

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 14TH OCTOBER 2024 AT 4.30PM AT THE KINGSWAY CAMPUS

Present:	Katie Anderson	External Governor
	Michele Bacon	External Governor
	Karen Banks	External Governor
	David Copeland	Staff Governor
	Millie Hargate	Student Governor
	Paul Leatherbarrow	External Governor
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Neil McGrath	External Governor, Chair
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Mary Murphy	Ex-Officio, Principal/CEO
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
Sarah Worsley	Student Governor	

In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Vice Principal (Head at Riverside)
	Leeann Bellfield	Vice Principal (Head at Cronton)
	Alan Brown	Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality)
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Stephen Parkinson	Co-Opted Member
	Catherine Shaw	Clerk to Governors

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and extended a warm welcome to Millie Hargate, Paul Leatherbarrow and Stephen Parkinson; this being their first meeting.

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for:

- Jayne Edwards – Co-Opted Member
- Rachael Owen – External Governor
- Susan Smith – External Governor
- Stephen Young – External Governor

2. **DECLARATIONS ON INTEREST**

Since being appointed as a Co-opted Member, Stephen Parkinson had notified the Clerk that he had accepted a temporary contract working at the College on a part-time basis until December 2024.

Millie Hargate left the meeting.

3. **ELECTION OF THE SIXTH FORM COLLEGE STUDENT GOVERNOR**

The Clerk advised that a student governor election process had duly taken place with the recommendation to appoint Millie Hargate to this role for the 2024/2025 academic year.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the appointment of Millie Hargate as Student Governor and be assigned to the Quality and Standards Committee. The term of office was to expire on 31st July 2025.

Millie Hargate re-joined the meeting and was congratulated upon her appointment.

4. CHAIR'S UPDATE

4.1 To receive an activity report

The Chair provided a summary of his activity since the last Board meeting in July 2024 which included:

- His attendance at regular three-weekly meetings with the Principal and Clerk
- A meeting with the Principal to undertake her Personal Development Review (PDR)
- A joint meeting with the Principal to undertake the Clerk's PDR
- Participated as a Selection Panel member in respect of the recent appointment of the Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality)
- Completion of annual safeguarding training
- Completion of the majority of the annual governor review meetings, together with the Clerk

Resolved: The Board **noted** the contents of the Chair's activity report.

4.2 Chair's Action

The Clerk advised that since the last Board meeting, Chair's Action had been invoked on two occasions and a summary was presented:

- Kingsway Estates 2nd October 2024 -- Due to buoyant student recruitment and space limitation, it was necessary for a brickwork/multi trade workshop to be built to meet student demand to deliver this aspect of the curriculum; the quotation being a key consideration
- Cronton Summer Works 4th October 2024 – As part of the summer works programme, the Board approved expenditure of £178k for a covered canopy and glazed enclosure to be built around the outside terrace to the rear of the Brasserie at the Cronton campus. This was to provide more social space at lunch times for students. Due process was undertaken with the preferred option costing £259k +VAT, hence Chair's Action was taken regarding the increased cost and was duly authorised

Resolved: The Board **ratified** the Chair's actions taken regarding the building contracts for:

- (i) Brickwork/Multi-trade Workshop at Kingsway
- (ii) Canopy and glazed enclosure around the outside terrace to the rear of the Brasserie at Cronton

5. PRESENTATION

The Chair advised that as part of the recruitment process for the post of Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality), Alan Brown delivered an excellent presentation on a "Five-year strategy; addressing key issues" and at the request of the Selection Panel he had been invited to present this to the Board.

The Deputy Principal (C&Q) identified the key issues for the College as (i) maintaining the Outstanding Ofsted grade, (ii) addressing areas for improvement in the Foundation Studies department, (iii) a sustained focus on curriculum and assessment reviews, (iv) development of an Artificial Intelligence Strategy, (v)

responding to a changing workforce, (vi) overcoming the challenges relating to Post 16 Alternative Provision, (vi) addressing any capacity/space issues across the College estate, (vii) close monitoring of the extensive exam access arrangements and any wider implications in connection with Education Health Care Plans, Special Educational Needs and Disability reforms and how the College responds to the demands (viii) responding effectively to Ofsted changes in respect of FE and skills inspections and (iv) addressing challenges within the external environment. The Deputy Principal informed the Board of the ways he would address each of these key issues and emphasised the vital importance of team work throughout. In summarising, the Deputy Principal drew the Board's attention to the significance of:

- Having a clear and through understanding of the challenges
- Using evidence-led research to support implementation
- Having a clear and consistent message to stakeholders
- Developing an effective approach to collaboration, support and challenge
- Meticulous monitoring and review of any adaptations
- Ethical and considered leadership

A discussion took place with numerous questions being asked and responded to.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the contents and thanks were conveyed to the Deputy Principal for his very informative presentation.

6. **PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGIC REPORT** (*previously circulated*)

The Principal congratulated Alan Brown on his recent promotion to Deputy Principal (C&Q).

The Principal delivered a presentation highlighting key areas from her strategic report that had previously been circulated. She drew the Board's attention to:

- College performance 2023/2024 – the College had either achieved or exceeded all of its targets. The Principal referred to the key priorities last year to raise the achievement rates of (i) 16-18 cohort and (ii) Apprenticeships. It was pleasing to report that both had been achieved. Financial health remained outstanding for the ninth consecutive year
- Student Destinations – 94% positive destinations for the Class of 2024
- 16-18 student enrolment 2024/2025 – significantly ahead of last year with a 6% growth in-borough. Open events to date had been very well attended, despite demographics indicating a decrease in the number of Year 11 students
- Walkthrough Week – 303 classroom observations had taken place since the start of the academic year with very positive outcomes
- Annual Staff Survey – the vast majority of areas scored in excess of 90% in favourable terms. An action plan was in place to address the minority of areas that scored less than this
- On-going collaboration with stakeholders – updates were presented in relation to (i) Reconnecting Runcorn, Town Deal and (ii) Halton Association of Headteachers, in which the Principal was Chair. In relation to (i) the Principal advised that potentially there could be VAT cost implications for the College. Should these materialise, the Principal would strongly recommend that the Board reviews its strategic position in relation to the Reconnecting Runcorn Town Deal
- National issues – included (i) disparity in pay awards between the school sector and FE, as recently announced by the newly elected Government (ii) the uncertain position regarding the Government's Qualifications Reform and

Curriculum Assessment Review, (iii) launch of Skills England, (iv) closure of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)

- Priorities 2024/2025 – included a focus on (i) Safeguarding/wellbeing of staff and students, (ii) the Adult Skills Fund and increasing learner enrolment, and (iii) improving the teaching, learning and assessment in Foundation Studies.
- Celebratory events – these included various Enrichment Fairs and the annual MacMillan 'Bake Off' fundraising event
- Quality-Efficiency-Growth (QEG) – each element linked directly to the College's Strategic Plan. Headline data from the 2023/2024 outturn report was presented in conjunction with the Annual Report. The Principal sought approval of the key performance indicators for inclusion in the QEG Performance Monitoring Report for 2024/2025

A discussion took place with numerous questions raised by Governors and responded to by the Principal and senior managers. A Governor queried the target and outcomes for GCSE higher grade maths. In response the Board was advised that given the national recruitment and retention challenges at various points in 2023/2024 the College had deployed a number of agency staff in this curriculum area. It was confirmed that following a successful recruitment process the department was currently fully staffed. It was acknowledged that there had been an improvement in results compared to the previous year which was reassuring, particularly as the borough was classified as a designated priority education investment area (PEIA). A Governor referred to the growth in 16-8 student recruitment and asked whether there was sufficient space at Cronton to adequately accommodate the increase in student numbers. The Principal advised whilst the increase in students numbers had impacted on available space, it was not adversely impacting on the quality of teaching and learning. The limited space would be alleviated to a certain degree upon completion of planned building works, as reported earlier at agenda item 4.2. The Principal assured the Board that any capacity issues were kept under review.

During the discussion the Board fully supported the key priorities in 2024/2025 which included a focus on the improvement of teaching, learning and assessment in the Foundation Studies department.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **approved** the Annual Report 2023/2024
- (ii) **approved** the QEG performance outturn for 2023/2024
- (iii) **approved** the quality targets, financial targets and QEG for 2024/2025
- (iv) **noted** the contents of the report

7. **SAFEGUARDING** (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk confirmed that all Board Members had recently completed the required safeguarding training session and had confirmed that the Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) government publication had been read and understood.

A discussion took place. In response to a question raised by a Governor, the Deputy Principal (C&Q) advised that Julia Withersby was currently the interim designated safeguarding lead (DSL), resulting from the recent senior management re-structure. Board Members were to be notified of the permanent DSL upon imminent appointment.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the content of the report and responsibilities relating to safeguarding, as detailed in the report which had previously been circulated.

8. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

8.1 To receive the Management Accounts to 31st July 2024 and Financial Update (previously circulated)

The Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) presented the Management Accounts as at 31st July 2024 and the updated position since that date. She highlighted the following aspects from her report:

- Operating surplus 2023/24 – Prior to pension adjustments this currently stood at £4.44m. This favourable variance was mainly attributed to (i) additional interest earned from higher cash balances, and (ii) due to the unavoidable delay in completing the summer works programme this had resulted in a revenue underspend of £653k
- Cash balances had increased as a result of delays in both revenue and capital project spend
- Operating surplus 2024/25 – Prior to pension adjustments the forecast had increased to £3.42m. This was mainly as a result of growth in 16-18 student numbers, offset with corresponding increases in pay costs and non-pay costs
- Capital Plans – College reserves were to be utilised for all new works
- Financial Health Indicators – these were more positive than those agreed as part of the three-year financial plan approved in July 2024. Furthermore, the College was to remain in outstanding financial health for all years to 2026/27

A discussion took place. In response to a question raised by a Governor seeking clarification on pension costs, the Deputy Principal (F&R) advised that these were actuarial calculations which the College was not in a position to influence and a further assessment would take place within the mid-year review. A Governor sought clarification regarding the budget heading 'Other' recorded on the balance sheet. The Deputy Principal (F&R) advised that this included capital grant income, deferred income and various accruals which were outlined.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the Management Accounts to 31st July 2024 and the very pleasing update regarding the current financial position.

8.2 Property Strategy Update (previously circulated)

The Deputy Principal (F&R) presented this report and updated the Board on the current status of the various building projects. She drew the Board's attention to:

- The two new builds (i) Cronton Music Hub and (ii) Green Technology Build at Kingsway had both been delayed due to the changes in design team, as previously reported via the Finance & Resources Committee
- Summer Works 2023/2024 – due to the delayed expenditure of £653k, these works were scheduled for completion in 2024//2025 whilst ensuring it remained affordable
- Funding received in-year relating to FE Grant Funding, Energy Efficiency and Reclassification was spent in-year. This resulted in less of the planned contingency being required for estates capital investment and summer works
- Reference to agenda item 4.2 and Chair's Action taking in respect of (i) the Construction Skills temporary workshop build, and (ii) Brasserie covered terrace extension to increase the quality of covered space to benefit the increased number of students enrolled at Cronton

Resolved: The Board **noted** the updated report relating to the Property Strategy.

9. AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING

9.1 **To receive the draft minutes from the Audit Committee Meeting held on 23rd September 2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Audit Committee referred to the draft minutes and highlighted the key agenda items from the meeting with questions invited.

Resolved: The Board **received** the draft minutes from the meeting.

9.2 **Annual Risk Management Report 2023/2024 and Risk Management Activity since July 2024** *(previously circulated)*

This report had been scrutinised by the Audit Committee and was presented to the Board for information purposes in overseeing risk management within the College as a whole. The Risk Register and Risk Management Action Plan accompanied the annual report for the Board's consideration.

The Audit Committee was satisfied that key risks were identified and closely monitored on a regular basis, as part of the College's strategic plan and reporting cycle.

The Committee Chair advised that a revised method of scoring/RAG rating strategic risks was to be implemented by the Risk Management Group (RMG) from the start of this academic year and had been welcomed by the Committee. The Risk Management Policy was to be deferred for approval to the next meeting to enable inclusion of the revised scoring methodology.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the contents of the report which included the Risk Register and Risk Management Action Plan.

9.3 **Assessment of Controls on Fraud and Irregularity** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was informed that the Audit Committee had scrutinised several reports to support the Board in making required representations on fraud and irregularity. These included an overview of the controls in place to mitigate against fraud and irregularity when approving the Financial Statements for year ended 31st July 2024 at its next meeting. Reference was made to compliance with the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice (ACOP). The reports included:

- A self-assessment summary of each of the potential risks
- The updated version of the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire 2023/2024
- Evaluation of performance against Annex D of the Post-16 ACOP
- Review of the fraud/irregularity questionnaire to be completed by individual governors

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **approved** the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire
- (ii) **approved** for individual Board Members to complete the fraud/irregularity questionnaire
- (iii) **noted** the contents of the report

10. **SEARCH & GOVERNANCE (S & G) COMMITTEE MEETING**

10.1 **To receive the draft minutes from the Search & Governance Committee meeting held on 24th September 2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the S&G Committee referred to the draft minutes and highlighted the key agenda items from the meeting with questions invited.

Resolved: The Board **received** the draft minutes from the meeting.

10.2 **Search and Governance Committee Annual Report 2023/2024** (*previously circulated*)

This report provided information on:

- The attendance levels of all Governors with the vast majority having met or exceeded the target level of 80%. The final percentage of attendance for board and committee meetings was 86% against the national benchmark of 82%
- Board constitution and membership
- Equality and diversity profile of the Board
- Committee Structures
- Developments
- Favourable outcome from the statutory external board review

A discussion took place. It was pleasing to note that once again, overall attendance levels at meetings exceeded the national benchmark. Assurance was provided by the Committee that enhancing the equality and diversity profile of the Board remained a key focus, despite national challenges in recruiting suitably skilled governors.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the Search & Governance Committee Annual Report.

10.3 **To approve the Calendar of Business 2024/2025** (*previously circulated*)

The Board considered the draft schedule of business as presented by the Clerk which encompassed both Committee and Board meetings throughout the year. For assurance purposes she advised that any new or emerging issues that may arise throughout the academic year would be added to the agenda of the relevant meeting. The Clerk also advised that the volume of business and content of reports relating to the Quality and Standards (Q&S) Committee were currently under review by the Chair of Q&S, Deputy Principal (C&Q) and the Clerk.

Resolved: The Committee **approved** the Schedule of Business for 2024/2025 subject to the outcome of the review relating to the remit and reports at Q&S.

10.4 **Membership and Succession Planning** (*previously circulated*)

The Chair of the S & G Committee summarised the discussions that had taken place at the recent meeting and had been outlined in the appended report. He advised that succession planning was a key area of focus to ensure the continuity of highly effective governance practice at the College, particularly as there were seven members whose term of office was due to expire at various points in 2024/2025 (five governors and two co-opted members). The Committee Chair advised that the annual individual governor review meetings were still taking place and any expressions of interest in re-appointment were being ascertained, subject to future consideration by the Board in connection with Principle 6 of the AoC Code of Governance relating to the optimum number of terms of office to be served.

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

10.5 **To note the progress made on the External Board Review Action Plan and approve action to be taken in respect of recommendation 14** (*previously circulated*)

The Chair advised of the need for a broader discussion regarding this specific recommendation which related to compliance with the Instrument and Articles of Government and the exclusion of staff and student governors for confidential items.

Current practice was reviewed and advice provided by the Clerk with examples of agenda items where the staff and student governors would not typically be required to withdraw from meetings.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **approved** the change to current practice to reflect full compliance with the Instrument and Articles of Government
- (ii) **noted** the significant progress that had been made relating to the external board review action plan

10.6 **To approve the Committee Terms of Reference** (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk referred to the proposed amendments to the Committee Terms of Reference in respect of (i) Finance and Resources, (ii) Quality and Standards, (iii) Remuneration, and (iv) Search and Governance. She pointed out that minor amendments to the Audit Committee Terms of Reference had been approved at the Board meeting on 8th July 2024.

Resolved: Following due consideration the Board **approved** the proposed amendments to the Committees Terms of Reference for inclusion in the Board's Standing Orders.

10.7 **Proposals for the reclassification of confidential minutes 2023/2024** (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk advised that this had featured on the S&G Committee's agenda, though towards the end of the meeting it had become inoperative. The Clerk referred to the requirement contained within clause 18 of the Instrument of Government for any approved confidential minutes to be reviewed to determine whether the minutes could be reclassified as non-confidential and become publicly available. The Board considered the schedule and agreed to re-classify certain agenda items as non-confidential for the reasons stated, as proposed by the Clerk.

Resolved: The Board **approved** for the agenda items identified by the Clerk to be re-classified as non-confidential for the reasons stated in the briefing paper.

11. **WRITTEN RESOLUTIONS**

To receive a report on written resolutions during 2023/2024

The Board considered the summary of written resolutions approved in 2023/2024 which had enabled efficient decision-making and avoided the need to convene a special Board meeting at short notice.

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

12. **MINUTES** (*previously circulated*)

12.1 **To approve the draft minutes (Part One) of the Board Meeting held on 8th July 2024**

The Board reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

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

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

Governors reviewed the action log from the previous meeting which related to the statutory external board review and the summary of the outcomes that required publication on the College website. The Clerk confirmed satisfactory completion.

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

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no additional business of an urgent nature submitted.

14. MEETING REVIEW

In accordance with the approved action plan resulting from the external board review in 2023/2024 Board Members were asked to review the effectiveness of the meeting. A discussion took place and the Clerk confirmed that the effectiveness of meetings continued to feature within the annual Board Self-Assessment Review, which also took into consideration of committee assessments of the same.

Resolved: Whilst no concerns of any ineffectiveness were raised, it was **agreed** for Governors to contact the Clerk directly should there be any individual issues to be conveyed.

15. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

These were **noted** as follows:

- Audit Committee - 18th November 2024
- Finance and Resources Committee – 20th November 2024
- Quality and Standards Committee – 26th November 2024
- Board – 9th December 2024

The Chair thanked all attendees for their participation and he closed the meeting at 6.10pm.

Signed: ...Office Copy signed by Neil McGrath

Chair

Date: ...9th December 2024.....