planning 2024/25

The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) gave an update.

- The process was now nearing completion. Youth programme planning had been finalised but adult numbers were still being reviewed across all strands. Adult funding continued to be complex. The adult plan would be submitted to WMCA, however the plan would change in year as opportunities for additional funding became available
- Staff resources had all been confirmed. Vacancies and recruitment were being considered
- The 16-18 target was currently 2381, compared to the contract of 2279. Internal progression across all levels was expected to be high
- There were new T Levels in Health Sciences, Health (Nursing), Early Years, Construction, Engineering and Tool Making, and the level of interest was growing. Work placements were needed across all areas so staffing to secure these had been increased
- The High Needs allocation had increased from 230 to 260, of which 113 were Futures students. The curriculum continued to be reviewed for this area
- There had been a comprehensive review of the apprenticeships offer. There were 19 standards available. The target was for 270 new starts and 308 carried forward.

Governors discussed ongoing challenges with apprenticeship recruitment. It appeared that many colleges faced similar issues. Independent training providers with more specialist provision were sometimes more successful.

- Retention for classroom based provision was 92.3%, similar to the previous year. 89% achievement was forecast, although this was difficult to predict due to grade boundary changes.
- Attendance at all GCSE Maths and English exams had been good
- An 87% pass rate was predicted for A Levels, with 22.5% of these at high grades.
- Achievement for apprenticeships was 40.5% at the time of writing the report but was now at 45%, compared to the target of 55% for the year. There were 44 apprentices with EPA booked and 55 at Gateway. 10% of apprentices were out of funding, which had dropped from 12% the previous month.

Governors were pleased to note that the attendance at GCSE exams had been high. The Assistant Principal added that attendance at revision sessions had also been higher this year.

The likelihood of reaching the apprenticeship achievement target this year was discussed. This was more positive this year. Governors acknowledged the work of staff to improve this.

Business Success

Management Accounts – April 2024

The 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:

- There was a significant uplift to the year to date position due to increases to 16-19 funding and High Needs top up funding. Adult delivery had increased, with funding being above budget for the month.
- The year to date trend continued for pay and overhead costs
- There continued to be reliance on partnership delivery
- Capital projects were ongoing
- Forecast working capital at year end was £4m and the forecast outturn was a surplus of £810k. This reflected amendments to income as set out in the written report. Pay costs included prudent forecasts for agency costs
- The risks and opportunities for the final quarter were noted. These largely related to partnership and rail activities.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor commented on the financial information on partnerships and asked if the Board had sufficient oversight of other aspects, such as safeguarding, health and safety and reputation. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that there would be a more detailed Partnership update later in the agenda, however it was agreed as important for the Board to have opportunities to scrutinise the arrangements.

The Board of Governors received the Management Accounts to April 2024

Credit Control Policy

The policy had been updated for recent changes to the college approach, which were noted.

Resolved – that the Board approved the Credit Control Policy

Bad Debt Write Offs

Board approval was required to write off individual debts in excess of £5k.

The summary report was noted and there was one debt requiring approval.

Resolved – that the Board approved the bad debt write off as requested.

Financial Regulations Update

The Financial Regulations had been updated in line with the new College Financial Handbook. Changes had been made following re-classification.

A further update would be brought back to reflect changes to SMT and also when the expected new Procurement Act was in place.

2024/25 Draft Top Down Budget

Work to set the 2024/25 budget was continuing. All ESFA and WMCA allocations had been confirmed.

- The current draft surplus was £650k
- There had been an increase in 16-19 funding, including for T Level students
- Adult delivery reflected the WMCA contracts. Birmingham rail provision would be added when confirmed
- Apprenticeships income would include planned new starts and the carry in value from this year
- HE numbers were being reviewed as discussed earlier in relation to the curriculum plan
- Trading income was explained.
- The current draft income budget was £42m
- The pay budget was not yet finalised. Supply costs were being reviewed

- Overheads had been included based on current rates and adjusted for known changes in year. Energy prices were expected to fall
- The final budget would be brought to the July Board meeting for approval.

A Governor commented that it would be useful to split the partnerships and core delivery out so that the Board could see the split more clearly. It was noted that direct premises costs could be split but staffing and overheads were more complex. Ways to do this would be considered. Action: Director of Finance.

Partnerships Update

The updates in the written report were noted. This gave the summarised performance by partner and was for information only. No approvals were needed.

A Governor asked about electric vehicle provision at Bentley Bridge, as this was not as high as expected. The ability of the offer to meet the needs of the city was questioned. It was explained that other centres for similar provision had now been set up and the offer was for upskilling individuals and training unemployed. WMCA recognised the need for further development in this area. Recent investment by Tesla in Wolverhampton was another opportunity for the college.

It was also suggested and agreed that the provision type for each partner should be added to the report in future. Action: Deputy Chief Executive.

Insurance Policy Renewal 2024/25

There had been a delay in receipt of information from the underwriters so the final figures were not available. A 5% increase was expected, which was deemed reasonable in light of campus changes taking place.

Mid-Year Health and Safety Report

The Deputy Chief Executive presented the term 2 report. The overall rating was reasonable assurance and the detail of the report was noted. Near misses had increased but this was felt to be due to better awareness and reporting now by staff. The college's health and safety performance was good compared to AOC benchmarks.

Actions were in place and being monitored. This included a review of crisis management protocols and procedures.

Governors commented that the report was reassuring and that it was pleasing that greater scrutiny and organisational maturity had improved reporting.

There was a discussion about the increased level of assaults recorded. Most were student on student and a high proportion involved high needs students with SEND and behavioural issues. Staff were trained to respond to incidents and disciplinary action was taken where appropriate.

People Engagement

HR Policy Scheme of Delegation

A table had been provided to propose which policies should be approved at Executive Management team level and which should be reserved for the Board.

The details were reviewed.

Resolved – that the proposal was approved and that the following policies would continue to be approved at Board level:

- **Recruitment**

- **Disciplinary**
- **Grievance**
- **DBS**
- **Probation**
- **Workforce Development Strategy**

84/24 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 9)

There had been no committee or task and finish group meetings since the last Board for which minutes were available.

85/24 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 10)

BCIMO

The Principal gave an update on the property in Dudley, with slides shared for information.

A Task and Finish Group had been arranged on 13 June to review the detail.

The college had signed up at Dudley until 2023 and the Partnership Agreement with NIS was now also signed. The WMCA allocation for 2024/25 was in place. BCIMO had funding until March 2025.

A future options review was being carried out by Amion Consulting and the college/TRIA was included in this. A strategic decision was expected by WMCA in July. The Task and Finish Group would review the detailed proposal later in the week.

86/24 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 11)

It was resolved that the following reports would remain confidential:

- **Rail (NIS and BCIMO), Property and CLQ Update**
- **Partnerships Update**

87/24 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 12)

Board of Governors – Monday 8 July 2024 at 5pm on Teams

The meeting ended at 7pm.