

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 8TH JULY 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
	Jayne Edwards	External Governor via Teams
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Neil McGrath	External Governor, Chair
	Mary Murphy	Principal & Chief Executive
	Rachael Owen	External Governor
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
	Lucy White	Student Governor
	Sarah Worsley	Student Governor
	Stephen Young	External Governor

In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Assistant Principal
	Thalia Bell	Deputy Principal (Curriculum)
	Leeann Bellfield	Assistant Principal
	Alan Brown	Assistant Principal
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Catherine Shaw	Clerk to the Governors

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Tom McInerney and Susan Smith. The meeting was quorate. The Principal advised that the Deputy Principal (Curriculum) would be late joining the meeting, due to an urgent matter that had arisen requiring her attention.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Declarations of interest were made as follows:

- Jayne Edwards – agenda item 10.1
- Michele Bacon, Karen Banks and Neil McGrath – agenda item 10.2

Resolved: Declarations of interest were **noted** by the Board.

3. CHAIR'S UPDATE

3.1 To receive an activity report

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

- Regular three-weekly meeting had continued to take place with the Principal and Clerk to Governors.
- Attendance at External Board Review meetings with the Principal, Clerk and Chris Jones (External Board Reviewer).

- Chaired interviews with two new prospective Governors within the remit of the Search & Governance Committee.
- Attendance at the Vocational & Technical Awards Ceremony – this was a hugely successful and enjoyable event.
- Meetings with Ofsted inspectors – the Chair also extended his thanks and appreciation to Michele Bacon, Karen Banks, Jayne Edwards and Rachael Owen for their valuable contributions throughout the required governance meetings during the recent Ofsted inspection.

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

3.2 **Chair's Actions** (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk advised that two matters of an urgent nature had arisen since the last Board meeting whereby 'Chair's Action' had been invoked. As detailed in the documentation which had previously been circulated, these related to:

(i) Scottish Power Energy Network (SPEN) Substation at Cronton College 99 year lease

In summary, the Clerk advised that a larger substation was needed which required a new lease of the land, as it was not possible to install the new unit in the same location as the current substation. Once the new substation was operational, the existing one was to be decommissioned. The Senior Management Team (SMT) had taken legal advice from the College's solicitors throughout the negotiations with SPEN. Reference was made to section 9.1 of the College's Financial Regulations whereby it was stated that leases can only be undertaken with approval from the Board of Governors, hence Chair's Action was taken to expedite matters.

(ii) Approval of the Accountability Agreement 2024/2025

The Accountability Agreement had been recommended for Board approval by the Quality & Standards Committee at its meeting on 18th June 2024. In accordance with regulations the Accountability Agreement must be approved by the Board and submitted to the Department for Education (DfE) by 30th June 2024. In order to comply with the submission deadline, Chair's Action was taken in respect of the Accountability Agreement and was duly signed by the Chair.

Resolved: The Board **ratified** the Chair's Action as detailed in the report and in compliance with Standing Orders 69 and 70 in respect of the approval of:

- (i) the SPEN Substation at Cronton College 99 year lease
- (ii) Accountability Agreement 2024/2025

The Deputy Principal (Curriculum) joined the meeting

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

The Principal presented her strategic report and highlighted the following aspects:

External Factors

- Ofsted Inspection April 2024 – the College had retained its outstanding grading. The Principal conveyed her deep appreciation to all staff and Governors for their hard work and commitment in achieving this tremendous outcome.
- General Election 4th July 2024 – Sir Keir Starmer had become the new Prime Minister, achieving a large Labour majority. The Labour Party's FE-related pledges were outlined which included (i) Apprenticeship Levy to be replaced

with a Skills & Growth Levy, (ii) a new 'task force' Skills England and (ii) a pause and review of curriculum reform/qualifications.

- Updates on the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), Local Skills Improvement Fund (LSIF) and the Liverpool City Region Long Term Skills Plan (LCR-LTSP).
- Reconnecting Runcorn – this collaborative project was approaching the procurement stage with the anticipated opening being Autumn 2025. For those new to the Board, the Principal advised that this project was initiated several years ago at which time the College's annual financial commitment to this development was agreed to be £35k.
- Aiming High for Halton's Children & Young People Plan 2024/2030 – the College continued to work in partnership with the local authority in its commitment to improve life chances for children and young people in the borough.

College Priorities

- Safeguarding and Wellbeing – there had been an increase in referrals relating to mental health, domestic abuse and suicide ideation. The College continued to support learners in very challenging situations.
- Staff Health and Wellbeing – the College had launched its first Employee Assistance Programme with the provider PAM Wellbeing. This provided staff with a 24/7/365 helpline to seek support relating to various life events such as bereavement, mental health or financial concerns
- Quality objectives linked to the College's Strategic Plan
 - Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment – as confirmed at the recent Ofsted inspection this was judged to be outstanding. There were positive indications of improved achievement rates for 16-18 and apprenticeships in 2023/2024.
- Efficiency objectives linked to the College's Strategic Plan
 - ESFA had confirmed that the College remained in outstanding financial health.
 - To date, all internal audit reports had provided substantial assurance that their respective control environments tests were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses.
 - Property Strategy - £26.3m was to be invested over the next four years derived from a combination of reserves and grant funding.
- Growth objectives linked to the College's Strategic Plan
 - 16-19 – a significant increased number of applications had been received for 2024/2025 and subsequent offers made.
 - Apprenticeships – there had been a 68% increase in the number of apprentices enrolled in 2023/2024 compared to the previous year.
 - Adult Education – on target to meet the original allocation.
 - Higher Education (HE) – the number of offers had increased comparative to last year.

College Activities and Achievements of Staff and Students

These were numerous and included:

- Race for Life – this annual event raised a record breaking £7,400 for Cancer Research UK with over 350 staff and students taking part.
- One World Week – celebrating cultural diversity.
- End of Year Shows – Performing Arts, Dance and Art & Design plus Award Ceremonies had taken place, celebrating student success and achievement throughout the year.

The Principal responded to several questions that were asked in advance of the meeting and invited any additional questions throughout her presentation. During subsequent discussions, Board Members congratulated the College Management Team (CMT) and all College staff on sustaining its outstanding Ofsted grading.

In answer to a question raised, the Principal outlined the College's response to the 'Ofsted Big Listen' whereby Ofsted sought views on its work from schools, colleges and children's social care.

In response to another question raised, the Principal confirmed that adult funding was not lagged.

As requested by a Governor, the Principal provided an update on staff recruitment in the Foundation Studies (FS) department and that an Interim Head of FS had been appointed from the start of the 2024/2025 academic year, together with a FS Lecturer and several Learning Support Workers.

In conclusion to her report, the Principal reported that the College remained in a very strong position in readiness for the start of the 2024/2025 academic year.

Resolved: The Board

- (i) **noted** the Principal's update on strategic matters
- (iii) **noted** the ESFA College Finance Assessment outcome
- (iii) **noted** the update to the QEG performance monitoring for June 2024

- 4.2 **Strategic Plan (Quality-Efficiency-Growth) 2024/2025** (*previously circulated*)
This was discussed within the preceding agenda item.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the Strategic Plan 2024/2025

5. **WRITTEN RESOLUTION** (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk advised that a written resolution had been sought and received on 21st May 2024 in connection with the 'Green technology new build at Kingsway.' For additional assurance purposes, the Board was advised that this matter was discussed in detail at the Finance & Resources Committee meeting on 19th June 2024 within the Property Strategy agenda item.

Resolved: The Board **ratified** the written resolution whereby it approved for Drees & Sommer (Project Management Consultants) to advise Whitfield & Brown (Developments) Ltd of their engagement for the remainder of the project, subject to usual clearance checks.

6. **EXTERNAL BOARD REVIEW** (*previously circulated*)

The Chair referred to the meeting that had taken place on 26th June 2024 whereby Chris Jones (External Board Reviewer) presented his findings to the Board; the outcome being that governance at the College was effective. Several recommendations had been made to further enhance governance which were considered by the Board and an action plan was agreed subject to Chris' Jones approval.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the action plan, subject to agreement by the External Board Reviewer, following which it was to be published on the College's website in accordance with DfE requirements.

7. **AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING**

7.1 **To receive for information a report from the Audit Committee meeting held on 17th June 2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Audit Committee provided a summary of the meeting held on 17th June 2024 and highlighted the following:

Internal Audit Reports presented by ICCA

The Internal Auditor attended the Committee meeting and provided written reports and associated commentary relating to the internal audits that had taken place. All audits had resulted in the Auditor providing the Committee with substantial assurance that the areas of the control environment assessed were designed and operated effectively with no significant weaknesses. The audits related to:

- Marketing Strategy
- Examinations
- Financial Planning and Budgetary Control
- Key Financial Controls

Annual Whistleblowing and Anti-Fraud Reports

The Board received assurance from the Audit Committee that within the 2023/2024 academic year there had been no reports received by the SMT or the Clerk relating to either:

- actual or suspected fraud
- whistleblowing

Audit Committee Terms of Reference

As highlighted, the Audit Committee had proposed one amendment to the terms of reference in compliance with the recently published DfE College Financial Handbook

Performance Management Reviews

The Board was informed that the annual performance management review of the internal audit provision had taken place. The Audit Committee had scored each section highly throughout the review process.

Resolved: Upon recommendation by the Audit Committee the Board

- (i) **noted** the report.
- (ii) **approved** the Audit Committee Terms of Reference
- (iii) **approved** the continued appointment of ICCA as the Internal Auditors for 2024/2025

7.2 **Internal Audit Plan 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

A detailed planning approach had been adopted by the Internal Auditor to inform the proposed assurance coverage by scrutinising (i) the College's Strategic Plan, (ii) Risk Register and (ii) most recent management accounts and funding performance report. The Committee was satisfied that the plan provided good coverage in a cross-section of areas.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and **approved** the Internal Audit Strategy 2024/2025.

7.3 **Risk Management** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that the main changes related to:

- Key Risk 2 (Achievement of Outstanding Learner Success) – RAG rating amended following the 'outstanding' outcome from the recent Ofsted inspection.

- Key Risk 5 (Disruption to the Estate) – building works had been delayed at the Kingsway campus. Planned progress had been fully discussed and advice taken from the College legal advisors.
- Key Risk 8 (Response to External Environment) – RAG rating amended to 'amber' whilst the political environment and curriculum remained uncertain.

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

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

The Board was advised that the contents of the Letter of Engagement had been considered by the Committee and was recommended for approval. The Committee Chair drew the Board's attention to Appendix 3, Section 1 detailing the responsibilities of Board Members regarding the preparation of the Financial Statements and associated audit.

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

7.5 **Financial Statements Auditor's Plan**

To approve the Financial Statements Auditor's Plan for work on the 2023/2024 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 and Regularity for year ended 31st July 2024.

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

7.6 **Policies**

The Audit Committee recommended to the Board that the following policies be approved:

- 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.

8. **QUALITY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING**

8.1 **To receive for information a report on the Quality & Standards Committee meeting held on 18th June 2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee Chair provided an overview of the business addressed at the recent meeting which included:

Safeguarding Update

- The number of welfare and safeguarding referrals continued to be a cause for concern, together with increasing complexity.
- In response to the number of students presenting with mental health concerns, the Health and Wellbeing Team had continued to increase the level of support available to students.
- In 2023/2024 to date, the College had dealt with 65 incidents of either attempted suicide or ideation.

- The College was proactive in its engagement with Community Policing and there were plans in place to raise awareness of County Lines, exploitation and digital online safety in the next academic year.
- Student applicants with complex social backgrounds had increased significantly for 2024/2025. This had resulted in a substantial increase for second stage interviews.

In conclusion to the safeguarding update, the Committee Chair referred to the recent Ofsted inspection and the recognition that featured throughout the report across the range of provision. She commended the work of the Safeguarding/Wellbeing Team to the Board.

Accountability Agreement 2024/2025 and Duty to Review

This had been addressed within agenda item 3.2 (ii).

Student Voice Presentation

A very informative presentation had been delivered by the Head of Student Services and the associated slide deck shared with Board members. It was pleasing to report that students had input into curriculum delivery/structure and in response to their feedback, changes had been made to the delivery of exam preparation.

Curriculum Update

There had been a focus on this agenda item at the Committee meeting in relation to:

- 16-18 cohort
- Adults
- HE
- Apprenticeships
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion – relating to student retention
- Attendance data

Curriculum reform was discussed in detail in light of the recent outcome of the UK General Election and change in office from a Conservative to Labour Government. The 'pause and review' within the Labour manifesto was debated. The Committee Chair advised that it was crucial for this to be closely monitored by the Committee with further updates to be provided to the Board, as appropriate.

A Governor asked whether there were any financial implications given the tightening of 'tailored learning' in respect of the Adult Skills Fund (formerly known as the Adult Education Budget) whereby the report stated it was significant for the College as the flexible funding route had not previously been capped. The Deputy Principal (F&R) advised that there had been an update since the meeting and courses were to be funded via a different stream.

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

8.2 **Policies**

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

- Data Protection
- 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 AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING

9.1 To receive for information a report on the Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 19th June 2024 (*previously circulated*)

In the absence of the Committee Chair, the Clerk provided an overview of the business addressed at the recent meeting relating to updates on the following:

Human Resources

- Absence Rates – decreased in year compared to 2023/2024 and stood at 3.82%.
- Gender Pay Gap March 2023 – confirmed the College was broadly in line with comparator organisations.
- Employee Health & Wellbeing Strategy – this continued to be a key priority with the launch of an Employee Assistance Programme and Mental Health First Aid refresher training which had also been undertaken.

Health & Safety

The Board was advised of the number of incidents, accidents and near misses that were recorded between February 2024 and June 2024, together with comparative data in the preceding academic year. There were no RIDDOR reportable incidents within this reporting period.

Property Strategy

- Sports and Wellbeing Centre at Cronton – due to delays relating to design and legal matters, the completion of the substation remained outstanding though progress was being made.
- The College had secured £9.38m of Further Education Transformation Capital Funding to address all areas of the College that were rated below category B. Property Consultants were being procured to prepare a condition survey which would inform a Property Strategy update; the latter was to include a de-carbonisation plan.

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

9.2 Management Accounts to 30th April 2024 (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk advised of the following:

- The actual underlying operating surplus was £4,498k; significantly higher than planned. This was due to favourable variances in Income, Pay and Non-Pay Expenditure.
- Cash balances had remained positive at £30,154k and presented a favourable variance.
- Annual capital expenditure was £3,129k and remained with the total amount previously approved by the Board.

Resolved: The Board **noted** the Management Accounts as at 30th April 2024.

9.3 Three-Year Financial Forecast including budget 2024/2025 (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk advised that the financial plan 2023/2026 which included the budget for 2024/2025 had been scrutinised by the Finance & Resources Committee at its meeting on 19th June 2024. The Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) had explained the modelling process in respect of the key ratios. It was confirmed that the financial health of the College was outstanding and forecast to remain so until at least 2026/2027. Key highlights included:

- Change of assumptions throughout the period of the Plan were referred to in section 5 of the report. The operating surplus in 2023/2024 was forecast to be £1.745m.
- Forecasts on income were also more favourable than predicted in July 2023, primarily as a result of uplifts in funding rates for 16-18 learners. Rising interest rates had led to an increase in interest received on bank accounts.
- Adult Education Budget – this remained challenging, given the all-year nature of recruitment. Mitigation had been included for clawback purposes should tolerance levels change.

The Board received assurance that a stringent sensitivity analysis had taken place. Contingencies had been built into the planning process to ensure the College had the flexibility to respond to any rapid and/or demanding changes that may take place.

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 2024/2025

9.4 **Partnership Provision Contracts 2024/2025**

The Board considered the sub-contracting business cases and proposals for 2024/2025 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.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and **approved** the Partnership Provision Contracts 2024/2025 as presented.

9.5 **Policies** *(previously circulated)*

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

- Financial Regulations 2024/2025
- Supply Chain Fee Charges
- Procurement
- Treasury Management

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

10. **SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MEETING**

10.1 **To receive for information a report from the Search & Governance Committee meeting held on 11th June 2024** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee provided a summary of the meeting held on 11th June 2024 and highlighted the following aspects:

Board Self Assessment Review (SAR) Plan

There had been a focus on progression relating to (i) reporting of the student voice and (ii) Board Succession Planning, primarily in relation to the roles of Chair, Vice-Chairs and Committee Chairs. Board Members were encouraged to contact the Clerk to Governors with any expressions of interest regarding these roles.

Scheme of Delegation

Following a review of policy delegation the Board was requested to accept the recommendations made by the Committee to extend the review date of nine named policies.

Training Plan 2023/2024

This had been considered by the Committee and it was satisfied that a wide range of training had been undertaken over the course of the academic year. The Clerk was to continue in forwarding details of training opportunities, as and when they arise, which were predominantly via the Association of Colleges and Education Training Foundation.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendations made by the Search & Governance Committee and

- (i) **noted** the contents of the report
- (ii) **approved** that the Student Voice was to become a standing agenda item at Quality and Standards Committee meetings
- (iii) **approved** the extended review dates of nine policies contained within the briefing paper from an annual review to every two years

10.2 **Appointment of Board Chair & Vice-Chair(s) 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Clerk advised that the initial stages of the formal process to appoint the Board Chair and Vice-Chair(s) had taken place, as approved by the Board at its previous meeting. The Board considered the nominations and self-nominations that had been received.

During the discussion of this agenda item Neil McGrath, Michele Bacon and Karen Banks withdrew and re-joined the meeting at appropriate times.

Resolved: The Board **approved** the following appointments for 2024/2025

- Neil McGrath to be re-appointed as Board Chair
- Michele Bacon and Karen Banks to be re-appointed as Board Vice-Chairs

10.3 **Board Membership and Succession Planning** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee Chair advised that there had been a focus on recruitment activity and succession planning at the recent Search & Governance Committee meeting. The importance of succession planning was highlighted to effectively forward plan to 2025/2026. The Committee Chair provided an overview of the meetings that had taken place with prospective new governors and their respective skill sets giving due consideration to the skills analysis of the overall Board.

Jayne Edwards briefly withdrew and re-joined the meeting during the discussion of this agenda item.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendations made by the Search and Governance Committee and

- **Appointed** Paul Leatherbarrow as an External Governor for four years and assigned to the Audit Committee
- **Appointed** Stephen Parkinson as a Co-Opted Governor for one year in the first instance and assigned to the Quality & Standards Committee
- **Re-appointed** Susan Smith as an External Governor for one year and remain assigned to the (i) Finance & Resources Committee and (ii) Remuneration Committee
- Following Jayne Edwards' imminent expiry of her term of office as an External Governor, to **appoint** her as a Co-Opted Governor for one years and to continue as a member of the Audit Committee

- **Re-appointed** Michele Bacon as the SEND Link Governor for a further year. No changes to be made to the Link Governor Scheme and was to remain with the two statutory roles relating to (i) safeguarding and (ii) SEND
- **Approved** the Committee Membership 2024/2025, as presented.
- **Approved** to amend the Standing Orders stating that the composition of Q & S was to be 'seven governors and one co-opted member'

11. MINUTES *(previously circulated)*

11.1 To approve the draft minutes (Part One) of the Board Meeting held on 18th March 2024

The Board reviewed the minutes from the previous meeting.

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

11.2 To receive a progress report on any matters arising from the previous meeting

Resolved – The Board **noted** that all previous action points had been completed and there were no matters arising from the minutes.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no matters of urgent business to address that were not on the agenda.


13. VOTE OF THANKS

On behalf of the Board the Chair conveyed his thanks and appreciation to Lucy White and Jayne Edwards upon the imminent expiry of their respective terms of office.

14. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

These were **noted** as follows:

- Audit Committee – 23rd September 2024
- Board – 14th October 2024
- Finance & Resources Committee – 20th November 2024
- Quality & Standards Committee – 26th November 2024
- Remuneration Committee – 1st October 2024
- Search & Governance Committee – 24th September 2024

Signed: 

Chair

Date:14th October 2024.....