

## MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 3<sup>rd</sup> JULY 2023 AT 4.30PM AT THE CRONTON CAMPUS

### Present:

Katie Anderson	<i>External Governor</i>	Andrew MacManus	<i>External Governor</i>
Karen Banks	<i>External Governor</i>	Tom McInerney	<i>External Governor</i>
Megan Burns	<i>Student Governor</i>	Mary Murphy	<i>Ex-Officio</i>
Michele Bacon	<i>External Governor (Vice-Chair)</i>	Wesley Rourke	<i>External Governor</i>
David Copeland	<i>Staff Governor</i>	Chris Siklorski	<i>Staff Governor</i>
Jayne Edwards	<i>External Governor</i>	Sarah Worsley	<i>Student Governor</i>

### In Attendance:

Thalia Bell	<i>Deputy Principal (Curriculum)</i>
Alan Brown	<i>Assistant Principal</i>
Julie Holland	<i>Deputy Principal (Finance &amp; Resources)</i>
Catherine Shaw	<i>Clerk to Governors</i>

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Neil McGrath (External Governor and Chair of the Board), Susan Smith (External Governor) and Ben Barton (Assistant Principal). The meeting was declared quorate. Michele Bacon took the Chair in the absence of Neil McGrath.

### 2. DECLARATIONS ON INTEREST

In addition to the interests recorded at the commencement of the academic year the following interests were declared in relation to the agenda:

- Katie Anderson – agenda items 3.1 and 10.1
- Jayne Edwards – agenda item 10.1
- Sarah Worsley – agenda item 10.1

*Katie Anderson withdrew from the meeting for agenda item 3.1*

### 3. WRITTEN RESOLUTIONS *(previously circulated)*

#### 3.1 Appointment of Katie Anderson, External Governor

The Board considered the summary report which had previously been circulated.

**Resolved:** The Board ratified the written resolution in respect of the appointment of Katie Anderson as an External Governor and approved a four year term of office commencing 1<sup>st</sup> June 2023 and expiring on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2027.

*Katie Anderson re-joined the meeting and was congratulated upon her appointment to the Board.*

#### 3.2 Accountability Statement 2023/2024

The Board considered the summary report that had previously been circulated which included scrutiny undertaken by the Quality & Standards Committee.

**Resolved:** The Board:

- (i) ratified the written resolution and **approved** the Accountability Statement 2023/2024
- (ii) **noted** that the Accountability Statement had been submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) by 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023, as required.

#### 4. CHAIR'S UPDATE

In the absence of the Board Chair, the Clerk provided the following verbal update relating to the Chair's activity since the last Board Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023:

- Regular meetings had continued to take place with the Clerk and Principal
- Meetings had taken place with two prospective new governors, namely Katie Anderson and Stephen Young respectively, in accordance with the Board's recruitment policy
- A meeting had taken place with Paul Walker (Chair of Southport College) to share experiences and discuss potential collaborative opportunities
- An introductory meeting had taken place with Chris Jones, the Principal and the Clerk in connection with the imminent external board review
- Attendance at the official opening of the new facilities for Health & Care, Digital, Business and Maths at Cronton Sixth Form College

The Chair conveyed his congratulations to fellow Governor Wesley Rourke on his recent appointment as Executive Director for Environment & Regeneration at Halton Borough Council.

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

*Jayne Edwards joined the meeting during the following agenda item.*

#### 5. UPDATE ON STRATEGIC ISSUES (previously circulated)

5.1 The Principal referred to the comprehensive written report which had previously been circulated. The Principal delivered a presentation and highlighted key updates since the last Board meeting. Questions were invited at regular intervals. Within her detailed report the Principal provided the Board with progress against the College's key priorities, namely (i) safeguarding and wellbeing, (ii) quality, (iii) efficiency and (iii) growth (QEG) in connection with the Strategic Plan. The following aspects were brought to Governors' attention:

- The College was on track to meet or exceed all of its major targets for 2022/2023
- Numerous current challenges within the FE sector which included staff recruitment and retention, rising costs, industrial relations, qualification reform, apprenticeship numbers, Special Education Needs and Disability (SEND) Improvement Plan, Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) and Maths to age 18.
- T Levels – from September 2023 the College was to offer T Levels in Early Years, Health, Engineering and Construction (Civil Engineering)
- Election Manifesto Influencing – the Association of Colleges (AoC) was to work with all main political parties ahead of the next General Election..
- College Priorities included (i) Safeguarding and Wellbeing, (ii) Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment, (iii) Efficiency and (iv) Growth. A partnership review had been undertaken between the College and Staffordshire University in April 2023 which resulted in highly favourable outcomes with the panel imposing no conditions and gave a number of commendations. The overall Qualification Achievement Rates (QAR) 2021/22 placed Riverside College in first position regionally. The Apprenticeship Employer Ratings Feedback had graded Riverside College as

excellent. Based upon the increased number of 16-18 offers, anticipated student recruitment for 2023/2024 looked promising.

- Apprenticeships - £2.2m funding target had been achieved.
- Adult Education and Higher Education – applications/offers had increased compared to last year and recruitment for 2023/2024 looked promising.
- Two areas were highlighted within the QEG where progress had been less than satisfactory and these were to be subject to close scrutiny in 2023/2024.
- An overview of the numerous College activities, fundraising, staff and student achievements that had taken place between March and July 2023. At the recent Halton Business Awards the College had received a highly commended award in the Employer of the Year category.

In line with customary practice, upon receipt of their supporting documentation Governors had been offered the opportunity to raise any questions in advance of the meeting. Where applicable, the Principal had incorporated responses within her presentation. Board Members were thanked for submitting their questions and they were encouraged to continue to do so.

A discussion took place with questions being asked by Governors and responded to by the Senior Management Team (SMT). This included requests for further information regarding the planned deadline for receipt of Covid financial support, the key performance indicators for retention and reasons for an amber RAG rating despite exceeding the national average and the future plans for management of apprenticeships within the SMT structure.

Two Governors advised they had recently attended the Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum which was exhibiting artwork created by students at Cronton Sixth Form College entitled 'Catalyst for Creativity.' They reported that the exhibition was of an exceptionally high standard and congratulations were conveyed to all those involved in this event.

In conclusion, the Principal reported that the College remained in a strong and stable position ready to face the challenges of the next academic year.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted**

- (i) the Principal's update on strategic issues
- (ii) the contents of the financial assessment letter received from the ESFA
- (iii) the monitoring of performance relating to the QEG.

## 5.2 **Strategic Plan 2023/2024**

The Strategic Plan was considered in its entirety with specific focus on (i) vision, values and strategic aims, (ii) internal and external environment, and (iii) performance monitoring. Governors' input had been incorporated into the plan following their identification of threats and opportunities at the Board's Strategic Planning event in February 2023. A discussion took place.

**Resolved:** The Board **approved** the Strategic Plan 2023/2024

## 6. **STUDENT VOICE** (*previously circulated*)

Megan Burns (Student Governor) presented this report highlighting the key outcomes from the 'Have Your Say' Student Survey undertaken in May 2023.

The data was scrutinised and an in-depth discussion followed. Numerous questions were raised by Governors which were responded to by the Student Governor and

members of the SMT. It was noted that the number of students who had participated in this latest survey had exceeded previous response rates. Governors explored potential ways to promote even greater engagement with the student survey. The various ways in which the student experience could be reported to the Board were also discussed.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the report, and
- (ii) **requested** additional data in order to differentiate the response rate between the 16-18 cohort and 19+ cohort

## 7. **AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING – 19<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023**

### 7.1 **To receive for information a report on the Audit Committee meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023** *(previously circulated)*

Karen Banks (Committee Chair) provided a summary to the Board relating to the on-going monitoring of risk management activity and progress against College action plans. The following aspects were brought to the Board's attention:

#### Internal Audit Reports

The Internal Auditor was in attendance at the Committee meeting and provided written reports and associated commentary relating to the internal audits that had taken place on:

- Risk Management – the Committee was provided with substantial assurance that the control environment tested during the audit were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. As a result of the audit, ICCA made one recommendation of a low level nature and two advisory recommendations. The Internal Auditors also undertook an assessment and understanding of the College's 'risk appetite' in line with its strategic objectives and this was discussed at length at the meeting.
- Additional Learning Support and High Needs Students – the Committee was provided with substantial assurance that the areas of the control environment tested during the audit were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. As a result of the audit, ICCA made two recommendations of a low-level nature and one advisory recommendation.
- Follow Up On Previous Recommendations – the Committee had been provided with substantial assurance that all previous recommendations had been actioned and it was reported that all had been fully implemented or superseded by management.
- Draft Internal Audit Programme 2023/2024 – this had been considered by the Committee with Governors requesting that internal audits on (i) the student voice and (ii) financial key controls be included in the plan.

**Resolved:** The Board :

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report, and
- (ii) **approved** the Internal Audit Programme for 2023/2024, subject to the inclusion of two audit areas; student voice and key financial controls, respectively.

### 7.2 **Risk Management** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Audit Committee referred to the ten strategic risks and assurance mapping which had been shared at an earlier Board meeting. She advised that following the most recent review of the Risk Register RAG ratings had been changed

in respect of Key Risks 1, 4 and 7 and the reasons for those amendments were provided. Risk appetite had been discussed in connection with the internal audit report on risk management, as referred to in the preceding agenda item.

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

7.3 **Financial Statements Auditor's Plan for work on the 2022/2023 Financial Statements** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that the External Auditor had attended the Audit Committee meeting and had presented the proposed plan to enable the audit to be undertaken relating to the Financial Statements for year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023 and which were to be presented for approval at the Board meeting in December 2023.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and **approved** the Financial Statements Auditor's Plan.

7.4 **Internal Audit Provision Letter of Engagement** *(previously circulated)*

The contents of the Letter of Engagement were considered by the Committee together with the recommendation made by the Audit Committee.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and **approved** the Letter of Engagement provided by ICCA, as the College's Internal Auditors.

7.5 **Policies for Approval and Committee Terms of Reference**

The Audit Committee recommended to the Board that the following policies be approved, together with the Audit Committee's Terms of reference.

- Anti-Bribery
- Anti-Fraud & Corruption
- Anti-Money Laundering
- Whistleblowing

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and **approved** the above-mentioned policies and Audit Committee Terms of Reference.

8. **QUALITY & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING – 20<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2023**

8.1 **To receive for information a report on the Quality & Standards Committee meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023** *(previously circulated)*

Michele Bacon (Committee Chair) provided a summary of the business addressed which included:

- Inclusion and Learning Support – a very informative curriculum presentation had been delivered by the Head of Foundation Studies and Additional Needs; the presentation slides were accessible to all Board Members via GovernorHub.
- Curriculum Report – updates were received relating to progress and retention, projected student recruitment 2023/2024, adult education and apprenticeships, Higher Education (HE), High Needs and Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs), concluding with Level 2 reforms and curriculum developments. A revised written format of presenting this report had been well received and generated constructive dialogue relating to identified areas of outstanding practice, any identified areas of concern and action required.

- Close Monitoring – the Committee had been pleased to note that progress was being made in the four areas subject to close monitoring, albeit at varying levels.
- Bursary Categorisation 2023/2024 – The Committee considered recent Government guidance which provided colleges with some discretion in the administration of bursary funds. The Board was advised that there was no change to the financial thresholds that had previously been approved and that the discretion related to ways in which financial support was distributed to eligible students; the Committee had approved the proposals recommended by the Senior Management Team.

A discussion took place.

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

## 8.2 **Safeguarding Update** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was notified of the number of referrals made in relation to (i) safeguarding and (ii) welfare concerns. The Committee Chair informed the Board that the Committee had considered a report outlining areas of outstanding practice, areas of concern and areas where further action was required. The Committee expressed concern regarding the quantity, level of seriousness and complexity of referrals and in particular the potential impact on staff members handling some very serious concerns. Governors received assurance from the SMT that staff wellbeing continued to be a priority with support available for staff should they wish to access it.

A discussion took place. In response to a question raised, the SMT advised that based upon general information acquired at college network meetings the high statistical data relating to mental health concerns and suicide attempts/ideation largely reflected the national picture in the sector.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the contents of the report. This included several areas of good practice which had been acknowledged and commended by partner agencies in circumstances where there was a multi-agency plan in place to support individual students.

## 8.3 **Policies for Approval**

The Quality & Standards Committee recommended to the Board that the following policies be approved:

- Complaints
- Data Protection
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
- Higher Education Bursary
- Student Disciplinary & Suspension Procedures

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee and **approved** the above-mentioned policies.

## 9. **FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING– 21<sup>st</sup> JUNE 2023**

### 9.1 **To receive for information a report on the Finance & Resources Committee meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2023** *(previously circulated)*

In the absence of Susan Smith as Committee Chair, Wesley Rourke provided a summary to the Board on key matters addressed which included:

- Human Resources Update – absence rates had decreased in-year compared to this point in time in the previous academic year. Some challenges had been encountered in attracting suitable candidates for a variety of job roles across the College which reflected the local and regional picture, as a result of a highly competitive labour market. The Committee considered gender pay gap comparisons with local employers which evidenced the College was in line with local comparators. The Committee received assurance that wellbeing support for staff members remained a key priority and an overview of the initiatives helping to promote a positive work life balance had been provided.
- Health & Safety – statistics relating to accidents, incidents and near misses were considered, together with activities undertaken which included staff training.
- Environmental Sustainability – the strategy had been updated to evidence the College’s adherence to the Climate Action Roadmap, as approved by the Board. It was pleasing to note that the Hydrogen Project, which was part funded by the Skills Development Fund (SDF) was well underway and new courses had been developed for delivery from September 2023.
- Property Strategy – progress updates were provided relating to the numerous and various projects currently taking place to enhance the student learning environment across all campuses. In relation to two T Level Capital Wave Four Bids, the Committee was informed that scope change submissions had been made which had not been accepted. The College was awaiting further information from the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to this. Details of the summer work programme were also considered.
- Partnership Update – The Committee considered the 2022/2023 performance and risk rating relating to the two sub-contracting partners. Governors also received information in connection with Subcontracting Standard introduced by the ESFA and subsequent audit to be presented to the Audit Committee.
- Governance Updates –these were considered in relation to Estate Management with the Committee remaining satisfied that it was satisfactorily discharging its responsibilities.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report, and
- (ii) **delegated approval** to the SMT regarding costs/any required changes per individual project contained within the Summer Works Programme 2023.

### 9.2 **Management Accounts to 30th April 2023** *(previously circulated)*

The management accounts had been analysed against the budget and the five-year financial forecast submitted to the Board at its meeting in July 2022. Following the review made by the Board on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023, it was confirmed that any revised forecast had been implemented within the current management accounts which had been scrutinised by the Committee. A discussion took place with several questions being asked by Governors and responded to by the SMT. Clarification was provided in relation to (i) the overall non-pay adverse variance and planned maintenance, (ii) the balance sheet in connection with creditors and actual spend against budget, and (iii) the performance of pension schemes.

**Resolved:** The Board **noted** the Management Accounts.

### 9.3 **Financial Performance and Three-Year Financial Forecast for 2023/2024 to 2025/2026** *(previously circulated)*

When considering this report the Finance & Resources Committee had taken into account the volatile backdrop of emerging issues resulting from the pandemic, the on-going tensions in Ukraine and a plethora of curriculum changes that included the introduction of T Levels and the defunding of long established qualifications, together with the FE colleges reclassification to central Government by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This comprehensive report analysed in detail:

- Short term financial priorities and objectives
- Borrowing requirements and covenant compliance
- Updates to assumptions in respect of income and expenditure
- Capital Plans
- A stringent sensitivity analysis that illustrated the likely position resulting from the materialisation of a worst case scenario

A discussion took place with several questions being raised and responded to.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report
- (ii) accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the three-year financial forecast which included the budget for 2023/2024

#### 9.4 **Partnership Provision Contracts 2023/2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the sub contracting business cases and proposals for 2023/2024 in relation to (i) Power in Partnership and (ii) Crosby Training. These were reviewed in conjunction with performance monitoring which took place by the SMT and the recommendations made by the Finance & Resources Committee. A discussion ensued with questions being raised and responded to relating to the detailed nature of the provision being delivered by the respective sub-contractors, the challenges encountered during the academic year, stakeholder engagement within the Liverpool City Region, performance monitoring and any risk implications.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the Partnership Provision Contracts 2023/2024 as presented.

#### 9.5 **Insurance Services** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that the insurance contract was entered into for a five-year period between 1<sup>st</sup> August 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025. In accordance with this contract, the Finance & Resources Committee had reviewed the terms and conditions at its recent meeting.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the insurance schedule, related policy documentation and for the contract to continue.

#### 9.6 **Approval of Policies** *(previously circulated)*

The Finance & Resources Committee recommended to the Board that the following policies be approved:

- Anti-Modern Slavery
- Financial Regulations 2023/2024 including relevant policies
- Procurement
- Supply Chain Fee Charges
- Treasury Management



**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and approved the above-mentioned policies.

**10. SEARCH & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 21<sup>st</sup> JUNE 2023**

**10.1 Board and Committee Membership 2023/2024 and Update on Recruitment Activity** (*previously circulated*)

The Board considered the recommendations made by the Search and Governance Committee as detailed in the written report.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report
- (ii) **approved** the Committee Membership for 2023/2024 which included the respective appointments of Katie Anderson to the Quality & Standards Committee and Stephen Young to the Finance & Resources Committee

**10.2 Link Governor Programme 2023/2024** (*previously circulated*)

The Board considered the recommendation made by the Search & Governance Committee.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) **noted** the report
- (ii) **approved** that the programme be composed of a Safeguarding Link Governor and a SEND Link Governor throughout 2023/2024, with a further review to be undertaken by the Search & Governance Committee at its meeting in June 2024.

**10.3 Association of Colleges (AoC) Code of Good Governance for English Colleges** (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk provided an update on the revised Code and that it was being presented for approval by the AoC Board on 5<sup>th</sup> July 2023 with a further update to be provided at the College's next Board meeting.

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

**10.4 Statutory External Governance Review** (*previously circulated*)

Following due consideration and discussion the Board **resolved:**

- (i) that the report be **noted**
- (ii) **ratified** the decision that Chris Jones be commissioned to undertake the external board review of governance during Autumn term 2023.

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

To approve the draft minutes (Part One) of the Board Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023.

**12.1** The Board considered the minutes.

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

**12.2 To consider any matters arising from the minutes**

Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting.

**Resolved** – The Board

- (i) **noted** that all matters were either completed, in progress or had been included on the agenda.

- (ii) **approved** the recommendation made by the Internal Audit providers to include the length of terms of office for Governors in the Board's Standing Orders and the review process undertaken prior to any re-appointments being made.
- (iii) **approved** the proposal to amend the Meeting Schedule 2023/2024 in relation to the meeting date for the Quality & Standards Committee in November 2023 and Search & Governance Committee meeting in June 2024.

### 13. VOTE OF THANKS

On behalf of the Board, the Board paid tribute and conveyed appreciation to:

- Megan Burns and Sarah Worsley for their valued contribution as Student Governors throughout 2023/2024
- Anne Dunning for the valued support that she had provided to the Board over many years in her role as the Personal Assistant to the Principalship. Best wishes were expressed on her imminent retirement.
- Wesley Rourke upon the expiration of his term of office with recognition of his outstanding service to the Board in several different capacities over many years, which included being the Chair to the Board during his tenure as an External Governor.

### 14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

These were **noted** as follows:

- Audit Committee – 25<sup>th</sup> September 2023 at 5pm
- Remuneration Committee – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023 at 4:00pm
- Search & Governance Committee – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023 at 4:45pm
- Board – 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023 at 4.30pm
- Finance & Resources Committee – 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 at 5pm
- Quality & Standards Committee – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at 5pm

The Chair thanked all attendees for their participation and she closed the meeting at 6.17pm.

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

**Chair of the Board**

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023