

**WALSALL COLLEGE
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION
HELD ON TUESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2020 AT 1730 HRS
VENUE: VIA ZOOM**

PRESENT:

Allan Pinnegar, Chair	Jat Sharma, Principal and Chief Executive
Alan Woods	Jo Hughes
Fiona Macmillan	Khuram Mahmood
Alastair Scales	Charlotte Bosworth
Jaswinder Dhillon	Graham Ward
Stuart Pedley-Smith	Mary Mahoney
Aisling McGowan	Dave Wheeler (from 1810 hrs)

TOGETHER WITH:

Paul Dale	Associate Governor
Jayne Holt	Assistant Principal Workforce Development and Learning Services
James Norris	Assistant Principal Commercial Development
David Turner	Assistant Principal Quality and HE
Deb Rajania	Director of Operations and Resources
Richard Brennan	Assistant Principal Curriculum
Matthew Brown	Director of Finance & MIS
John Adams	Director of Commercial Projects
Andrea Packer (Item 06.21)	Interim Head of Student Services and Wellbeing
Alison Buick	Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES: Paul Averis

01.21 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. Governor meetings were continuing to be held via Zoom due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This was working well, although there was a preference to return to face to face meetings when Government guidelines permitted.

Much had happened since the last full meeting in July. The Principal was asked to pass the thanks of Governors to all staff, who had worked tremendously hard in challenging circumstances.

Given the size of the agenda, all were asked to be concise in presentations and strategically focused in questions.

02.21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Paul Averis.

03.21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no additional declarations of interest. Jaswinder Dhillon had a standing declaration relating to membership of local community and educational organisations. Alan Woods also had a standing declaration due to his employment as Chief Executive of an awarding body. As previously noted, his organisation now had a small contract with the college.

04.21 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2020 having been circulated, were taken as read and approved.

05.21 MATTERS ARISING

Governors reviewed the Action Points Record and noted the following:

Item 56.20

The link to the curriculum items would be circulated as soon as possible.

Item 59.20

One to one meetings of Governors with the Chair had all been concluded.

Item 78.20

The risk register wording had been updated as agreed.

Item 81.20

Governor thanks had been passed to staff in the summer as agreed.

06.21 POLICY APPROVAL – SAFEGUARDING

The report was presented by the Interim Head of Student Services and Wellbeing and was an annual update. There were some updates for Safeguarding, following the updating of Keeping Children Safe in Education, effective from September 2020. As Governors were aware, there were two safeguarding policies, one relating to children and one for adults at risk of harm. Both were fully compliant with the statutory guidance.

The Interim Head of Student Services and Wellbeing highlighted the particular changes that had been made, as follows:

- Increased content and emphasis on mental health, which was now a key area for staff but was not reflected in detail in the previous policy versions;
- Honour based abuse;
- The role of the Designated Safeguarding Lead. The training aspects of the role had been made clearer and more formal;
- Minor changes to wording throughout the documents.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor noted that in respect of the flowchart on dealing with allegations there were some differences in the potential outcomes. The Interim Head of Student Services and Wellbeing would look at this again.

The Chair asked about the number of safeguarding cases. It was confirmed that they were continuing to rise. The safeguarding team was well resourced and highly skilled. There were also volunteer safeguarding officers across the curriculum and pastoral officers that provided additional support where needed. The Chair commented that he continued to have very informative termly catch up meetings with the Interim Head of Student Services and Wellbeing.

A Governor asked about controls to keep students safe during digital interactions with the college, and what guidelines were in place. The

**Interim
Head of
Student
Services
and
Wellbeing**

Interim Head of Safeguarding and Wellbeing noted that digital learning did present some risks. Staff had recently attended some CEOP training. The Principal added that there had been a fundamental change to the delivery of teaching and learning, and that the policy had been amended to reflect this. The Assistant Principal Workforce Development and Learning Services commented that all students were asked to complete an e-safety induction and that they signed an agreement including conduct and context when being allocated a college device. E-safety had been a sharp focus of this year's induction. The Assistant Principal Curriculum further explained the guidelines issued for staff to follow when setting up teaching online. These were being revised in light of experience as it was a new area to most.

It was **resolved** that Governors **approved** the:

- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedure; and
- The Adults at Risk of Harm Safeguarding Policy and Procedure.

07.21 POLICY APPROVAL – EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE presented the policy for approval. There were no significant changes as statutory guidance was unchanged. The content had been reviewed in the context of accessibility, references to the Ofsted framework had been updated and there were some minor changes to wording.

A Governor asked whether the policy supported the aspirations of the BAME Principals group, of which the Principal was a member. The Principal responded that the policy was to promote equality for all regardless of background. Succession planning for the Board and senior management team was a key focus at the moment. The Walsall population was approximately 20% BAME so there was more to do to ensure that the college was representative.

Further questions were asked about whether there was an action plan alongside the policy. It was noted that some work had been undertaken by the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations, so it was an area of interest in the wider context, not just FE. The Principal noted the work of the Equality and Diversity committee in reviewing the detail of progress against targets and closing the gaps between different cohorts of students. He accepted that reporting on staff E&D matters required staffing data. It was also agreed to consider more reporting to Governors, although noted that there was regular discussion at Search and Governance Standards Committee.

Principal

The need to focus on equity for all groups was agreed.

Governors **resolved** to **approve** the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

08.21 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

The Principal presented his report and drew attention to the following specific aspects:

- Staff continued to work hard in challenging and unprecedented circumstances due to the pandemic. Every effort had been made to provide a Covid secure environment for students;

- Student engagement was high, retention was good and attendance was holding up well. Students seemed happy to be back in college;
- 16-18 recruitment was at 3930, which was slightly above contract;
- Around 5% of staff and 250 students had been absent due to Covid related issues. There had been some disruption to learning. Students had expressed a clear preference for face to face learning where possible;
- The college was working well with colleagues from Public Health and seeking advice where needed;
- Section 3 of the report gave some details of emerging areas expected to be in the Government's FE White Paper, to be published before Christmas. The Minister was keen to push for investment in FE. It was clear that Government remained concerns about aspects of governance in some colleges. Walsall was preparing a response to the key areas through the updating of the corporate plan and re-structure as previously discussed with Governors;
- Section 4 of the report included the strategic pledges that the senior team were working on to shape the corporate plan update. A particular focus would be to maintain a balance of providing higher level qualifications to meet the expectations of funders and regulators whilst continuing to support the needs of the local community.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor commented on the opportunities within the Kickstart programme. It was felt that engaging employers within the curriculum was key, but that resources to do this effectively were needed. Employers needed support to interpret what was needed in developing curriculum priorities. The Principal agreed. Engagement with employers would be at a variety of levels and by the ER team. Employer voice needed to be developed further and was a priority.

The Assistant Principal Curriculum agreed. Employer input to what was taught and how was key.

It was confirmed that the college was preparing an intermediary application for the Kickstart programme in partnership with the Black Country Chamber and local authority. Information was being received from DWP.

There was a discussion about the corporate plan update and the extent to which Governors could engage in the strategic elements of this. Growing apprenticeships was a challenge. Targets were ambitious but it was agreed that this was a key objective for the college. It was commented that the pandemic may result in fewer students decided to go into HE, so apprenticeships may be in greater demand and the college should be prepared for this. The Principal agreed. The Augar review was likely to be used to re-balance between HE and FE. It was hoped that funding would flow more towards FE.

The possibility of introducing A Levels would continue to be considered.

The Principal intended to bring the corporate plan update back for approval early in 2021.

Governors **resolved** to **receive and accept** the Principal's Report.

09.21 CITB UPDATE

Governors were reminded that the approval to acquire CITB had been given in January 2020. Since then, the project had been on hold due to the coronavirus pandemic, which had closed the site for six months.

A short update paper had been provided. The site had re-opened and was operating in a Covid secure way, at around 70% of capacity. A new transaction date of 30 November 2020 had been proposed and management were working towards this. The fee had previously been agreed.

It was confirmed that the risks of acquisition to the wider college business were minimal. The original project plan was in place, albeit with revised timelines. There were no concerns about managing the provision remotely.

No further Governor approvals were required.

Governors **resolved** to **note** the CITB Update Report.

10.21 QUALITY AND HE UPDATE, INCLUDING EMERGING SAR REPORT

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE presented his report and highlighted the key aspects. Much of the content had been reviewed in detail at the Learning and Quality Committee on 30 September.

Specific comments were made on the following areas:

Closure of 2019/20

- Working remotely had clearly been challenging for many students. However, engagement had been around 80%, which was good;
- All GCSE Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) had been completed on time and with integrity;
- Data would be finalised with the submission of the final ILR return on 22 October. The emerging achievement rates were high, with HE at 90%, vocational courses at 89% and High Needs at 85.6%. Apprenticeships data was likely to be affected by delays to End Point Assessments moving some achievements into 2020/21 rather than 2019/20. The expected apprenticeships outturn was 65.5%, which was below target.

Re-engagement of students for 2020/21

- Attendance was currently at the target level of 90% for face to face delivery. 70% of delivery was through remote learning, at which attendance was around 80%;
- Students were RAG rated according to their risk of withdrawal or not achieving. 235 were RAG rated at the highest level.

Ofsted Report and Next Steps

- The main focus was ensuring consistency of approach across all curriculum areas. The re-structure was being planned to meet this objective;
- The senior team was strongly committed to re-gaining Ofsted Outstanding.

Questions and comments were invited.

Governors asked about the current ambitions for HE. It was confirmed that flexible provision remained at Walsall. There were over 800 HE students, the majority of whom were at LCCA in London. The LCCA provision would cease in February 2021. There were ongoing HE partnership discussions with other providers.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Quality and HE Update.

There was a ten minute comfort break.

11.21 CURRICULUM UPDATE

The Assistant Principal Curriculum presented his report, and the following areas were noted:

- There would be a change to the approach to planning for adults in response to emerging needs in the adult market. The adult offer needed to be more flexible and responsive, particularly to the priorities identified by the WMCA. More short courses were likely to be needed. A balanced approach would be taken;
- The strategy for AEB, which would include preparing adult plans in conjunction with representatives from WMCA earlier in the process. This was a more 'commissioning' based approach;
- That there had been some consolidation of subcontracting, but future decisions would depend on commissioning priorities and the needs of the community.

It was noted that the WMCA was setting an agenda for the region, which may be very different to the footprint for Walsall. This needed consideration in Walsall's adult planning activities.

There was a discussion about the difficulties for local businesses as a result of Covid, and whether skills shortages offered an opportunity for the college to support. It was confirmed that the local authority did have a community learning plan. Examples of how the college was supporting this and working with the local authority were given. The importance of the ability to be innovative and responsive was agreed, as was the need to have effective dialogue with employers to be able to reassure students that there were job opportunities.

- There would be 430 students sitting GCSE Maths and 350 students sitting GCSE English in November. Students would keep the highest grade awarded from either August or November;
- Current Government guidance stated that there would be a full suite of GCSE exams in summer 2021, although they were expected to start three weeks later than usual;

- The college was working to ensure all GCSE students had regular assessments so that there was sufficient evidence of ability in case Centre Assessed Grades were needed again.

Governors asked whether the proportion of synchronous and asynchronous learning was appropriate, given the feedback that students preferred face to face teaching where possible. The Assistant Principal Curriculum confirmed that teaching and learning approaches were being adapted as necessary. Curriculum leads were looking very carefully at this to ensure the most appropriate mix of delivery methods. It would remain under review. There was now less Maths and English on line.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Curriculum Update Report.

12.21 FINANCE REPORT JULY 2018

The Director of Finance & MIS presented his report.

The management accounts position to 31 July 2020 was noted. This had been reviewed in detail at the recent Finance and Resources Committee. A conservative view of the impact of Covid-19, in terms of lost income and additional cost, had been taken. It seemed likely that the original budget would have been met had the pandemic not occurred.

A good level of cash had been generated in year. The college continued to hold some cash for bursary and free school meals funding on behalf of the Government. Financial health at year end was Outstanding.

The external audit was under way and the statutory accounts would be presented for approval at the next meeting.

The budget for 2020/21 had been prepared in a very uncertain external environment. However, the assumptions within the budget seemed to be robust so far.

Apprenticeships recruitment was holding up and 16-18 enrolment was above contract. The Littleton restaurant had traded well during August. Early indications were therefore that the financial position was reasonable at this time, given all the uncertainties.

The impact of the accounting treatment for the LGPS was noted. This would increase the pension deficit to over £20m this year. There was, however, no cash impact at this time. The Finance and Resources Committee had discussed this at some length.

The college was moving towards becoming cashless.

There was an ongoing test case relating to business interruption insurance, and it was possible that the college may benefit from any positive precedent arising from this.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked whether the college had considered returning funds received from the Government's Job Retention Scheme. The Director of Finance & MIS responded that the college had carefully considered

whether to apply for funding and had done this late in the process. The claim was to cover costs for staff in commercial areas only so was within the spirit and letter of the guidance from Government and AOC. Receipt of the funding had safeguarded jobs, including for outsourced services.

There was a further question about whether the retention funding for staff furloughed but still at college in January would be claimed. The Principal confirmed that the criteria would be considered but that if the college was eligible then a claim would be made. It was important to consider all financial impacts of the pandemic on the college.

A Governor questioned the pension deficit, and it was agreed that the Director of Finance & MIS would contact her for a discussion outside of the meeting.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Finance Report.

13.21 STUDENT SERVICES REPORT

The Assistant Principal Workforce Development and Learning Services presented her report.

- There was an ongoing focus on safeguarding, with 113 cases being reported in year so far. 'Stay Safe' week had run from 5 October;
- Additional mental health first aiders had been trained;
- There had been a very proactive pre-induction period with a high level of engagement;
- Induction was going well, although many students had still to complete this in full. There were some new topics of focus, including Covid-19, ACES and unconscious bias;
- Student voice activities were taking place, including a well-attended 'Chat with Jat' earlier in the day and student focus groups at all campuses;
- Careers activities were being delivered in a variety of ways. An HE Fair had been held in October.

Questions and comments were invited.

There was a further discussion about induction. Activities would continue if necessary after half term. There would be follow up through the 'skills scan' process to identify gaps in learning. Much tracking of students was taking place. The Student Governor noted that there was a clear safeguarding focus in tutorial activities.

The Student Governor was asked to comment on student perceptions on the term so far. He noted that the Union elections were ongoing, so this had given him opportunities to meet a range of students. He was not aware of any particular safety concerns that students had. There was feedback that students found asynchronous teaching more difficult, and that in some classes there was a mix of students present in classrooms and some online. Some students were concerned about sitting GCSEs in November.

The Assistant Principal Curriculum was not aware of classes being taught with a mixture of students present and online, so would look into this.

Director of
Finance &
MIS

Assistant
Principal
Curriculum

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Student Services Report.

14.21 GOVERNANCE MATTERS

The Clerk presented her paper, which covered the following areas, which were largely for information:

1. Updates to the Instrument and Articles of Government;
2. Governance SAR and QIP;
3. Corporation attendance and performance indicators;
4. Link Governors for 2019/20;
5. Committee Membership 2019/20;
6. Annual review of confidential minutes;

Governor approval was sought for items 1, 4 and 5.

It was **resolved** that Governors **approved** the minor amendments to the Instrument and Articles of Government, and also the Link Governors and Committee Membership for 2020/21.

15.21 OBSERVATIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY, SAFEGUARDING, PREVENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY

None.

16.21 CORPORATION COMMITTEE MINUTES AND REPORTS

It was **resolved** that the following minutes and reports were **received and accepted**:

Search and Governance Standards Committee 12 May 2020;
Learning and Quality Committee 15 June 2020; and
Finance and Resources Committee 23 June 2020.

It was also reported that:

Audit Committee met on 9 June 2020;
Learning and Quality Committee met on 30 September 2020;
Finance and Resources Committee met on 6 October 2020; and
Search and Governance Standards Committee met on 8 October 2020.

No approved minutes of these meetings were yet available, although Governors noted the items discussed, as set out in the Clerk's paper.

Governors were advised that the recommendations of the various committee minutes included in their packs had been considered by Corporation in the previous meeting or earlier in the agenda.

Governors **resolved** to accept the Corporation Committee Minutes and Report.

17.21 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair commented on his recent activities, which included:

- Termly meetings on safeguarding with the Designated Safeguarding Lead;
- Governor Training on 12 October, which had been extremely helpful. Governor suggestions for the next session, in February 2021, were invited;
- One to one meetings with all Governors had been concluded. There were some recorded actions that were being worked through;

- The Chairs' meeting would take place on 9 November on Zoom;
- His attendance at the virtual meetings of the AOC Chairs group were useful, and provided assurance that Walsall was dealing with pandemic issues as well as others in the area;
- His attendance, with the Principal, at a meeting of Walsall Borough leaders;
- That Governor recruitment was ongoing.

18.21 MATTERS OF REPORT

Alastair Scales asked for an update to Corporation on the Board Assurance Framework and Risk Management process.

The Director of Finance & MIS stated that a small working group had been formed to look at the updates to the Board Assurance Framework in more detail. It would meet after half term, after which there would be an update to Audit Committee in November and Corporation in January.

19.21 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was **resolved** that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 26 November 2020 at 1730 hrs via Zoom.

The meeting ended at 2030 hrs.

How Governors challenged management		Impact of meeting on College	
06.21	Asked about controls to keep students safe during digital interactions with the college.	06.21	Approved two Safeguarding Policy and Procedure documents.
07.21	Asked whether the EDI policy supported the aspirations of the BAME Principals group.	07.20	Approved the Equality, Diversity and Impact Policy.
11.21	Asked whether the proportion of asynchronous vs synchronous learning was in the right balance	14.21	Approved minor amendments to the Instrument and Articles of Government, and the Link Governors and Committee Memberships for 2020/21.
12.21	Asked whether the college had considered returning funds received through the Job Retention Scheme.		