North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION

Thursday 10th April 2025 at 6pm - Room4-49 - Wigston Campus

Present: In person: Prof. Ray Linforth (Chair), Mrs Marion Plant (Principal), Mrs Sally Barnett, Mr Chris Benham, Mr Steve Dover, Mrs Jeannette Essex, Mrs Helen Holley, Mrs Michelle Kavanagh, Mr Simon Kirby, Mr Anil Majithia, Mr Jeevan Marwaha, Mrs Natalie Prosser, Mr Clive Read and Mr Andrew Turner.

Via Microsoft Teams: Mrs Natalie Prosser and Mrs Rebecca Suart.

In attendance: Mr Colin Butler (Executive Director People and Culture), Mr Paul Joyce (Deputy Principal Designate), Mr Simon Lomax (Associate Executive Director 14-16 and Schools), Mr David Poole (Chief Operating Officer and Deputy CEO) and Mrs Rachel Marshall (Clerk).

Members welcomed Paul Joyce, the new Deputy Principal, to his first Corporation meeting. Ray Linforth asked Paul Joyce to introduce himself.

Paul Joyce thanked Members for their welcome and went on to explain how much he had wanted to join the College in light of its culture, mission, vison and values, his reasons for changing roles and how much he had enjoyed the recent management team meeting.

Ray Linforth highlighted to Members that the interim management structure was now in place and the structure document had been posted on TeamEngine for Members to view. Marion Plant provided Members with an overview of the new structure and the reasons for its implementation She expressed her gratitude to the Team for stepping up during this time of change.

Members then received a briefing from David Poole on the College's Budget and Medium-Term Business Plan which provided an overview of the annual cycle of planning and the planning process itself, the interrelationship with the curriculum planning process, the budget review process, the treatment of non-pay, costs and capital, and the budget and medium term business plan approval process.

1. Routine and Standing Items

1.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Ben Crook, Jeanette Essex, Mannie Ketley, Steve Maxey and Mr Luke Robinson.

Ray Linforth welcomed everyone to the meeting, which was quorate.

1.2 Declaration of Interests including Gifts and Hospitality

Chris Benham declared that he had been appointed as a governor at Birkett House which was a SEND school. Members confirmed that there was no conflict of interest with this appointment. There were no other new declarations of interest, or any declarations of the receipt of gifts and hospitality.

1.3 Minutes of a Meeting held on Thursday 12th December 20204

The minutes of the last meeting held on Thursday 12th December 2024 were unanimously approved. (Proposer: Anil Majithia; seconder: Steve Dover).

1.3.1 Schedule of Actions

Members received the schedule of actions.

1.3.2 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

1.4 **Chair's Action**

Ray Linforth reported that he had undertaken no Chair's actions since the last meeting.

2. Strategic Development

2.1 **Principal's Briefing Update**

Marion Plant presented a number of slides highlighting national, regional and College updates and provide an overview the following key matters for Members' information:

i. An update on national developments including:

- A summary of significant national developments which would impact Further Education, despite it having been reclassified as being in the public sector, as its budgets were not protected. It was likely that that cuts would be made to funding and that there would be financial turbulence, which could be challenging.
- In respect of funding and finance there had been some in-year growth particularly in relation to T-levels, and support for the national insurance increases, although this funding would not be received until September 2025 which meant the College would have to cover the increase until then. The College would also benefit from the removal of the 97% tolerance for directly funded adults. David Poole explained the impact of this change. An announcement about the comprehensive spending review was awaited. Other positives included an increase in 16-18 funding, the announcement of a £635m construction skills package and a 10,000 additional places on foundation apprenticeships, together with a significant increase in construction focused boots camps.
- There were ongoing concerns about future cuts to 'unprotected' budgets which would include Further Education as well as possible further cuts to adult funding. It was clear there were some ups and downs, making it hard to predict the financial position which was likely to be tight but manageable. The College needed to be clever and grow its areas of success.
- An overview of likely changes being brought about by curriculum reforms relating to English and maths was provided. The emphasis on FE/HE partnerships was ongoing and a tertiary approach to education was now taking place. Ofsted was also consulting on its proposed new framework. The College would be responding to the consultation, and Members would receive a presentation on the changes when they had been confirmed. Apprenticeship achievement rates were increasing and the requirement for adults to take English and maths during their apprenticeship had now been removed.

ii. Regional matters were highlighted including an overview of local College mergers which were currently taking place. Some business opportunities for the College were being identified including some new business partners moving towards the College. Devolution discussions were currently taking place, and a response from the College and the Corporation was being worked on. The West Midlands mayoral powers were growing and funding around this was increasing so the College was busy working up an ambitious response.

iii. A summary of matters currently taking place in College was presented including the management team realignment, Green Week, competitions, the celebratory opening of the new motor vehicle and engineering workshops and the T-level suites, a Queen's Award submission for the MTI, a new employer focused newsletter and increases in applications for 2025/26. Overall, there was a good feeling across all campuses.

Members asked why the Nuneaton town centre timeline had been put back until 2026.

David Poole gave an overview of the current position and progress taking place, and explained that completion had been delayed until February 2026, despite the Council indicating that it would be October 2025. The opening would not therefore take place until summer 2026.

Following discussion, Members received the presentation.

2.2 **Confidential - Update on Strategic Estates Development including ICT**

2.3 **Strategic KPI Dashboard 2024/25 including Published Achievement Rates 2023/24**

Simon Lomax introduced the paper, explaining that it had been presented to the Students, Learning and Quality Committee. He then provided the following overview:

i. Since the Students, Learning and Quality Committee meeting, the achievement rates set out on page 3 of the paper had been added. College achievement rates for apprenticeships and education programmes were broadly in line with national averages. There was however work to do on adult education retention and achievement rates in the new year.

ii. Attendance rates were not where they needed to be. Improvements had been made in the previous year and interventions, which were explained, were continuing. Where attendance was below 90% a number of actions would be taken. Decreasing student mental health had impacted on attendance levels.

iii. Schools and access applications were 400 up on the same time in the previous year.

Members asked how many applications would convert to enrolments?

Simon Lomax explained that the conversion rate for the previous year was 82%. The College was not using a waiting list, and all applicants were being given offers, so the position was very positive.

Members asked whether the 16-18 maths attendance rates boded well.

Simon Lomax indicated that the rate was 10% lower than the overall rate and went on to give an overview of the targeted interventions which were taking place. This was the biggest set of GCSE exams ever undertaken, with over 1600 students taking maths exams and a slightly smaller number of students taking English exams over the course of May 2025. A whole programme of work was taking place to prepare for the exams, which he went on to describe. Although attendance was better than before, it still needed to improve further.

Members asked what the story was behind the drop in 18-23 year old apprentice retention and was there anything that could be done.

Marion Plant explained that it was a national issue caused by the apprentices moving into work and not completing their qualifications. The position was however better than the previous year and all actions that could be taken, were being taken. Feedback from apprentices was good and quality, as endorsed by Ofsted, remained good.

Colin Butler reported on the People KPIs, highlighting that the People, Strategy and Governance Committee had received the paper as its last meeting. He provided an overview of the KPIs relating to staff turnover, vacancy, stability and staff sickness rates. Generally, everything was in a good place although the Team was not resting on its laurels.

Members asked for more detail concerning long term sickness issues and asked why there was significant expenditure on agency staff costs.

Colin Butler explained that 60% of the staff sickness rate related to the long term sickness of a small number of staff members who were experiencing a number of challenges which he outlined. The HR Team supported and managed long term sickness in a different way to short term sickness. There had been a need to fill roles with agency staff which had therefore increased costs.

Following discussion, Members received the paper.

3. Teaching Learning and Assessment

3.1 Curriculum and Quality of Education Update

Simon Lomax introduced the paper on behalf of Ben Crook, explaining that the paper had been presented to the Students, Learning and Quality Committee and provided the following overview:

i. The paper responded to the feedback provided by Ofsted and also to the matters raised by Members at the Strategy Day.

ii. Quality was 'good' as indicated by Ofsted following the recent inspection. A number of examples were provided to illustrate the work being undertaken in this area. There was, however, further work to do.

iii. Due to current challenging financial circumstances a piece of work was being undertaken around curriculum efficiency and how to respond to the cuts in the Adult Education Budget (AEB) in respect of group sizes, staff utilisation, facilities and classrooms.

Members highlighted that it was clear that a real push was now being made to improve class sizes.

Simon Lomax outlined the work being undertaken, the differences in the types of curriculum areas and the expectations being set for each.

After discussion Members received the paper.

3.2 Students, Learning and Quality Committee Assurance Report and Draft Minutes from 27th March 2025

Members received and noted the draft minutes and the assurance report arising from the Students, Learning and Quality Committee meeting from the 27th March 2025.

4. Financial Matters and Arrangements for Internal Control

4.1 Confidential - Performance Report incl. Period 7 Management Accounts and Overview of Forecast 2

4.2 Update on Recruitment and Financial Implications 2024/25

David Poole introduced the paper, presenting an update on the current position for 16-19 full time study programmes, 19+ and higher education students and highlighted that the College was currently working in excess of its Education Skills Funding Agency allocation target with a total of 3152 students within the 16-19 funding claim. The one area of under recruitment, apprenticeships, was being reviewed to identify cost savings and additional recruitment. This identified risk was noted in the period 7 management accounts with a variation to forecast 2 and the budget. Mitigating actions were now in place. The AEB was currently on track. HE recruitment was steady and just above the £1m mark.

Following discussion, Members received the paper.

4.3 Finance and General Purposes Committee Assurance Report and Draft Minutes from 13th March 2025

Members noted the assurance report and the draft minutes.

4.4 Audit Committee Assurance Report and Draft Minutes from 20th March 2025

Members noted the assurance report and the draft minutes.

5. Consent Agenda

5.1 **Policies**

Following discussion, Members unanimously approved the following policies. (Proposer: Helen Holley; seconder: Anil Majithia).

5.1.1 Health and Safety Policy Statement

5.1.2 Tuition Price Policy

5.2 **Matters for Note**

Members noted the following papers:

5.2.1 Annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Report 2024-2025

5.2.2 GDPR and Information Governance Report - Autumn Term 2024

5.2.3 Hinckley Campus Events 2025

6. Other Matters

6.1 Members agreed to the release of papers with the exception of:

i. Agenda item 2.1 Principal's Briefing Update as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

ii. Agenda item 2.2 Update on Strategic Estates Developments incl. ICT as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

iii. Agenda item 2.3 Strategic KPI Dashboard 2024/25 including Published Achievement Rates 2024/25 as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

iv. Agenda item 3.1 Curriculum and Quality of Education as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

v. Agenda item 4.1 Forecast 1 including Period 7 Management Accounts and Overview of Forecast 2 as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

vi. Agenda item 4.2 Update on Recruitment and Financial Implications 2024/25 as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

vii. Agenda item 4.3 Finance and General Purposes Committee Assurance Report and Daft Minutes from 13th March 2025 as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

viii. Agenda item 4.4 Audit Committee Assurance Report and Daft Minutes from 20th March 2025 as it contained information which was commercially sensitive.

vii. Agenda item 8.1 Confidential Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 12 December 2024 as they contained information which was commercially sensitive.

viii. Agenda item 8.2 Update on Coventry University Partnership Progress as they contained information which was commercially sensitive.

6.2 **Date of the Next Meeting**

Members agreed the date of the next meeting would be Thursday 3rd July 2025 at 5.30pm at the Nuneaton Campus.

Matters on the confidential agenda, and the confidential agenda for External Members only were then dealt with.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8pm.