

# Riverside College

Widnes & Runcorn

## MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 11<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2023 AT 4.30PM AT THE KINGSWAY CAMPUS

<b>Present:</b>	Katie Anderson	External Governor
	Michele Bacon	External Governor
	Karen Banks	External Governor
	David Copeland	Staff Governor
	Jayne Edwards	External Governor
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Neil McGrath	External Governor, Chair
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Rachael Owen	External Governor
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
	Susan Smith	External Governor
	Lucy White	Student Governor
	Sarah Worsley	Student Governor
	Stephen Young	External Governor

<b>In Attendance:</b>	Ben Barton	Assistant Principal
	Leeann Bellfield	Assistant Principal (Minutes)
	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal (Curriculum)
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal
	Jason Burgess*	External Auditor, Beever & Struthers
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)

*\*Remote attendance via Microsoft Teams for agenda item 5.2*

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Mary Murphy (Principal) and Catherine Shaw (Clerk to Governors). In the absence of the Clerk, it was agreed that Leeann Bellfield was to take the minutes of the meeting.

### 2. DECLARATIONS ON INTEREST

None

*Agenda items 5.1 and 5.2 were taken at this point with the External Auditor leaving the meeting thereafter.*

### 3. CHAIR'S UPDATE

The Chair provided a summary of his activity since the last Board meeting in October 2023 which included:

- The Chair's continued attendance at regular three-weekly meetings with the Principal and Clerk.
- The undertaking of the Principal's performance development review.
- Meeting with Chris Jones (External Board Reviewer), as part of the statutory external Board review process.

- Attendance at the Annual Strategic Planning Conversation meeting which was led by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA); a process that took place in all colleges.
- Attendance at the official opening of the Sports Block at Cronton College on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the Chair's update.

#### **4. PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGIC REPORT** *(previously circulated)*

4.1 The pre-recorded presentation that accompanied the Principal's Strategic Report was delivered. The Principal had included responses to questions raised by Governors in advance of the meeting and welcomed any additional questions which were to be responded to by the College Management Team (CMT). In her commentary accompanying her comprehensive written report, the Principal highlighted the following aspects:

##### National Politics and Issues

- The on-going global conflicts between (i) Ukraine and Russia, and (ii) Palestine and Israel continued to dominate the news and the resulting economic impact nationally.
- Meeting skills needs remained high on the political agenda, as demonstrated during the recent party-political conferences.
- Autumn Statement 2023 - the apprenticeship minimum hourly rate was increased to £6.40.
- The Government had provided £165m of funding via the Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) to support collaboration and the implementation of the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).

##### Local Environment

- A collaborative bid with the colleges within the Liverpool City Region (LCR) has resulted in a total award of £4.3m, of which the College was to receive £750k to enable it to deliver the Strand 4 project on modular courses.
- The draft version of the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Long Terms Skills Plan was circulated to colleges and stakeholders for consultation in November 2023; the intention was to set out a 10-year strategy to address the skills gaps in the LCR.
- Reconnecting Runcorn Town Deal - the Strategic Oversight Group for the Health & Education Hub was making good progress. It was anticipated that designs would be approved by February 2024.
- Halton Association of Headteachers (HASH) - the College was taking an active part in the three sub-groups which had been established to address areas of the Priority Education Improvement Area Plan, namely (i) Attendance, (ii) Maths and English, and (iii) Inclusion.

##### College Priorities

- As referred to in the Chair's update at agenda item 3, the Annual Strategic Conversation meeting took place on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023 with the ESFA and the Further Education (FE) Commissioner. The Principal, Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources), Deputy Principal (Curriculum) and Chair of the Board participated in this meeting.
- The Department for Education (DfE) Autumn Termly Conversation took place on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and the Senior Management Team; discussions included the provision of T Levels, Apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, High Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and 18-19 provision.

- DfE Guide to Effective Practice in approaching Cultural Change in Colleges – the College had featured in this publication.
- Safeguarding and Wellbeing - the staff annual event took place on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 at the Cronton campus. This was a hugely successful day. Adult students participated in a wellbeing week of activities that took place from 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023.
- Achievement rates in summer 2023 – overall there had been a 1% decrease compared to 2022. The Principal provided assurance that there was a laser focus on achievement rates in 2023/2024.
- Self-Assessment Report (SAR) 2022/2023 and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2023/2024 – the College had self-assessed its overall effectiveness as outstanding. This was to be addressed in greater detail at agenda item 7.2.
- Expert Provider of Apprentices – the DfE had recently published a list of thirteen ‘expert’ providers of apprenticeships with Riverside College being one of the five FE colleges to be awarded this kitemark.
- Matrix Award – the College had successfully met the new standards which ensured the delivery of high-quality information, advice and guidance. A glowing report had been received in connection with this assessment.
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment – in October 299 walkthroughs were completed to review behaviour and classroom standards. With regards to the ‘Great Teaching – Teaching and Learning Strategy 2023/2024’ support observations and second coaching conversations were currently taking place.
- Efficiency Objectives linked to the College’s Strategic Plan
  - Appendix 1 confirmed the ESFA’s assessment that the College remained in outstanding financial health.
  - The new £8m Sports facilities at the Cronton campus was officially opened on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2023 by Steve Rotheram, Mayor of the LCR.
  - Climate change action - the College continued to work towards achieving Net Zero and the Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting Regulation (SECR) and gradual reductions had taken place since 2020/2021.
- Growth Objectives linked to the College’s Strategic Plan
  - 16-18: an encouraging number of visitors had attended open events.
  - Apprenticeships: the number of apprentices recruited to date was very pleasing. The number of apprentices currently in learning was 492.
  - Adult Education: recruitment was very buoyant, particularly for English as a Second Language (ESOL); the College was submitting a growth bid for £200k to the LCR.
  - Higher Education: enrolment last year had exceeded targets. In 2023/2024 there had been a slight shortfall and the recruitment campaign for 2024/2025 was in progress.
- College activities and achievements – numerous activities were referred to and included the hugely successful performance of ‘A Christmas Carol’ by students at Cronton College. The Principal was delighted to inform the Board that the College had been awarded Community Organisation of the Year by Cancer Research UK in connection with the Race for Life event that had been held in Victoria Park, Widnes.

Despite the turbulence in the external environment, the Principal concluded her presentation by informing the Board that the College remained in a very strong position.

A discussion took place with several questions being raised by Governors and

responded to by CMT. A Governor commented on the pleasing early indications relating to improved attendance and retention data. In response to a question as to whether this was sustainable, CMT confirmed that it was sustainable.

A Governor referred to the delivery of T Levels and the defunding of BTEC courses, querying the financial impact to the College. The Deputy Principal advised that whilst the College had concerns with this curriculum reform and the potential impact for learners, it was not from a financial perspective as funding rates did not differ significantly.

In response to a Governor's question, the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) provided an update on the College's delivery of hydrogen-related courses in relation to Strand 4 of the LCR collaboration.

A Governor commented on the positive increase in the number of apprenticeship applications. The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) was pleased to report that the College had seen a return to pre-Covid data in this respect.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **Noted** the Principal's update on strategic issues
- (ii) **Noted** the contents of the letter from the ESFA confirming the College's outstanding financial health grading, together with the associated financial dashboards.

## **5. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2022/2023**

### **5.1 To receive the Audit Committee's Annual Report for 2022/2023** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that the annual report had been prepared in compliance with the requirements of the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice (ACOP). The report had been considered and approved by the Audit Committee at its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the Audit Committee's Annual Report for 2022/2023.

### **5.2 To approve the Financial Statements for 2022/2023** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that the Financial Statements had recently been considered by both the Audit Committee and Finance & Resources Committee. The Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) drew the Board's attention to the headline data contained within the Statements which included:

- The underlying operating surplus of £3,958k was in line with the forecast as per the management accounts at the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023, prior to the inclusion of pension costs. After accounting for these adjustments, the surplus for the year was £3,848k.
- During 2022/2023 the College received £3m in grant income and had spent £3,154k on fixed assets. The increased turnover and expenditure was mainly due to interest earned, revenue grant income and spend, and the approved costs pressure payment made to staff.
- The College's total borrowing had decreased by £250k over the year, as a result of repayments and no further loans. Cash balances remained high and bank covenants were well satisfied.
- The College's financial health remained as 'outstanding' and this rating had been confirmed by the ESFA.
- Contents of the Letters of Representation and Assurance

- There was a requirement that the Financial Statements be submitted to the ESFA by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023, accompanied by the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR).

The External Auditor referred to the Management Letter which had previously been circulated to the Board and provided an overview of the key areas of focus during the audit. In conclusion, the Board was advised that Beever & Struthers was to (i) provide an unqualified audit opinion for the year ended 31 July 2023, subject to the completion of certain elements of income work and review of the final ESFA/LCR income reconciliations and (ii) provide an unmodified opinion on Regularity for the year ended 31 July 2023, subject to receiving a signed copy of the Letter of Representation.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **Noted** the Auditor's Management Letter
- (ii) **Approved** the Financial Statements 2022/2023
- (iii) **Approved** the Letter of Representation

*The External Auditor was thanked for his report and he left the meeting.*

## **6. AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING**

### **6.1 To receive for information a report from the Audit Committee meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (previously circulated)**

The Chair of the Audit Committee provided a summary of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023; a significant part of which was in relation to matters discussed earlier in the Board meeting at agenda items 5.1 and 5.2. The Board was advised that the review of the key strategic risks featured as a key agenda item, with the distinct and respective responsibilities being outlined between the Risk Management Group (RMG) and those of the Audit Committee.

The Committee Chair advised that the Audit Committee received an update relating to the RMG's anticipated implementation of an electronic risk management system. This would serve to enhance risk management reporting mechanisms and this was welcomed.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the report.

### **6.2 To receive the Value for Money (VfM) Annual Report (previously circulated)**

The Committee Chair drew the importance of this report to the Board's attention and the responsibility of the Audit Committee to provide the Board with assurance that VfM was being delivered and that effective arrangements were in place at the College to do so. The Committee Chair was pleased to report that it was evident that the vital importance of securing VfM had become embedded practice throughout the College.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the Value for Money Annual Report 2022/2023.

## **7. QUALITY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING**

### **7.1 To receive for information a report on the Quality & Standards Committee meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (previously circulated)**

The Committee Chair provided an overview of the business addressed at the recent meeting. It was agreed that the following reports were to be presented Board in addition to agenda item 7.2 to 7.4.3 (inc):

### Safeguarding and Student Wellbeing Update

The increasing number of wellbeing concerns, safeguarding referrals, level of complexity and seriousness were of concern to the Committee. Whilst it was assuring to be informed that students placed their trust in staff in disclosing concerns and requesting help, Governors considered the increasing demand being placed on staff and the potential adverse effect on their own well-being. Additionally, where multiple partner agencies were involved in assisting learners, such as Social Services, an increasing administrative demand was being placed on the College to co-ordinate intervention plans.

Governors requested further information regarding the increased administrative demands placed on the College in multi-agency situations and any associated risks related to this, particularly the well-being of staff. The Deputy Principal responded to the questions raised.

### Student Attendance and Retention

Attendance and retention data at both the Kingsway and Cronton campuses confirmed were confirmed to be strong and statistically presented an improved position compared to 2022/2023 data at this point in the academic year.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report.
- (ii) **requested** it continued to be appraised of the increased workload demands in respect of matters of a safeguarding nature.

## 7.2 **To approve the College's Self-Assessment Report (SAR) for 2022/2023 and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2023/2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Assistant Principal (Quality) provided a summary of this report which had previously been considered by the Quality & Standards Committee. He highlighted the following key aspects:

- The overall grade remained as outstanding.
- There had been a decline in achievement rates, predominantly as a result of retention levels on two-year programmes. Despite this decline, achievement rates remained above the national average.
- Three areas had been identified for inclusion in the College's Quality Improvement Plan 2023/2024 for future monitoring.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee and

- (i) **approved** the College's Self-Assessment Report 2022/2023
- (ii) **approved** the Quality Improvement Plan 2023/2024.

## 7.3 **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Report 2022/2023 relating to students** *(previously circulated)*

The Board received an update on the EDI measures for the College against retention and achievement results for 2022/2023. The report included an EDI overview of the student population in 2023/2024.

The Board was pleased to note that all five agreed objectives had been achieved in 2022/2023. It was also reported that an informative presentation had been delivered by the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) at the Quality and Standards Committee meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023; the slide deck was accessible via GovernorHub.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the EDI Annual Report 2022/2023.

#### 7.4 **Policies**

- 7.4.1 Safeguarding Children
- 7.4.2 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults
- 7.4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The Board considered the policies as recommended for approval by the Quality & Standards Committee at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendations made by the Quality and Standards Committee and **approved:**

- (i) the Safeguarding Children Policy
- (ii) the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy
- (iii) the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy

### 8. **FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING**

#### 8.1 **To receive for information a report on the Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 (previously circulated)**

The Committee Chair provided an overview of the business addressed at the recent meeting. It was agreed that the following reports contained within agenda items 8.2 to 8.4.3 (inc) were to be reported to the Board.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the report
- (ii) **approved** the recommendation for a further increase of £20k to be made to Power in Partnership, should this be required to meet mid-year recruitment demands.

#### 8.2 **To receive for information the Management Accounts to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (previously circulated)**

The Board was advised that the management accounts had been considered by the Finance & Resources Committee at its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023. Key headline data relating to the accounts were highlighted and included:

- Since the financial plan was agreed at the July 2023 Board meeting, the Department for Education (DfE) had increased the funding for 16-18 delivery in 2023/2024. The full financial plan was to be updated at mid-year with continued forecasting updates to be presented at each meeting.
- The actual underlying operating surplus of £1,328k was higher than planned due to favourable variances in Income, Pay and Non-Pay. The Board was referred to Appendix 1 – full Income and Expenditure Statement.
- Cash balances remained positive.
- Cash-flow reconciliation contained within Appendix 2 demonstrated that projected cash flows remained well within the bank covenant limits.
- Annual capital expenditure to date was £1,314k and remained within the total amount of £12,091k previously approved by the Board.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the Management Accounts to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

#### 8.3 **To receive for information the annual Health & Safety Report for 2022/2023 and to approve the Health & Safety Statement of Intent for 2023/2024 (previously circulated)**

This report detailed the number of accidents recorded for the academic year 2022/2023, including those categorised as RIDDOR reportable, and comparative data to the previous year. No patterns or trends had been identified in relation to the 'near misses' recorded for the academic year. The proposed Health & Safety Statement of Intent 2023/2024 was reviewed by Governors.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the annual Health & Safety Report 2022/2023
- (ii) accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the Health & Safety Statement of Intent 2023/2024

## 8.4 **Policies**

### 8.4.1 Health & Safety

### 8.4.2 Trips & Visits

### 8.4.3 Disaster Management & Business Continuity Plan

The Board considered the policies as recommended for approval by the Finance & Resources Committee at its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendations made by the Finance and Resources Committee and **approved** the:

- (i) Health & Safety Policy
- (ii) Trips & Visits Policy
- (iii) Disaster Management & Business Continuity Plan

## 9. **GOVERNANCE MATTERS**

### 9.1 **Governor Review Process 2022/2023 and resulting action plan** (*previously circulated*)

The Chair thanked Governors for their valued contribution during the recent individual Governor review meetings with himself and the Clerk to Governors. As stated in the Clerk's briefing paper, the emerging themes from those meetings had been recorded in the proposed action plan for the Board to review. A discussion took place which resulted in a consensus with the following:

- the subscription to GovernorHub as a dedicated governance portal had been beneficial in terms of its use as a single management system.
- Emerging themes included (i) further development and Governor engagement in the reporting of the student voice to the Board, (ii) the Board to have greater engagement with stakeholders to further enhance the strong position that existed between the College's Senior Leadership Team and numerous stakeholders (iii) Governor training on discharging its responsibilities in connection with setting the College's medium/long term strategy.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report and approved the resulting action plan.

## 10. **MINUTES** (*previously circulated*)

### 10.1 **To approve the draft minutes (Part One) of the Board Meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

The Board reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

**Resolved** – The Board **approved** the minutes as a correct record of the meeting.



10.2 **To review the action log and to consider any matters arising from the previous meeting**

Governors received a progress report on the sole action contained within the action log.

**Resolved** – The Board **noted** the report.

11. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Written Resolution - To ratify the approval of capital expenditure of £500,000**

The written resolution mechanism was invoked by the Clerk on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023 seeking capital expenditure approval from the Board of £500,000 in total; this was in relation to the LSIF Strand 4, as referenced earlier at agenda item 4.1 within the Principal’s Strategic Report. The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) clarified the breakdown of expenditure over the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 academic years in connection with the creation and teaching of modularised units in Retrofit & Green Energy, Green Advance Manufacturing, Green Transport, Hydrogen and Digital Skills through multi curriculum green teaching rigs. It was confirmed that the Clerk had received a sufficient number of replies for quoracy purposes confirming Governors’ approval.

**Resolved** – The Board **ratified** its approval of £500,000 capital expenditure as detailed in the written report circulated on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023, via the written resolution mechanism.

12. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

These were **noted** as follows:

- Strategic Planning Workshop – 19<sup>th</sup> February 2024
- Board – 25<sup>th</sup> March 2024

The Chair thanked all attendees for their participation and he closed the meeting at 5.40pm.

**Signed:** ...Office copy signed by Neil McGrath....

**Board Chair**

**Date:** .....18<sup>th</sup> March 2024.....