

## CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

### Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Monday 13 May 2024 at 5pm via Teams

#### **PRESENT**

Mr Mike Hastings - Chair	Gabriel Gregorini, from 5.40pm
Ms Dionne Barrett – on Teams, from 5.35pm	Ms Wendy Harris
Mr John Bradford – on Teams	Ms Hshaana Knight
Mrs Jane Carter	Mr Darren Shaw
Mr Sam Duru, until 7pm	Mr Mark Taylor - on Teams
Mr Simon Evans	Mrs Amanda Tomlinson
Mr Ian Gardner	

#### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Mrs Alison Buick	Head of Governance
Mr Paul Davies	Director of Finance
Mr Mike Dixon	Assistant Principal
Mrs Louise Fall	Deputy 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.

#### **64/24 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)**

Apologies were received from Mr Mal Cowgill, Mr Trevor Dutton and Mr Scott Thompson

Mark Taylor made his usual declaration regarding his conflict of loyalty as an employee of Wolverhampton Council.

#### **65/24 MINUTES (ITEM 2)**

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2024 be **approved**.

#### **66/24 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS (ITEM 3)**

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

- The Anchor Group activities had been discussed as a topic at the Governor Strategy Day on 2 May.
- The ATAC tour had taken place prior to the meeting.
- Press coverage of the Coventry VLR had been provided and reviewed.

#### **67/24 CHAIR'S ACTIONS (ITEM 4)**

There were no Chair's Actions to report.

## **68/24 CORRESPONDANCE (ITEM 5)**

Several items of correspondence had been circulated with the papers. Governors noted:

- a. ESFA Letter to Accounting Officers dated 20 March 2024 (College Financial Handbook). The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the college had reviewed this. There were no material changes but the Financial Regulations needed to be updated. These would be brought to the next meeting for approval. Action: Director of Finance.
- b. OfS Letter dated 22 March 2024 (Freedom of Speech). The Deputy Principal confirmed that existing college policies and procedures covered the requirements. There had been no reports of unlawful harassment.
- c. Secretary of State letter dated 27 March 2024 (Partnership Arrangements).
- d. WMCA Letter dated 15 April 2024 (confirming 2% funding uplift for adult education). The Deputy Chief Executive explained the background to this and likely changes next year.

Governors discussed adult education funding and whether a 2% uplift was in line with expectations. It was confirmed that it would be included in the budget planning currently taking place. Governors also noted the election of a new WMCA Mayor and asked if the college had made contact to invite him to visit. It was confirmed that this had already been done. There were several college events planned and it was hoped that he may be able to attend.

- e. ESFA Letter dated 22 April 2024 (Financial Statements Review 2022/23). Governors were aware that the long standing Financial Notice to Improve had been lifted. The Financial Health grade for 2022/23 was Good. There was a recommendation relating to the fixed asset register, which was being progressed. Audit Committee would review this.

## **69/24 STRATEGY (ITEM 6)**

### Property, Rail and CLQ

The slides from the recent CTOG meeting had been provided in the papers. The Deputy Chief Executive gave an update and the following were noted:

### ATAC

- The current focus was on completion and transfer of equipment from Paget Road. There was ongoing liaison with staff about the plans. All was currently on track for opening in September 2024.

### CLQ

- Foundations were complete and steelwork was due to start soon.
- A number of the legal documents were still to be finalised:
  - The Council had provided some comfort over the VAT position.
  - The Funding Agreement and Development Agreement were to be completed. There were some areas to be further discussed with the Council.

(Dionne Barrett arrived at 5.35pm)

### Paget Road

- The plans for decanting and sale of the site were progressing.
- Bruton Knowles had been jointly appointed by the college and the Council to market the site for sale. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Council for this was to be agreed.

## NAC Disposal

- There were ongoing discussions with the Council over the sale of the site.

## Other Works

- Speed gates had been procured but the installation had been delayed.
- PA systems were being installed during the summer.
- Work to re-furbish the Food Hub at Wellington Road in the summer was being planned.

## Rail

- Planning permission had been granted for the change of use at Aston.

## Social Value

- There had been several promotional activities and there were opportunities to leverage benefits for students in a variety of ways.

(Gabriel Gregorini arrived at 5.40pm)

## College Improvement Plan

The Deputy Principal explained that the report showed the term 2 update. The following were noted:

- There had been much progress, especially in improving the quality of feedback to students. This had been reviewed as a theme during the deep dives.
- Destinations continued to be tracked.
- Tutorial processes had also been reviewed during deep dives and were found to be very positive.
- GCSE and A Level exams started this week. All exams had been planned and necessary support arrangements were in place. There was some uncertainty about grade boundaries for this year.
- Attendance was lower than target, especially in English and Maths. Some low level disruption had been affecting attendance.
- Overall, all areas of the QIP were expected to be completed.

A Governor asked about CPD planned for July. The Deputy Principal noted the plans, which included SEN. Jane Carter was thanked for her support to identify and commission the SEN training.

## Draft Accountability Agreement 2024/25

The Deputy Principal stated that the document presented was the draft and that a final version would be brought back for Board approval in June.

- Accountability Agreements had been introduced in 2023/24 but the DfE had published new guidance for 2024/25 in December 2023. Requirements had been simplified. The Board's duty was to review how the college met local needs. The final document was to be submitted by 30 June 2024.
- The document had two parts. Part one was from DfE confirming the funds. Part two was the paper in the meeting pack.
- The document submitted last year had received no challenge or discussion.

A Governor asked about admission numbers, the demographic factors affecting recruitment and High Needs support. The Deputy Principal confirmed that numbers for both general and High Needs recruitment were expected to grow. This would be reflected more explicitly in the final version of the Accountability Agreement. Action: Deputy Principal.

The Chair suggested that the improved Financial Health score also be reflected. The Deputy Principal agreed. Action: Deputy Principal.

## **70/24 COLLEGE UPDATE (ITEM 7)**

### **Student Engagement**

#### Student and Apprentice Survey Outcomes

- Headline data was provided for FE and HE learners, with a snapshot for apprentices.
- Overall satisfaction was very high.
- Participation levels had increased.
- There had been a decline in some areas.
- Wording of some of the questions was being reviewed.
- Many positive comments had been received about staff and student experiences in classrooms.
- The HE participation level was lower but overall satisfaction was 92%. There were some issues in some curriculum areas and with facilities.

There was a discussion about facilities for HE students, particularly catering. Staff were looking at how improvements could be made.

- The apprenticeships survey was done monthly. Figures presented were for the latest snapshot. Participation rates were lower but it was hoped to improve this in term 3. Many positive comments had been received.

#### Applications Update

- Applications were positive so far.
- The marketing approach had been changed – there had been fewer but more intense open days this year.
- Applications from young people were up by 35%, but these needed to be converted to enrolments. All curriculum areas were seeing increases, but they were highest in Engineering and Automotive. Science was slightly lower but not significantly so.
- Adults continued to enrol for in year learning and applications had started for September as well. There had been more part time than full time applications. Health and Social Care were popular.
- There had been 105 HE applications to date, with the new Sports Foundation degree particularly popular.

Governors asked about how the college kept in touch with applicants and the Deputy Principal explained the keep warm activities. There were monthly communications from Marketing and relevant curriculum areas.

A Governor asked if there was capacity to meet increased demand in Health and Social Care. Management had no concerns about this.

Applications would continue until enrolment in September for full time courses.

#### Bilston Town FC

The Principal had provided an update, which the Deputy Principal gave in his absence.

- As reported to the December Board meeting, the college was building relationships with the club.

- A sponsorship deal had been agreed from August 2024. The college would be the main sponsor so would have adverts, logos, graphics and social media posts. Staff would also be able to attend home matches to promote the college.
- The Deputy Chief Executive was liaising with the club to set out the formal agreement.

A Governor asked about the college brand being associated with the club and if the college was doing due diligence and safeguarding checks. They were mindful of welfare and safeguarding concerns reported in the media around youth sports in recent years. The Deputy Principal confirmed that all required checks were taking place.

It was noted that the partnership was expected to be beneficial for the college as the club had a wide reach in the area, including their social media presence, and a high number of members.

#### City of Wolverhampton Adult Education

- In 2018 a Memorandum of Understanding had been set up for the college and Council to review the future of adult education. Discussions had been held but not progressed at the time.
- The Council now had a new education strategy and CLQ, which was adjacent to adult education, was progressing well. It was felt that the time was right to re-start discussions.
- An initial scoping meeting had been held with the Council. A strategic case was needed to expand on this.
- Further details would be brought to the July Board. A new Task and Finish Group to look at this may be needed.

It was agreed that there was an opportunity to progress this, to make efficiencies and improve quality.

#### **Student Success**

##### Qualification Achievement Rates for 2022/23

The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) gave an update.

- DfE had provided information before Easter and the college had reviewed performance against local, regional and national data.
- The overall achievement rate was in the top 10% nationally. The college was the best performing of all the Black Country colleges and the second in the West Midlands.
- Overall achievement for 16-18 students was 88.2% and for adults was 89.7%. Both of these areas were the highest performing across the Black Country colleges. However, apprenticeships achievement was 49.2%, which did not compare favourably with other Black Country colleges. The work of staff in year to improve apprenticeships was explained. The Task and Finish Group continued to look at this.

A Governor asked about benchmarking groups for college achievement data. The Assistant Principal confirmed that some was carried out, particularly with the Black Country colleges, who had similar demographics.

A Governor asked what work the college had done to identify other colleges to work with whose apprenticeship achievement was stronger. The Deputy Principal confirmed links with Hull College. The work to review the challenges in apprenticeships and to change the curriculum planning was explained.

Governors asked what positive marketing the college was doing to promote its high achievement rates for young people and adults. This was outlined. It included sharing the statistics with prospective students that had applied for next year.

### Curriculum Planning Update

The Assistant Principal (Lynn Parker) gave an update.

- All planning activities were on track to date. Individual course reviews had taken place and final changes had been made.
- An increase in student numbers was expected due to demographics and progression from Level 2 to Level 3.
- The adult plan was being collated, with discussions with key partners such as NIS.
- An update would be brought to the next Board meeting.

### People Engagement

#### Staff Survey Outcomes

A Pulse survey had been done and the outcomes were noted:

- Participation rates had been challenging but there had been an increase to 44% this time.
- Responses had been split and analysed by type of staff.
- Generally, the feedback had been very good. Examples were given.
- Comments had also been invited. Some of the issues raised were around communications on strategic matters, workload, relationships with managers and the future of the college.
- Actions being taken were explained.

A Governor asked if there were correlations between the staff and student surveys and if this was possible to consider if not. Management would look at this. Further work was needed to improve staff response rates. There was a discussion about how to encourage this.

#### Workforce Development Update

- The performance management process had been improved.
- There had been a good level of success on recruiting to the Taking Teaching Further programme.
- Levelling up payments for FE teachers were being introduced for some subjects with payments of £4-5k for Early Careers Teachers in their first five years from 2024/25. The college was promoting this.
- The college was continuing to do some collaborative work on recruitment with Colleges West Midlands.
- HR Roadshows were being held with staff.

Governors asked about levelling up payments. To be eligible, teachers needed to have qualified recently or be working towards a PGCE or Cert Ed qualification.

#### HR Policies

Two HR policies were presented for approval. These were:

1. Unpaid Carer's Leave, which had been updated to reflect new legislation; and
2. Flexible Working – which had been updated for changes to the Employment Rights (Flexible Working) Act 2023.

**Resolved – that the Board approved the Unpaid Carer's Leave Policy and the Flexible Working Policy.**

## **Business Success**

### Management Accounts – March 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:

- The year to date position was a surplus of £165k compared to a year to date budgeted surplus of £200k. This was an improvement compared to the previous two months.
- Reasons for variances were noted, as set out in the written report. Apprenticeships and HE income continued to lag behind budget.
- Pay costs were below budget due to vacancies.
- The balance sheet showed continued investment in estates and facilities. There were several projects funded by Energy Efficiency and Reclassification grants.
- The cash position was strong and the cashflow forecast was positive for the remainder of the year.
- Financial Health was Requires Improvement but forecast to be Good by year end due to an upturn in the EBITDA.
- The forecast outturn at year end was a surplus of £385k, showing an improvement on last year.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked if there was any forecasting based on expected student numbers for next year. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that this was being built into the budget for 2024/25. The budget was being built from the agreed curriculum plan.

Governors noted the improvements in the cashflow compared to previous years and congratulated staff on achieving this.

### **The Board of Governors received the Management Accounts to March 2024**

#### Partnerships Update

The updates in the written report were noted. Some changes for contracts for NIS and BlackRook were required, so approvals for these were sought. It was also noted that EV provision was down. There was work with employers and the Job Centre to look at this.

### **Resolved – that the Board approved the contract variations for NIS and Blackrook.**

#### Budget 2024/25

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

- ESFA income had increased by £1m due to the 16-18 uplift and the T Level funding. Curriculum planning and funding for T Levels was explained.
- The draft pay budget was based on current staffing and curriculum needs.
- All budget holders had submitted their non-pay and capital budget requests and these were being reviewed by EMT.
- An update would be brought to the next Board meeting in June with a final version for approval in July.

(Sam Duru left at 7pm)

### Barclays – Change to Bank Mandate

It was noted that the Bank Mandate needed to be updated to reflect changes in staff and responsibilities.

**Resolved – that Governors approved the updated bank mandate.**

A Governor asked whether market testing of banking services was due. The Deputy Chief executive confirmed that the service did not have a specific end date but that periodic market testing was good practice and would be considered.

### Procurement Approvals – Food Supplies and Associated Services

Governors noted the proposals via The University Catering Organisation (TUCO) and other direct contracts, as well as the anticipated savings from changing the arrangements.

A Governor commented on the difficulties in achieving savings when food inflation continued to be high.

**Resolved – that the Board approved the use of the TUCO framework and the awarding of direct contracts as outlined in the written report.**

### Contract Award Approvals

The Deputy Chief Executive explained the proposals for the refurbishment of the Food Hub at Wellington Road and also the de-carbonisation plans.

A Governor asked about the social value of the projects and if there was any consideration of the Wolverhampton pound. It was suggested that these aspects be included in future reports. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that there had been discussions on this with staff and there was information in the appendix to the report.

**Resolved – that the Board approved the awarding of the contracts as outlined in the written report.**

### Insurance

The renewal process had started but was not yet complete. Details would be brought back for approval in June.

## **71/24 GOVERNANCE UPDATES (ITEM 8)**

The Head of Governance commented on four items. These related to items that had been discussed at the Search and Governance Committee in March 2024, and which the Committee had recommended for Board approval:

- Re-appointment of two Governors – terms of office for Amanda Tomlinson and John Bradford would expire on 31 July 2024. Both were willing to be re-appointed if the Board agreed.

**Resolved – that Amanda Tomlinson and John Bradford be re-appointed for further four-year terms of office commencing on 1 August 2024.**

- Meeting Dates for 2024/25 – a draft schedule had been circulated following the last Board meeting. Some changes from that for 2023/24 were proposed as outlined in the written report.

**Resolved – that the meeting dates for 2024/25 were approved.**



- Whistleblowing Policy – this had been reviewed and minor updates were noted.

**Resolved – that the Whistleblowing Policy was approved.**

- Freedom of Information Policy – this had been reviewed and minor updates were noted.

**Resolved - that the Freedom of Information Policy was approved.**

**72/24 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 9)**

The minutes of the following recent meetings had been circulated:

- Rail Task and Finish Group 26 February 2024
- Search and Governance Committee 4 March 2024
- CTOG 18 March 2024
- Audit 20 March 2024
- Apprenticeships Task and Finish Group 18 April 2024
- CTOG 29 April 2024

There were no recommendations from any of these meetings that had not been covered elsewhere on the agenda.

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

**73/24 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 10)**

None.

**74/24 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 11)**

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

- Rail, Property and CLQ Update
- Partnerships Update
- Task and Finish minutes for Rail, CTOG and Apprenticeships

**75/24 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 12)**

Board of Governors – Monday 10 June 2024 at 5pm on Teams

The meeting ended at 7.15pm.