

MINUTES OF CORPORATION MEETING HELD ON 24TH OCTOBER 2024
PART ONE

Members:

Charlotte Bosworth
 Barbara Van Der Eecken
 Mary Mahoney
 Alexandru Marina
 Edward Ng
 Stuart Pedley-Smith
 Rani Sahota
 Tony Sadla
 Jat Sharma
 Nelson Tanyanyiwa
 Graham Ward
 Garry Welborn
 David Wheeler

In Attendance:

Kirsti Lord, Deputy Principal Curriculum, Innovation & Student Success
 Jacky Leek, Interim Director of Finance
 James Norris, Assistant Principal Commercial Development
 Deb Rajania, Director of Operations & Resources
 David Turner, Assistant Principal Quality & HE
 Lesley Venables, Head of Governance

 Charlotte Wood, Head of Safeguarding – minutes 1 to 25
 Rachel Jones, Assistant Principal MIS & Student Services – minutes 1 to 25

	CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS	
1	The Chair welcomed governors and staff to the first meeting of the new academic year.	
	APOLOGIES	
2	Apologies for absence were received from Paul Averis and Heather Lodge.	
3	The Head of Governance advised that, following recent discussions, Heather Lodge had requested a leave of absence to 31 st December 2024 to enable her to deal with a difficult personal issue.	
4	Resolved – That Heather Lodge be granted a leave of absence from the Corporation until 31 st December 2024	
	DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
5	There were no declarations of interest in any specific agenda items.	
	MINUTES	
6	Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 th July 2024 (Parts 1 & 2) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair	
	MATTERS ARISING	
7	The Board received a progress report on actions arising from previous meetings and noted that the majority of these were either completed or in progress.	
8	All matters relating to the lease of the Adult Learning Centre had now been deferred to January/February 2025, due to delays in Walsall Council's processes. In relation to minute 10 the EDI Annual Report would be presented to the Corporation in March 2025. The AI link governor would be asked to attend the next meeting of the College's internal group on this issue (minute 265).	RJ
	LINK GOVERNOR ACTIVITIES	
9	The Chair reported that some minor amendments had been made to the schedule of link governorships to accommodate Heather Lodge's leave of absence. A further copy of the form to record activities and the guidelines would be circulated.	LV

10	Resolved – That the revised list of link governorships be approved	
SAFEGUARDING UPDATE		
11	Governors received for information the Annual Safeguarding Report for 2023/2024 and a report on safeguarding activities since the July 2024 meeting.	RJ/CW
12	Data on the number and type of cases was being amalgamated from 3 different IT systems into 1 and would provide a more robust and consistent position in future. The report included information by site, age, faculty and type of concern. Staff had received more safeguarding training in 2023/2024, and managers were challenging curriculum areas where the number of concerns identified was lower than expected.	
13	In 2023/2024 there had been a total of 3,158 cases, which was a 52% increase on the previous year. So far in the current term there had been 1,052 cases, which equated to nearly a third of the total for the whole of 2023/2024. The Corporation was assured that at the moment staff seemed well able to cope with this level of increase, and that the team had access to ‘supervision’ as part of their own support mechanisms	
14	Governors were advised that student awareness of safeguarding measures had improved significantly. The Principal commented that a number of extreme situations regarding student safety had been dealt with successfully by the College over the past 2 weeks and the Corporation expressed its thanks for staff for their response. It may be necessary to make some changes to operational management processes as a result of these incidents.	
15	The majority of safeguarding cases related to mental health, anxiety and well-being issues. Staff were addressing these through bespoke workshops and using the strong links the Local Authority and other partners to support mental health, wellbeing, and behaviour	
16	There had been an increase in the number of sexual assaults (17 this term to date), some of which had taken place on campus and some between students. It was noted that such assaults could take place off site, but were reported to College staff as the individuals saw this as a safe place.	
17	Concern was expressed by the Board over the number of cases where the classification was detailed as ‘not applicable’, which totalled 471. The Assistant Principal reported that staff were working through this data to clarify their categorisation.	
18	Governors received for information a copy of the Department for Education’s updated guidance, “Keeping Children Safe in Education”.	
19	The Head of Safeguarding was asked to provide in future reports an indication of the total number of referrals and the size of the student cohort, together with the types of issues being dealt with by staff. A governor also sought assurance that staff were receiving the appropriate level of ‘supervision’ which was confirmed by the Assistant Principal MIS as this was part of the College’s duty to support the Designated Safeguarding Lead and Officers. Management felt that the right structure and level of resources were now in place, but it was noted that the data would include multiple referrals for some students.	

20	A governor questioned how students developed an understanding of consent and whether this was sufficient to prevent further incidents. The Assistant Principal MIS reported that a variety of initiatives had been introduced, such as Staying Safe workshops and training on consent. This was confirmed by the Student Governor.	CW
21	Assurance was sought by governors on the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements in place (eg partnership working, robust policies and staff training) and whether these had had a positive impact. The Head of Safeguarding responded that this was demonstrated by the higher number of positive destinations as a result of interventions, but currently any further evidence was anecdotal. The Single Central Record provided a starting point to examine any trends and related this data to levels of achievement and attendance overall.	
22	New software (Smoothwall Monitor & Filtering) had been purchased that had enhanced the detection and automation in supporting potential online safeguarding threats, and ensured a more consistent approach. The system also applied to personal electronic devices that were logged into the College's network, providing another layer of assurance.	
23	Further work would be undertaken on safeguarding arrangements for apprentices under the age of 18 who were staying in hotel accommodation near the CCM facility. This was a contract between the CITB and relevant employers.	
24	Information on the impact of changes to the College's 14-16 provision would be included in the next report to the Corporation.	
25	Resolved – That the revised Safeguarding Policy for 2024/2025 be approved	
	Rachel Jones and Charlotte Wood left the meeting.	
STUDENT UNION PRESIDENT'S REPORT		
26	Governors received for information a report on activities by the Student Union and on enrichment in the first few weeks of the new academic year including: • Survey on enrichment identified that students wanted more sports clubs and more social space at the Green Lane Campus • 3200 students engaged in enrichment this year, which was a significant increase on 2023/2024 • Safeguarding Pulse Survey to be conducted next week to further raise awareness of the PREVENT Agenda. • Good level of attendance at the Freshers' Fair, with a second event planned for the Hawbush Campus in late October. • Variety of student clubs on offer, with growing levels of attendance • Students met with members of Walsall Council's Cabinet and were asked about the types of events that should be promoted in the College • Council representatives would be discussing student safety in the locality at a series of meetings in December	
27	Governors praised the student union group for the wide range of work completed since the beginning of the year.	

	EXECUTIVE REPORT	
28	The Executive Team presented an update on strategic and operational issues since September 2024.	Exec
29	Enrolment had been successful and had enrolled 4248 16-18 students against the target of 4141. The 'Swap Don't Drop' programme had enabled students to transfer between courses, which had resulted in 92% of those at risk re-engaging with learning. The College may be eligible for growth funding if the overall number of students remained at 101 or more above the ESFA allocation	
30	A total of 173 students were now enrolled on A Level programmes (compared to 47 in 2023/2024). A further review would be required over the next few months to determine its future structure and curriculum offer, linked to the Corporate Plan.	
31	Governors emphasised that the College's ethos was that of a vocational, inclusive college, offering a wide range of courses to all groups and that this was paramount in planning the future strategic direction. The Deputy Principal responded that the development of the College's A Level courses was partly to address the Government's de-funding of Level 3 provision. The outcome of any funding reforms had been deferred prior to the General Election. It was important that the College ensured that any A Level courses were high quality and delivered efficiently.	
32	There were some risks in relation to the funding of places on the College's high needs provision due to be paid by Walsall Council. Discussions on the amount and timing of these monies continued and it was anticipated that the matter would be concluded shortly. This item had been placed on the College's risk register and planning for next year's cohort of learners had already commenced.	
33	Enhancements to a number of human resources policies would be required following the new workplace harassment legislation.	
34	Additional security measures were being introduced to improve student and staff safety, such as turnstiles at the entrance to each campus, the need for which had been heightened due to several incidents amongst students. Recently there had been a number of fire alarm alerts due to students vaping, which had caused disruption to classes.	
35	The Principal reported that clear guidance had not yet been issued by the DfE on the implications for further education of the October Budget in terms of capital funding, support for any pay increases (in line with the school sector) and VAT relief.	
36	Governors were advised that the number of Out of Funding apprentices had reduced since the last report and that the College's provision in this area was on track to meet the requirements set out in the Accountability Framework (9.2% of the overall cohort).	
37	Apprenticeship starts had been below plan for Q1 of 2024/2025, partly due to reduced staff capacity in the directorate at the beginning of the year. This had now been resolved and it was anticipated that the number of starts would increase. In-year retention on apprenticeship programmes had improved and	

	end point assessments were now undertaken in a more timely manner, generating more income at the start of the 2024/2025 academic year.	
38	In collaboration with key partners, work at The Link continued to increase and there was a high level of employer engagement across the College. Following detailed negotiations, the Combined Authority had agreed to provide £400k to support The Link in 2024/2025.	
39	A governor asked why there had been a reduction in T Level enrolments for 2024/2025. The Deputy Principal explained that this was due to students not meeting the identified entry criteria as their GCSE results were insufficient. Any such students were offered alternative vocational programmes.	
40	It had been the DfE's intention that T Levels would be given parity with A Level programmes, but this had not materialised, despite the significant capital investment made in T Levels nationally. Subject experts from Health & Care, Digital and Construction were working with colleagues from Colleges West Midlands to explore entry assessments that could provide an alternative to GCSEs for progression to T Levels.	
41	Recruitment on adult and community programmes currently met 91% of the identified target for September, with the main areas of under-recruitment in Access to HE and Professional Services. Work had commenced to review this provision.	
42	It was agreed that the inputs from governors resulting from the session on the Corporate Plan would be collated and fed back to individuals.	KL
	CORPORATE STRATEGY UPDATE	
43	The presentation from the session at the governors' training event earlier in the day would be circulated together with precis of the discussions and information on the next steps for the development of the Corporate Strategy. A final draft of the Strategy would be presented to the Corporation for approval at its December 2024 meeting.	KL
	PROPERTY UPDATE	
44	The Director of Operations presented an update on the College's property strategy, with a particular focus on the proposals for the Adult Learning Centre (Park Street Campus) and associated projects. This had been discussed in detail by the Capital Projects Working Group, which had made a number of recommendations, the financial aspects of which had also been considered by the Finance & Resources Committee.	
45	Draft heads of terms for the lease of the ALC had been submitted for approval by the Corporation and it was noted that there would be no service charge to the College for the first 20 years of the lease. Leases for the Whitehall building and The Link would be aligned to that of the ALC.	
46	The CPWG had recommended that the Corporation should give in principle agreement to the transfer of the Leather Museum to the College on a long-term lease. The level and potential cost of any work that may be necessary to enable this building to accommodate the College's SEND provision had still not been determined definitively. The lease for the Hawbush Campus would be surrendered to Walsall Council once the ALC was operational.	

47	A number of funding challenges for the ALC project had been identified and these had been debated by the CPWG, as the costs had increased and the amount of funding allocated by the local authority was now insufficient. Governors were reminded that the risks of the project not proceeding due to the availability of funding rested with Walsall Council and that the latter did not have any other partners that could take on the project.	DR
48	Approval of the education, financial and business cases for the ALC would be required in late January/early February 2025, in line with the Council's revised timescales. Governors received information on current and future travel to learn patterns to model the impact of the ALC on educational opportunities.	
49	Resolved – That the following items be approved: 1 Alignment of the Whitehall and ALC leases 2 Lease arrangements for the ALC – no service charge payable until Year 20 3 Submission of travel to learn information as part of the education case for the ALC 4 Current approach to working in partnership with Walsall Council, subject to it maintaining the current level of funding for the ALC project 5 Development of the College's capital expenditure capability over the next 5 years to support future discussions on affordability of capital projects	
SEARCH & GOVERNANCE STANDARDS COMMITTEE		
50	The Chair of the Search & Governance Standards Committee provided a verbal update on the meeting held on 24 th September 2024.	
51	Governance Performance Review Process 2023/2024 Following the decision to introduce a more formal process for the assessment of performance for 2023/2024, governors had completed forms that reviewed individual governors, the Corporation, the Chair and committees. The Head of Governance and the Chair of Corporation had met with the majority of governors. All participants had been receptive of the process and diligently completed the paperwork. In addition to the questions on the forms attendance and training undertaken to date were discussed.	
52	The common themes had been collated in the report, such as the need for more information at meetings on employer engagement activities and succession planning for governors coming to the end of their terms of office. An action plan to address any areas for improvement had been prepared and recommended for approval. Annual Governance Report 2023/2024 The Committee had noted an 83% level of attendance overall (target 75%), with the exception of the L&Q Committee which had only just met the target and was an area for improvement in 2024/2025,	
54	Recruitment activity had been minimal, but at the end of the year the Corporation decided to remove the associate governorship and transfer 2 of the 3 associates to a full governorship. Currently there were 2 vacancies for external governors. An external specialist had been engaged to support the recruitment of 2 individuals with finance/audit/risk expertise once of whom could be appointed as chair of the Finance & Resources Committee.	

55	Succession planning for future vacancies would be a focus of activity over the next 18 months as terms of office expired.	
56	There had been a continued focus on updating and streamlining the governance framework and modernising processes, such as the formal performance review process. The importance of on-going induction and training for governors was highlighted and would be a key priority in 2024/2025.	
57	Committee Memberships Governors received a revised schedule of committee memberships which had been updated to reflect the removal of the associate governor category and recent resignations.	
58	Review of Confidential Business 2023/2024 The Head of Governance advised that each year the Board was required to undertake a review of any minutes classified as confidential to determine whether they could now be released into the public record. This exercise had been completed and it was recommended that only 2 items (a discussion on the College's 14-16 arrangements and the content of the External Audit Plan for 2024/2025) should be reclassified as non-confidential.	
59	Resolved – That the following items be approved: 1 Revised Schedule of Committee memberships 2 Proposals on the reclassification of confidential minutes for 2023/2024	
AUDIT COMMITTEE – 2ND OCTOBER 2024		
60	The Chair of the Audit Committee provided a verbal update on the meeting held on 2 nd October 2024.	
61	The ongoing work on the College's risk management arrangements had been noted and a draft list of the 'top 10' risks would be presented to the Committee's next meeting for discussion.	
62	The overall assessment of the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2023/2024 was 'Amber/Green', in line with the previous academic year.	
63	A total of 5 assurance assignments had taken place, two of which had been graded as providing 'substantial' assurance and 3 as 'reasonable assurance'. There had been 18 recommendations, 8 of which were graded as 'medium' priority and 10 as 'low' priority actions. No 'high' priority actions had been raised in 2023/2024.	
64	The progress report on the implementation of previous recommendations identified by the Internal Auditor had concluded that 'reasonable' progress had been made, with 17 out of a total of 32 recommendations completed in-year.	
65	A briefing was received on the implications of the Procurement Act 2024 (which was now expected to become effective from February 2025) and developments in higher education which included the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. The Committee considered other potential risks in HE such as the anticipated change in remit of the Student Loans Company and the recent announcement of the removal of Level 7 higher apprenticeships.	

66	The Sub-Contractor Controls Annual Assurance Review 2023/2024 was an annual requirement of the ESFA. Beever & Struthers had been appointed to undertake this work and the overall outcome was that the College's systems and controls in this area provide a 'satisfactory' level of assurance to enable it to manage sub-contracting delivery. A total of 3 areas for improvement had been identified.	
67	The Committee had received a report on the actions identified in the recent Funding Assurance Audits undertaken by PWC and Mazars. From a total of 28 recommendations relating to apprenticeship funding, 8 had been fully completed and a level of progress had been made on a further 15 recommendations. A number of changes to the College's systems and processes had been made and management was confident that these measures were sufficient to ensure that any future audit would receive a higher grading. However, the Committee noted that there may be further points made in the management letter issued to the College.	
68	Off The Job (OTJ) apprenticeship hours was the highest risk area, which now had robust controls in place and management felt that the evidence collected exceeded the minimum requirements.	
69	There was still some work to be completed on the recommendations emanating from the KPMG audit in December 2023. A mapping exercise would be undertaken as part of the Transformation Project.	
70	The College would need to determine the degree of tolerance it was willing to accept in terms of non-compliance. A 3% tolerance level was included in the ESFA guidelines and the Principal had been asked to obtain benchmarking information if possible.	
71	From a total of 45 recommendations made in 2023/2024, 15 were still active and it was noted that this was an improvement on the previous report (June 2024) with no actions overdue compared to the identified completion date. The system for tracking progress had improved significantly this year and there had been no overdue items within the report received by the Committee.	
72	The Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire 2023/2024 (an annual requirement under the ESFA's Post-16 Audit Code of Practice) had been recommended for approval.	
73	Resolved – That the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire for 2023/2024 be approved.	
FINANCE COMMITTEE – 8TH OCTOBER 2024		
74	The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee presented a verbal summary of the meeting held on 8 th October 2024.	
75	Governors were reminded of previous discussions regarding the likely outturn for 2023/2024, due to lagged funding, underperformance in previous years and buoyant recruitment for 2024/2025. The increase in the 16-18 funding rate allocation from the DfE had offset the 6.5% pay award for staff for 2023/2024 and the investment in quality improvement measures.	
76	Income had reduced in apprenticeships, National Tuition Fund courses, higher education and Construction. Some vacancies in specialist curriculum	

	areas had been filled through agency staffing, which had increased to £1m in 2023/2024.	
77	All the above factors had led to an EBITDA figure of 0.63%, which was insufficient to cover the capital investment planned by the College.	
78	In 2024/2025, recruitment of 16-18s had been higher, with adult enrolments at a similar level to 2023/2024. A number of cost pressures had been discussed by the Committee. Nationally a 5.5% pay increase for teachers in schools for 2024/2025 had been funded by the DfE, but there was no such arrangements yet for further education. Coupled with a likely increase in employer national insurance contributions and the National Minimum Wage, this would have a negative impact on the College's financial situation. Any pay proposals submitted to the Corporation in January/February 2025 should include information on the full implications of pay award decisions and their impact on the level of EBITDA, for example, spending an extra £500,000 will reduce EBITDA by 1%.	JL/JS
79	Issues relating to the College's High Needs Funding for 2023/2024, 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 had been reported and it had been agreed that progress would be monitored at each meeting until this was resolved.	
80	Performance of each sub-contractor had been considered. Learning Curve had under-performed on start activity against their Free Courses For Jobs contract. They had asked if they could now use their carry over contract for new starts in 2024/2025. The L&Q Committee had been asked to consider the decrease in quality over the past year prior to any decision being made (which would be subject to approval from the Combined Authority)	
81	Information on performance against key human resources indicators had been received, together with activities on health, well-being and CPD.	
82	A comprehensive report on the main outcomes of the Capital Projects Working Group had been received, the majority of which had been discussed under an earlier agenda item.	
83	Resolved - 1 That the following items be approved: a) the EVSC project to be put on hold until the project completion can be fully funded from external sources. b) undertake a value engineering exercise for the ALC project. 2 That the Corporation endorse the reallocation of the £909k Town Deal funding to the ALC project to bridge part of the funding shortfall.	
MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO JULY 2024		
84	The Interim Director of Finance presented the Management Accounts to July 2024, which had been discussed in detail by the Finance & Resources Committee.	
85	Governors were reminded that the budget approved at the July Corporation meeting included a deficit of £0.5m. However, the actual outturn was a deficit of £1.5m due to the reasons outlined earlier..	

86	Staff costs to income were 71.58% and the predicted 1% increase in National Insurance would increase staffing costs by £370K. The College's financial health graded remained as 'Good'	
87	An EBITDA of 3.5% would require cost savings of approximately £1.5m, which would be the aim of the Transformation Project. The Principal was asked by governors if other measures such as increasing class sizes had been considered and responded that this was not always possible, due to the specialist nature of some accommodation and learner needs.	
LEARNING & QUALITY COMMITTEE – 14TH OCTOBER 2024		
88	In the absence of the Committee Chair, Mary Mahoney presented a summary of the meeting held on 14 th October 2024.	
89	A group of Advanced Practitioners had given a presentation on their current projects, which included tackling behaviours and attendance in STEAM, an Early Years Forest School and Health & Social Care.	
90	Whilst the Corporation concurred that it was reassuring to hear about the quality of teaching, the College had some significant challenges in Maths & English and the Executive was asked what was being done to address these. Governors were advised that attendance had improved slightly in 2024/2025 and that the additional hour within the timetable was being used to contextualise Maths.	
91	It was felt that the groups were now appropriate in terms of student aspirations. However, it should be noted that there was a national shortage of Maths teachers and the College was competing for these resources against schools which paid at a higher level. The Deputy Principal commented that the College acknowledged that it recruited teachers who were relatively new to the profession, and to support and train them to a high level. A proportion were likely to then leave and progress into schools, but this should be planned for as a rolling programme.	
92	The number of students undertaking GCSE re-sits had increased significantly in 2023/2024 and this would be replicated in 2024/2025. The College had changed awarding bodies, which had meant that students only sat 2 examinations rather than 3 under the previous system. More effective streaming was in place. It was agreed that the Executive Report to the December 2024 Corporation meeting would include information on Maths & English re-sits.	Exec
93	The Committee had received reports on enrolments (including the Swap Don't Drop initiative), T Level and A Level recruitment for 2024/2025 and an update on apprenticeships.	
94	Information on preparations for the imminent Ofsted inspection had been provided, together with reports on quality assurance and quality improvement issues.	
95	The Committee had received a report on Adults and Work-Based Learning provision. Although there were no concerns regarding quality in 2023/2024, it had been noted that the College was in discussion with the Combined Authority on any new starts on Free Courses for Jobs operated by Learning Curve. Governors were advised that the Finance & Resources Committee had	

96	been concerned that any under-performance would mean that the College would face a clawback of funds by the CA and had recommended that this contract should only continue if the CA was willing to underwrite any shortfall as the contract had been undertaken to fill a gap in provision. The Assistant Principal (Adults, WBL & Community) advised that since the L&Q Committee meeting the College had agreed with the CA that no new provision would be undertaken by Learning Curve, but last year's activity would be completed.	
	DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS	
	4th February 2025 Search & Governance Standards Committee 4th February 2025 Governor Training 11th February 2025 Finance & Resources Committee 27th February 2025 Learning & Quality Committee 11th March 2025 Audit Committee 13th March 2025 Student Voice Committee 27th March 2025 Corporation	
	The staff and student governors left the meeting at this point.	