

## CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

### Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Thursday 14 November 2024 at 5pm in Room 206A, Wellington Road

#### **PRESENT**

Mr Mike Hastings – Chair	Ms Dionne Barrett
Mr Simon Evans	Mrs Amanda Tomlinson – until 6pm (on Teams)
Mr John Bradford (on Teams)	Mr Darren Shaw – from 5.15pm
Mrs Jane Carter	Ms Doina Surchicin
Mr Sam Duru	Mr Mark Taylor (on Teams)
Ms Wendy Harris	Mr Scott Thompson

#### **IN ATTENDANCE**

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

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

#### **13/25 APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)**

Apologies were received and accepted from Louise Fall. Hshaana Knight was not in attendance.

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

#### **14/25 MINUTES (ITEM 2)**

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2024 be **approved**.

#### **15/25 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS (ITEM 3)**

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that the speed gates were now installed and well embedded.

#### **16/25 CORRESPONDANCE (ITEM 4)**

Two letters had been received and shared for information:

1. From the Secretary of State for Education on 4 November 2024, relating to higher education.
2. From the Minister for Skills on 8 November 2024, relating to announcements in the recent budget.

## **17/25 STRATEGY (ITEM 5)**

### **Property, Rail and CLQ Update**

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive gave an update, noting that details had been shared with CTOG earlier in the week and the slides from that meeting had been emailed to Governors.

Governors noted the following:

#### ATAC

- ATAC was substantially complete. Staff and students had settled in well

#### CLQ

- Work was progressing well, as shown in the images included in the CTOG slides.
- There was focus on managing the moves into the building and planning for the operational opening, which was likely to be after October 2025 half term.
- It was hoped that site tours, including for interested Governors, would be able to be arranged soon.
- Work continued on the legal documents, which were not yet finalised. The significant commitment to FE capital funding in the recent budget had been reassuring.

#### Other Property Matters

- The disposal of Paget Road was expected to be marketed soon. DfE would be kept updated as they held a charge over the site.
- The sale of Newhampton Arts Centre had been agreed. Heads of Terms for the disposal had been received and were being agreed. Completion was expected to take 2-3 months.
- The Aston campus was fully open and operational. An opening event was being planned. Governors would be invited.
- A decarbonisation plan was being developed. The college had recently been advised that it could not apply directly for Salix funding. Instead, WMCA would receive an allocation of devolved funding for public sector buildings. It was hoped that the college would be able to access this.

(Darren Shaw arrived at 5.15pm)

- Social value opportunities continued to be discussed with the main contractor for CLQ.
- There were plans to start work to update the Estates Strategy.

Questions and comments were invited.

The Chair noted the more detailed discussions at the recent CTOG meeting. It appeared that there was good awareness of the progress at CLQ in the wider community.

A Governor asked about parking arrangements at CLQ. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive responded that he was aware of the need but that no headway had been made. Some discussions had been held with the management team at the nearby Wulfrun Centre, which was the nearest neighbour with a car park. It was hoped to secure a small number of spaces. A Governor commented that the City

Council had recently announced increased charges for the car parks that they operated.

A Governor asked about the economic pressures affecting opportunities for social value. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive commented on expected cost increases for employers following the budget announcements on increases to National Insurance and apprenticeship wage rates. There was little available information on the social value generated by CLQ to date. However some local labour was being used. There were discussions with the contractor to progress social value.

A Governor asked about the information on CLQ that was being shared with local businesses in the city centre. He was aware of a number of businesses that may be interested in collaborating and using the new college facilities. There were opportunities for the college to maximise the use of its building. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that there were discussions with local business groups but that he was happy to contact others. There were some technicalities that limited its use to certain activities in line with the funding conditions. It was suggested that it would be useful to link into the City Investment Board's comms group.

### **Adult Education**

It was reported that the Adult Education Service was going through a re-structure so there was limited information to share at this time.

For reasons of confidentiality, the remainder of this discussion has been minuted separately.

## **18/25 COLLEGE UPDATE (ITEM 6)**

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive commented on aspects of the Principal's Update section of the report, including:

- Members of EMT had attended the AOC Conference in Birmingham earlier in the week. This had provided some useful reflection time as well as opportunities to hear from some high profile keynote speakers.
- The relationship building with Bilston Town FC was continuing.
- Speed gates had been installed and were operational.
- The recent budget had included some areas relevant to colleges, such as:
  - Requirement for the school pay review body to consider the implications of any pay decisions on the FE sector.
  - £300m of additional funding for colleges, with more details to follow. It was expected that this would cover demographic growth.
  - DfE was continuing to push for changes to VAT on colleges.
  - The development of the new Skills England body was continuing.
  - £40m had been allocated for changes to apprenticeships
  - Additional capital funding for education, some of which was expected to be allocated for colleges.
  - The National Insurance increases for employers were expected to be funded.

The Chair asked if the college had any plans for additional capital funding if received. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive responded that there were no detailed plans as yet but that an updated property strategy would be brought back later in the year. A college estates survey was to be carried out next year. This may be used by DfE to determine how capital funding is allocated to colleges.

## **Student Engagement**

### **2023/24 Complaints Annual Report**

The report had been provided for information and the Assistant Principal (Lynn Parker) commented on the following aspects:

- The overall level of complaints was low relative to the total student population, with 74 across the year.
- The complaints process was overseen by the Quality team, with independent investigators assigned where appropriate. HR would be involved if staffing matters were a concern.

A Governor asked if there were any themes in the complaints and it was confirmed that there were not. The majority related to aspects of student entitlement, curriculum and quality. There were low numbers of appeals after responses had been provided.

### **Enrolment Update**

The Assistant Principal (Lynn Parker) gave an update that covered the following:

- There had been 2570 youth enrolments compared to the target of 2279, which was 256 higher than last year.
- There had been high enrolments in Construction and Health & Social Care, but falling numbers in Music, Science, Uniformed Public Services and some A Levels.
- Staffing challenges remained in some areas, such as Construction.
- Adult enrolments to date were around 4,000, similar to last year. Enrolments would continue throughout the year.
- There were 134 HE enrolments, higher than the target of 120.
- Apprenticeships were expected to meet target by the end of the year. There were currently 490 active apprentices.

Governors noted the positive impact of the new ATAC building on enrolments. It was hoped that CLQ would have a similarly positive impact for next year.

### **Student Welcome Survey Outcomes**

The Assistant Principal (Lynn Parker) gave an update that covered the following:

- Outcomes were positive and the completion rate was high.
- 98% of students had stated they had a positive college experience so far, an increase of 3% compared to the previous year.
- A number of the comments made were included in the written report for information.
- 98% of students felt safe in college. This had also increased 3% on the previous year

There was a discussion about the speed gates, wand security checks and knife arch. These had been viewed positively. Only one student had refused to go through the arch. It was noted that student behaviour was better. The security team had some new members and they were dealing well with students. Pastoral support available was strong.

A Governor asked about improvements in the Food Hub area. The Student Governor commented that the queuing times were better and that the overall feel of the space was good.

A Governor suggested that some of the student comments be used in the college social media and promotional material.

### **Student Success**

#### **2023/24 Achievement Outcomes**

The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) gave an update which covered the following:

- The overall achievement rate for the year was 92.7%, 3% higher than the previous year and believed to be the best ever for the college.
- The breakdown showed 16-18 achievement as 89.7%, adults 94.5% and High Needs 88.7%
- Partnership activity significantly contributed to the adult results.
- QER meetings for apprenticeships had been taking place and many areas had been RAG rated as green. Apprenticeship achievement had been 51.9%, which included some legacy learners. The number of out of funded learners had reduced. It was expected that apprenticeship achievements would improve in the current year.
- The breakdown of achievements for different levels was included in the written report. The focus was on improving Level 3 this year, which although better, was below the national average.

(Amanda Tomlinson left at 6pm)

#### **Curriculum Planning Cycle Update**

The Assistant Principal (Mike Dixon) explained changes to the process for this year. The Assistant Principals would be responsible for intent and the Deputy Principal and Director of Finance for implementation. Plans had recently been launched with SMT and a meeting was scheduled with stakeholders to gain insights on their priorities. The college priorities were to increase adult numbers and to address youth unemployment in Wolverhampton.

Planning would be reviewed at Christmas and was expected to be complete by Easter.

A Governor commented on youth unemployment and the City task force that had been set up. This had started some good initiatives, including business engagement but it was unclear what was now happening. Another Governor noted the city-wide education, employment and skills strategy that had been created and that this was being taken forward through a different route to the task force. The role of the college in bringing partners together to drive change was agreed as important. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive noted that this was a theme that the WMCA Mayor was keen on.

The Assistant Principal commented on the need to understand community issues and needs, which differed across the city. Ideas for addressing this were being discussed with curriculum teams.

A Governor added that they had sent a document on supported internships to the Head of Student Entitlement earlier in the week. This was for students with SEN support not just EHCPs. It presented some opportunities for consideration and would be sent to the Assistant Principals as well. Action: Jane Carter.

#### **2024/25 Self-Assessment (SAR) Process**

All curriculum areas had completed their SARs for validation and grading confirmation to a panel of Governors, EMT members and a peer College (Vision West Notts). SARs had been based on Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework.

Based on findings so far, the College's overall effectiveness for 2023/24 was expected to be judged as Good. Other judgements would be:

Quality of Education - Good  
Behaviour and Attitudes - Good  
Personal Development - Good  
Leadership and Management - Good

Types of Provision would be judged as:

Education programmes for young people - Good  
Adult learning programmes - Good  
Apprenticeships – Requires Improvement  
Provision for students with High Needs - Good

There would be a final validation of the SAR, before presentation to Governors for approval at the December Board meeting.

## **People Engagement**

### **Staff Survey Outcomes**

- The survey had been completed and the results shared with the Board at the meeting in September.
- Since then, management had been working on key actions identified.
- There had been discussions with the union representatives and a Cultivating a Healthy and Engaged Workforce Group had been set up. The Group had met to discuss the actions. The action plan would be brought back to a future Board meeting.

## **Business Success**

### **Management Accounts – September 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 budget had been phased differently this year to reflect seasonality, so was not in equal twelfths. More details had been provided in the written report.
- There were no concerns about income at this early stage of the year. The overall year to date position was a deficit, but this was smaller than had been budgeted. The income target for the year was expected to be met.
- Partnership delivery was significantly ahead of the same period last year.
- The main variances to the year to date budget were noted, including for apprenticeships, HE, commercial training and advanced learner loans.
- Pay costs were currently under budget, but this reflected the very early stage of the year being reported.
- The recent budget had announced changes to employers National Insurance and the National Living Wage. The annualised impact of this on the college was estimated at £465k.
- There were no significant concerns about non-pay costs currently. A prudent approach had again been taken to budgeting for energy costs.
- Attention was drawn to costs in the budget for promotional events for ATAC and CLQ, the investment in the Food Hub at Wellington Road, other building work and IT works in ATAC
- The cash position remained healthy.

- The external audit was nearing completion.
- The financial reporting pack had been reviewed with input from an Associate Governor and some changes would be made later in the year.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked if the income variances could be further broken down in future reports, and this was agreed. Action: Director of Finance.

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

### 2023/24 Year-End Update

- The audit completion meeting was to be held on 18 November and the final accounts would be presented for approval at the December Board meeting.
- Provisional figures indicated an operating surplus of £1.6m and net assets of £9.950m.
- There had been balance sheet growth and a credit received for the pension scheme.
- Overall results were positive and this was expected to continue into the current year. A view on a pay award would be taken in January.
- There would be a pre meeting with the Audit Committee Chair the following week, and the Audit Committee would review the audit outcomes ahead of the next Board meeting.

### Subsidiary Company Update

- The background to the setting up and operations of the company, including staffing, was noted.
- The audited accounts for the year ended 31 July 2024 would be brought to the December Board meeting.
- Governors noted some key information, including:
  - Staff turnover rate had reduced.
  - Quality KPIs had been set and were being met.
  - There had been significant improvement in the service quality and financial performance of the areas since they had been brought in-house, with around £220k of savings in areas such as VAT and management fees.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked whether the directors were remunerated and it was confirmed that they were not for this role. Some were paid employees of the college.

A Governor asked if there were any other service areas to consider bringing in and the Deputy Principal and Chief executive confirmed not.

A Governor asked if there was scope to grow the business, for example by offering it to schools. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive thought that there may be some.

### Health and Safety Annual Report

- The detailed report had been provided to Governors as part of the annual assurances that they were fulfilling their statutory responsibilities.
- Some highlights to be noted were.
  - A range of organisational developments in the last year.
  - There had been 322 incidents recorded, of which three had been reported under RIDDOR requirements.

- The reporting of near misses continued to be encouraged.
- Improvements that had been made in year, including the new zebra crossing at the entrance to Wellington Road.
- There were regular meetings of the SHEF and Safety Committees.
- A new PA system had been installed.
- The new occupational health provider was well embedded.
- Priorities for the current year had been identified.

The Chair commented that it was good to see improvements to reporting in this area.

#### Partnerships Update

The updates in the written report were noted, including the outturn for 2023/24.

There was a request to increase the contract value for NIS to reflect ESFA additional uplifts and additional Bootcamp delivery.

**Resolved** - Governors approved the request to increase the NIS contract value by £83.9k.

Overall partner provision outturned at £12.455m against the initial curriculum plan of £11.999m. This was largely driven by additional Bootcamp delivery, which attracted additional funding, manual ESFA uplifts and virements to reflect changing learner demand.

The activities of the individual partners were noted. This provision had done much to increase the adult activity of the college. Quality was good and enrolments, retention, pass rates and outcomes were excellent.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked about BCIMO, which was not included. It was explained that this was the Dudley delivery element of NIS work, so the figures were included.

#### Bidding Update

There was a management group that met regularly to oversee strategic and high quality bids. This aimed to identify new opportunities, select those that were strategically appropriate, financially viable and could be delivered with quality. There was also oversight of the successful bids to ensure that projects were running as expected.

Examples of the bids in 2023/24 were given. There was funding available for new teaching staff within FE in recent years and for specific subjects. A Governor asked how many staff had benefitted from this. Exact figures were not known as staff needed to submit their own applications.

A Governor commented on the project to develop the use of AI. This was expected to be a major focus in many industries.

The commitment of staff to supporting the projects funded through the Turing scheme was noted.

Funding had been agreed in principle, subject to contract, to continue to allow DWP presence at Wellington Road and facilitate employability training.

#### Value for Money Update

A detailed report had been provided. Highlights included:



- Savings achieved through the Enterprises company and from rationalising the estate.
- That the college compared well against the AOC's procurement efficiency management model.
- That improvements had been made to procurement processes.
- Procurement of a new HR and payroll system was under review.
- The Procurement Act had been delayed but the college needed to be prepared for this.
- There was more work to be done on sustainability in terms of value for money and procurement efficiency.

## **19/25 GOVERNANCE MATTERS (ITEM 7)**

### Prospective Governors

The Head of Governance reported the activities to recruit new Governors. It was hoped to bring recommendations to the next Board meeting in December.

### External Governance Review Action Plan

The action plan had been reviewed by the Search and Governance Committee and the final version had been provided for Board approval. Wording of a short statement on this was to be considered as this needed to be published on the college website.

**Resolved** – that the External Governance Review Action Plan was approved.

### Governor Strategy Day – Next Steps

EMT had provided a short update on the areas discussed at the recent Strategy Day. Progress was ongoing and all areas were being taken forward.

## **20/25 COMMITTEE REPORTS (ITEM 8)**

The minutes of the following recent meetings had been circulated:

- Campus Transformation Oversight Group (CTOG) 16 September 2024
- Search and Governance Standards Committee 3 October 2024
- Apprenticeships Task and Finish Group 10 October 2024

A further CTOG meeting took place on 11 November 2024 but this had been after the circulation of the Board papers so would come to the next meeting in December 2024.

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

## **21/25 ANY OTHER BUSINESS (ITEM 9)**

None.

## **22/24 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 10)**

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

- Property, Rail and CLQ Update

- **Adult Education Service Update**
- **Committee minutes for the Apprenticeships Task and Finish Group**

**23/25 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 12)**

Board of Governors – Thursday 12 December 2024 at 5pm at Wellington Road

The meeting ended at 7.15pm.