

WALSALL COLLEGE
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION
HELD ON TUESDAY 24 MAY 2022 AT 1730 HRS
VENUE: SKILLS ACCELERATOR ROOM, WISEMORE CAMPUS

PRESENT:	Alan Woods, Chair Stuart Pedley-Smith Graham Ward Julie Haywood Ray Simmonds (on Teams, until 1840 hrs)	Jat Sharma, Principal and Chief Executive Rani Sahota Tony Sadla Jaswinder Dhillon Mary Mahoney (on Teams)
TOGETHER WITH	Nick Tomkys David Turner Richard Brennan Matthew Brown John Adams James Norris Alison Buick	Associate Governor Assistant Principal Quality and HE Assistant Principal Curriculum Director of Finance & MIS Director of Commercial Projects Assistant Principal Commercial Development Head of Governance
APOLOGIES:	Charlotte Bosworth, Heather Lodge, Malissa Clarke, Aisling McGowan, Dave Wheeler, Leah Brookes, Paul Averis	

59.22 CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. This was a hybrid meeting with two Governors on Teams.

The Chair commented on recent events he had attended, including the HE Graduation, which had been an excellent event. He had also met the AOC's Area Director, Jen Hope, earlier in the day.

Governors were informed that the scheduled Remuneration Committee had been postponed due to the absence of the Committee Chair. A new date would be confirmed as soon as possible.

The recent resignation of Fiona Macmillan as a Governor was noted. The Chair had written to thank Fiona for her contributions to the work of Corporation and its committees.

Finally, Governors were asked to congratulate the Principal on his recent appointment as a Deputy Lieutenant for the West Midlands.

60.22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Charlotte Bosworth, Heather Lodge, Malissa Clarke, Aisling McGowan, Dave Wheeler, Leah Brookes, Paul Averis.

61.22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Julie Haywood declared an interest in the Walsall Town Centre plan, a project in which the college was involved.

62.22 CONFIDENTIALITY

Governors were reminded that all discussions that take place at this meeting should remain confidential to the meeting. Minutes will not become a public document until approved at the next meeting and confidential items will not be open for public display.

63.22 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2022, having been circulated, were taken as read and approved.

64.22 MATTERS ARISING

Governors considered the Action Points Record and noted the following:

Item 81.21

Health and Safety training for Governors had been planned for the next Governor Training Day on 13 June 2022. However, the Training Day date had been moved and therefore the training would need to be re-scheduled.

Item 82.21

The Curriculum Conference date had been moved, and was now on 4 July 2022.

Item 38.22

Meetings were being arranged between the Principal and Student Governors.

Item 46.22

The Chair's declarations of interest had been updated.

65.22 FINANCE REPORT

The Director of Finance & MIS presented his report, which had two parts:

Management Accounts

The management accounts for the period to 31 March showed a year to date overall surplus of £114k compared to a budgeted position of £84k. This balanced position had arisen from underspends in both pay and non-pay costs offsetting under achievement in income. AEB, Apprenticeships, National Tuition Fund and Tuition fees were all significantly behind budget. The reasons for these variances had been discussed in detail at the recent Finance and Resources Committee.

Questions and comments were invited.

The Chair noted the additional cost pressures and their impact on the financial health measures.

A Governor asked about energy costs and it was agreed that this would be covered later, in the presentation on the budget. The clawback of HE funds was also questioned, and this was explained as being an adjustment following the college's withdrawal from the provision at LCCA.

Budget 2022/23

Work was ongoing to draft a budget for 2022/23. Governors were aware that the Finance and Resources Committee had discussed and agreed the following as high-level objectives for the year:

- EBITDA > 7.5%
- Staff Cost as a percentage of Income < 69.5%
- Average Class Size of at least 16
- Investment of £1m in resources (excluding match funding contributions). Particular investment was needed in IT.

However, the energy market continued to be very volatile. The electricity contract had been fixed from 31 March 2022 and this had added a further £1m of cost. The gas contract was due for renewal next year. The impact of energy price rises reduced EBITDA to around 5.5%.

The curriculum planning process was complete. A fully costed draft budget had been produced. This generated cash to support the capital plan.

Pay and non-pay inflation were concerns. The college had some control over the pay elements but controls over non-pay areas were increasingly difficult. It was hoped that the budget would allow for a 2% pay award next year, but this was not being formally proposed at this time.

The overall budgeting process continued to be prudent. There were opportunities to increase income through boot camps, swaps and other initiatives. These were not in the budget but it was hoped that there would be flexibility to be able to respond to opportunities that arose in year.

The biggest risk to delivery continued to be staffing, especially in areas where skills were in high demand.

In summary, the draft budget was balanced, met objectives, had prudent income projections, had some capacity for growth but had risks relating particularly to inflation and resourcing.

Questions and comments were invited.

The Director of Commercial Projects commented on the increased availability of opportunities for Government funding bids. These needed a degree of flexibility to enable the college to capitalise on the opportunities.

A Governor asked whether there were any plans to cut energy costs by reducing usage. The Director of Finance & MIS responded that efficiencies were being considered. Some evening opening at Wisemore may be reduced, although this added different pressures on timetabling.

A Governor asked whether a 2% pay award had been factored into the budget. This was not yet included but was expected to be affordable if the budget performed well.

The Chair noted the union request for a 10% pay award, which was felt to be unaffordable for the sector.

There was a discussion about class sizes and how the optimum of 16 could be achieved. The study programme hours of 580 were a challenge for curriculum staff to manage. Fewer and larger cohorts were desirable, although this did not always meet customer demand.

The Chair asked about receipt of the Lenartz refund. The Director of Finance & MIS confirmed that this had been received, although auditors' advice on the accounting treatment was awaited.

The Chair also commented on the variety of financial pressures facing the college and the FE sector in general. Corporation needed to be mindful that they could impact on the college's ability to meet its Quality/Finance/People objectives, and therefore that some changes may need to be considered. He was aware that the AOC Chairs' group had been discussing concerns about the FE funding model.

The Staff Governor asked whether staff were being fully utilised. She felt that capacity was an issue and that staff could perhaps be used differently. There was also a concern about courses that were being closed. The Principal responded that the staff turnover at Walsall was below the sector average, that staffing was a concern across FE in some curriculum areas and that it was important to both recruit 16-18 students to contract and to programmes that were right for them. WMCA had views on types of adult courses to be funded to meet local skills needs. The Director of Finance & MIS added that the curriculum plan used all available resources. However, there was not widespread closure of courses. Some changes were necessary due to policy and funding requirements, and also to ensure a suitable line of sight to work.

A Governor asked about plans to work with voluntary and community sectors. It was agreed that this would be covered at the later agenda item on strategic direction.

The final draft of the budget would be brought to the next meeting, in July. No approvals were needed at this time.

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

66.22 EXECUTIVE TEAM REPORT

The Principal commented on the report, which gave updates on the seven strategic pledges, safeguarding and student experience.

Governors were asked to note that:

- For Pledge 1, there was ongoing work to engage with employers. The LSIP was not yet published. The college had a clear ambition to bring an 'employer into every classroom' and there was good progress towards this;
- There was more work to do in respect of Pledge 2, which aimed to bring the college back to an Ofsted Outstanding rating;
- Pledge 3 had limited evidence of progress as it was too early to see the impact of the change delivery model for Maths and English. However, attendance had improved, which was positive;

There was a discussion about development of a consistent teaching and learning ethos, the use of Advanced Practitioners, of industrial upskilling and of reflective practice.

- There was good progress on Pledge 4, in relation to use of digital facilities and staff training in this area;

- There had been much work to review curriculum design, which supported Pledge 5, although still further to go on this.
- A framework for stakeholder engagement was being set up as a key element of Pledge 6;
- Pledge 7 related to improving progression. This had been a key focus of curriculum planning again this year.

A Governor commented that the document provided a great deal of useful information but that adding a RAG rating would be helpful. This was agreed.

Principal

There was a discussion about funding available for work with ex-offenders and whether this was an area for the college to consider. Staff confirmed that there were links with some community groups to support individuals transitioning back into employment. There had been a small amount of in prison activity and work in college, subject to reasonable adjustments that may be necessary, individuals meeting college criteria and safety/safeguarding considerations. In custody training was a complex area and not one that the college was currently engaged in. The Chair suggested that management give further consideration to this and that it be reported back to Learning and Quality Committee in future.

Principal

(Ray Simmonds left at 1840 hrs).

The Chair commented on information provided to Governors and suggested that more metrics were needed to demonstrate how the college was progressing towards an Outstanding Ofsted rating. A SAR update with KPIs and RAG rating would be helpful. This was agreed.

Principal

The Principal commented on aspects of safeguarding and student experience within his written report. The Interim Designated Safeguarding Lead continued in post but a new post of Head of Student Experience had been advertised. It was hoped to recruit to this in mid-June. Paul Averis, Safeguarding Link Governor, had agreed to sit on the interview panel. Paul was thanked for his work as Link Governor. He had recently been very active and supportive, providing feedback to management and the Chair.

Governors **resolved** to **receive** the Executive Team Report.

67.22 GOVERNANCE MATTERS

Chair's Report

The Chair had given a verbal report of the activities he had been involved in at the start of the meeting and there was nothing further to add.

Committee Minutes

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

- Finance and Resources Committee 15 February 2022; and
- Search and Governance Standards Committee 25 January 2022.

Governors were reminded that:

- Learning and Quality Committee met on 16 February 2022;
- Student Voice Committee met on 10 March 2022;
- Audit Committee met on 15 March 2022;

- Finance and Resources Committee met on 3 May 2022'
- Search and Governance Standards Committee met on 10 May 2022; and
- Remuneration Committee was due to meet on 24 May 2022 but the meeting had been postponed.

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

Governors were advised that there were no specific recommendations of the committees to be considered at this meeting.

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

Link Governor Reports

There were no Link Governor reports.

The Assistant Principal Quality and HE commented that it would be useful to have a Careers Link Governor and asked that this be considered.

The Head of Governance reminded Governors that they could attend Learning Walks with college staff if they wished and that this was a useful way to gain an understanding of the day to day operations of the college.

There was a five-minute comfort break.

68.22 STRATEGIC DISCUSSION – CURRICULUM DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE

The management team provided a contextual overview for the discussion, which included:

- The introduction of T Levels and the take up across the West Midlands. There were currently 374 T Level students across years 1 and 2 in the West Midlands, of which 130 were at Walsall;
- Walsall was therefore the largest T Level provider in the region;
- The feedback from the Ofsted T Level thematic review was positive. All 130 students had secured a placement;
- Following the Government review of Level 3 qualifications, a list of those to be defunded had been released on 11 May. This presented a lot of challenges for the college, which management had been discussing;
- Plans had therefore been made to move to an A Level model alongside smaller applied general qualifications in readiness for the extended diploma funding to cease in many areas of current provision;
- College plans for transitioning students, including adults for whom WMCA commissioned some L3 courses. WMCA may be able to continue to fund some Level 3 provision even if the Government did not;
- The Government's Level 2 qualifications review was underway. There was a large Level 2 cohort at Walsall, so the potential impact of this was also significant;
- Some T levels were not being offered at Walsall as they were not felt to be suitable;
- Curriculum considerations included the relationships between LR and ER courses, and also the offers at local school sixth forms;

- A potential limiting factor to growing T Levels was the need to provide placements;

There were four areas for discussion at the end of the written report and Governors were invited to comment.

The Chair stated that he had written to the Skills Minister to express concerns about the defunding issues.

A Governor suggested that the college be more ambitious about taking the A Level offer forward into new areas.

There was a discussion about the A Level offer agreed, which was an offer linked to a pathway such as Law or Sciences. Most school sixth forms offered a 'mix and match' approach from a wider number of subjects. Two pathways were to be offered from September 2022, with more planned in future years.

A Governor commented on the lifelong learning agenda for HE. Government had expressed some clear ideas, but colleges needed to decide how to respond to the broader agenda. There was a desire to reduce the costs of education and also respond to the skills needs of employers and the economy. High quality technical and academic provision was in demand. Walsall needed to ensure it remained at the heart of dialogue to influence the agendas, including levelling up.

There was a discussion about how subject pathways could or should be agreed and also how courses were funded. Funding was for a study programme, but class sizes were variable. T Level students would have a higher funding rate, reflecting that these qualifications had more hours than A Levels, and a placement to complete.

The first cohort of T Level students would complete their qualifications this year, but this would be subject to having completed the required number of placement hours. It was not yet known how universities generally may view students without the full number of T Level placement hours. Many of the Walsall cohort would be progressing to university or into employment with their placement employer.

It was confirmed that T Levels had been developed by IFATE, who had consulted employers on proposals. It was not known if any Walsall based employers had been part of the consultation. There was a concern that not enough SME employers yet understood T levels.

A Governor commented on the resourcing constraints highlighted in the Finance report and asked whether the college had staff to deliver the programmes. The Assistant Principal Curriculum confirmed that for the planned A Levels, staff already teaching at Level 3 would be utilised. It had been agreed not to open up the A Level offer faster than the staffing resources allowed.

The Chair noted the ambitions of the college but that the finances to develop this were needed. The vision was evolving but it was clear that there was a place for the college to offer something unique in the local

area with work placements and the academic offer. Governors agreed with the approach to this.

The Principal noted that the approach still aligned to the core strategy of the college, with a clear line of sight to work, a work placement and an employer in every classroom.

Governors reflected on current gaps in the market that could attract future students, given the local area and the need to offer digital skills to meet demand.

The Assistant Principal Commercial Development commented on his section of the report, which related to levelling up and the fact that Walsall had been selected as one of three pathfinder areas (together with Blackpool and Barking & Dagenham). Walsall had been selected due to having a high number of benefit claimants despite there being a high number of job vacancies. Work in Walsall would focus on St Matthews and Birchalls-Leamore wards.

Walsall's employment & skills pathfinder plan 2022 was noted. To support this, Walsall Employment and Skills Board which had been established for some years would change its Terms of Reference for the short term to provide Governance for the Pathfinder agenda. The college would be involved with this.

The paper suggested some areas for Governors to discuss and views were invited.

Governors were informed of the possibility of a 'super sixth form' being set up in Walsall. The Chair suggested that updates on this be provided via the Learning and Quality Committee.

Governors discussed the need for a collaborative approach with employers and the need for adequate funding to allow the college to participate in a meaningful way. There were some potential mis matches in the funding and priorities. The role of the Local Authority was key in determining a vision for Walsall. It was also important to consider what impact previous investments in the two wards had had.

The Assistant Principal Commercial Development confirmed that there was an emerging Pathfinder Action Plan so this would be brought back to a future meeting. The Chair asked that this include some supporting data.

The wider role of education as a long-term solution to levelling up was agreed, as was the need for Government to better understand the wide range of skills needs within a sector, for example retail. There was a variety of ways in which the college could be involved, including greater adult provision, being more innovative and considering different provision models.

69.22 EDI TRAINING

It was agreed to defer this until the Governor Training event in June.

**Assistant
Principal
Commercial
Development**

70.22 REFLECTIONS ON EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEETING AND MATTERS OF REPORT

All staff other than the Principal left for this item.

The importance of having space for a strategic debate was agreed. Available funding influenced what the college could do but having an opportunity to consider what was possible if there were fewer financial constraints was helpful.

Governors commented that the different meeting style had been collaborative and worked well. The interactions with senior staff had been very positive.

The Principal thanked Governors for their input. It was valuable to frame the college plans with the strategy, vision and intent.

71.22 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 7 July 2022 at 1730 hrs.

The meeting ended at 2010 hrs.

How Governors challenged management		Impact of meeting on College	
65.22	Asked about college plans to cut energy usage.	68.22	Contributed to strategic discussions on future curriculum design.
65.22	Asked about staff utilisation.		
68.22	Suggested that the college be more ambitious in it's a Level offer.		
68.22	Asked whether there were sufficient resources to deliver planned and changed programmes.		