

CORPORATION MINUTES PART 1

Date: Thursday 26 March 2024

Venue: Poplar

Time: 5:30pm

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| **Chair** | | Rob Hull |
| **Corporation Members** | | Marilyn Hawkins, Neil Yeomans, Gerry McDonald, Brij Patel, Stephen Critoph Ruth Gilbert (online), Richard Smith Morgan (online) Claire Baker, Mohammad Hussain, Nazifa Sania |
| **Officers** | | Principal Tower Hamlets and Hackney: Alison Arnaud  Principal Havering Colleges: Janet Smith  Principal Redbridge and Epping Forest: Narzny Khan  Deputy CEO: Imelda Galvin |
| **Director of Governance** | | Elsa Wright |
| **Apologies** | | Philida Schellekens, Sue Williams QPM, Dean Stanford, Cynthia Griffin |
| **Item No** | **Item of business** | |
|  | **PRELIMINARY PROCEDURAL MATTERS** | |
| **1** | **Chair’s Welcome & Opening Remarks**  The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. | |
| **2** | **Apologies for Absences**  Apologies were received and accepted from Philida Schellekens, Sue Williams, Dean Stanford and Cynthia Griffin. | |
| **3** | **Declaration of Interests**  Members were reminded of the need to declare any interest in any items on the agenda. No declarations were made. | |
| **4**  **5** | **Minutes of the Last Meeting Held on 14 December 2023**  The minutes were **APPROVED** and would be signed as an accurate record of the meeting online.  **ACTION – Minutes to be signed online**  **Matters Arising and Action Points from the Meeting**  The matters arising were complete or were scheduled for discussion on the agenda. The Chair asked about City Gateway and the Principal Hackney said that the contract would not be extended. | |
| **STRATEGIC MATTERS** | | |
| **6** | **CEO Report**  The CEO gave an update to his report. He explained that he expected the reach and remit of the apprenticeship levy to change after the election. The Labour Party had suggested that 50% of funds could be spent on non apprenticeship training and this might lead to apprenticeships stopping completely. The bureaucracy was the key issue. Governors asked about the defunding of BTECs and equivalent qualifications. The Minister had not replied to the questions posed and this could affect around 220 students. The T level replacement was mainly engineering with a small amount of electrical work and was not the industry standard qualification that was in demand and was being defunded. The Board recorded its thanks to the Group Executive Director, Marketing and Student Support and her team for the successful Matrix reaccreditation. This was a standard that the College needed to achieve and there had been very positive feedback with all the action points from the previous inspections completed.  The CEO updated the Board on changes at other local colleges and the involvement of the FE Commissioner.  Work on the proposed merger with BSix continued. The loan of £0.5m would be paid off in August with no separate documentation required by the DFE. Potentially, BSix could pay it off before merger due to funding and savings that had been identified as part of the merger process. The consultation document was ready to be issued on Thursday and there would be a meeting for staff at NCC Hackney the day after the Board meeting. The statutory notices would be published in the Times and the Hackney Gazette. NCC would support delivery of the two adult programmes before the merger. TUPE letters had been issued. The Director of Governance confirmed that the consultation document was agreed and had been signed off by the BSix Board as it was their consultation.  **6.1 Risk register**  There was a discussion about the risk register. Commercial income was improving but the target would not be achieved this year due to delays with one contractor. Looking forward, there was visibility with more clients and there were prospective partners. Other commercial activity was still slow.  Governors asked about item 11 Income streams and the additional risks numbered 12-15 and whether they should sit with committees. The CEO confirmed that there was further work to do on mitigations and they would be allocated to committees, where appropriate. The Chair of Audit explained that the direction of the travel of the risk would be indicated with a new risk register format and risks could be moved from the main register to a second tab when the risk had been reduced or was no longer a key risk. SMT would be reviewing the proposed format before discussion at the July Board meeting.  **6.2 Governance KPIs**  There was a suggestion around an additional heading under staff which could feed into the objectives for next year. The CEO reported on the mid year position. There had been improvements in a number of areas including finance with strong data on achievement. Against the new national rates, NCC was still significantly ahead of the average and 4th in London for 16-18 students with very close performance amongst the top four colleges. Adult achievement was 6th in London. Last year the national rates had dropped but they had increased by 1-1.5% this year and achievement at NCC was still significantly above competitor colleges. Some colleges were in the 70s with others as low as 60%. The data included sixth form colleges and independent training providers. Data from sixth forms in schools was not comparative. Achievement rates were used in the FE sector and not pass rates which school sixth forms used. The Ofsted grade was the only direct comparator. The achievement data was difficult to access and was produced for the sector and not for parents.  Governors asked about the reason behind the merger as achievement rates were low. The Principal, Hackney and Tower Hamlets explained that it was important to give all students a better experience and the merger would achieve that; it was important for the College’s voice to be heard as the main provider in the borough and that there were limited numbers of learners with a finite amount of funding which would come the NCC as the Main FE provider.  Governors asked about the use of achievement rates in marketing material. They were used, particularly in case studies, to demonstrate to applicants and parents how students had achieved and their final destinations. They were particularly helpful where students might not have achieved at GCSE as predicted and could be used to show an alternative route to their destination or a different option.  Governors congratulated the team on a strong set of data. Progress against the new KPIs would continue to be monitored by the Curriculum, Quality and Students Committee. | |
| **7** | **Committee Recommendations**  The Committee Chairs reported back on the recent round of meetings | |
| **7.2** | **Finance and General Purposes**  The Chair explained that the committee had reviewed the accounts and there was a projected surplus at the end of the year of around £1.7m. The Human Resources report had been discussed and the committee had looked in detail at EDI in recruitment and retention of staff. The Group Executive Director, HR would be bringing back a more detailed report. The new Head of Procurement attended the meeting and spoke about the measures that were being put in place to ensure compliance and to achieve value for money. The committee reviewed the latest health and safety report with increased incidents on some campuses which would be monitored.  **7.2.1 Management accounts and cash flow**  The forecast was strong and the Corporation thanked those involved for their hard work in managing the budget.    **7.2.2 Fee Policy**  There were no substantive changes to the fee policy and the Deputy CEO would check to ensure that the policy reflected the changes to the GLA limits.  Governors asked about international students and what the position was for students who might be refugees or asylum seekers. It was confirmed that the policy referenced the ESFA funding guidance which set out the full details in relation to eligibility. This was a complex area so the guidance was referenced rather than included in detail in the policy. The Deputy CEO would confirm the position.  **ACTION – The Corporation agreed the Fee Policy subject to the checks set out above**  **7.2.3 Investment options**  There had been a discussion about cash with a number of projects about to begin. The most prudent way to manage was viewed to be the current approach with day to day management of cash. The committee had asked to see a longer term cash flow looking at the position over the next two to three years.  A joint meeting of the Finance and Property committees would be added to the schedule in the Autumn term to look at the cash flow and the property developments. | |
| **7.1** | **Audit committee**  The Chair of the Audit committee explained that there had been two internal audits, including safeguarding, with very strong results. A risk management policy was in development which SMT would review. A policy would need to be in place for the end of the year. There were no incidences of fraud to report. The committee would continue to monitor the quality of the internal audits. | |
| **7.3** | **Curriculum, Quality and Students Committee**  The Vice Chair of the Corporation fed back from the meeting. The committee had welcomed student governors and been updated on work across the College on learner voice including the results of the SPOC survey. There had been an update on the first accountability agreement, with a high level of participation. Adult growth was strong and promising work continued with SEGEN and Aviva. The new framework for KPIs aligned with the college structure. Consistency would be monitored by curriculum area and not by campus. There had been a discussion about teaching quality and there would be more training for observers to ensure consistency. In year retention was strong. Attendance was a national issue which was not improving across the sector. There had been some good improvements against the QIP. There had been a very positive Matrix report on careers guidance. There were still a high number of safeguarding cases.  This was a new approach and would be monitored through CQS by curriculum area. HE had now been added into the KPIs and there was a measure for teaching and learning which would be the starting position for this year. Governors asked about retention for A levels at Havering and the retention was measured over 2 years rather than one as with almost all other courses. The national rates were lower for sixth form provision for this reason. The attendance rates were not available as a national rate. The College looked at attendance in a very clear way with no distinction between the type of absence. NCC was doing some research with Queen Mary on attendance and AOC was undertaking a benchmarking exercise. The college outturn 22/23 was shown in the table with current attendance in year standing at 85% against a target of 90%.  Governors discussed the KPIs and the use of national rates or target rates set internally. It was suggested that it would be helpful to show where the national rate was a valuable benchmark or where the College had set higher rates. The Principal, Havering confirmed that the College targets were key and that they were usually higher than the national rates.  There was an update on the new Condition of funding for English and Maths which had to be studied if a grade 4 had not been achieved. NCC provision was currently above the requirement as it was necessary for progression. The 5% tolerance requirement was not an issue as it was only used in extremis. This was now being removed completely by DFE. Students with an EHCP were currently exempted if there was no further qualification for them. It was clarified that the students had to study a programme for the qualification. Some colleges did exempt students and paid a charge to do so.  The new regulations required 3 hours for English and 4 hours for Maths in 2025. Currently 3 hours was delivered in both subjects at NCC. There was additional funding attached and it would be difficult to attract staff to deliver this as schools, who paid more, would also fall under the new guidance. There could be changes post election before the 2025 introduction. Multiply staff would be working through to Easter and they could be further employed to deliver the additional hours. This would be a sector wide issue and much bigger for those colleges not currently delivering a high number of hours. The sector had put forward different solutions which had not been taken up by the current government. There had been discussion about studying Maths to 18 but this was a long term aim of the current government. The costs would net off but finding teachers would be difficult | |
| **7.4** | **Property Committee**  The Chair of the committee reported back from the meeting. The new Group Director, Capital Projects was doing a good job. The committee heard an update on Ardleigh Green and at Hackney an investment memorandum was being written inviting developers to make proposals for the site. There had been a number of positive conversation with politicians in Hackney. There would be a deadline in the autumn for proposals to be submitted to deliver the project, including a new college building. It was a long term commitment to the campus which would be redeveloped. 16-18 numbers were declining but adult numbers were strong. There were opportunities to develop with BSix. | |
| **7.5** | **Search and Governance Committee**  The Chair of the committee reported back from the meeting. The Governance review would be taking place during the summer term. A desk based review would begin after Easter and there would be a scoping meeting with the reviewer in early May and the Director of Governance would circulate the scope. Members who were keen to be interviewed as part of the process should let the Director of Governance know.  There was a discussion about the mandatory courses that all Governors were asked to complete. The Chair of Search explained that it would require resource to look at and research equivalencies if exemptions were to be granted. For governors with professional experience in the subjects, the course could be clicked through and the assessment completed at the end. Current expectations of Board members around training remained the same. If there was feedback on the training for governors on safeguarding, it would be helpful to get feedback. Governors were asked to do sufficient training to be an effective board member.  It was suggested that there should be a discussion at the Strategy Day. Members who wanted to attend a committee online should contact the chair and for most committees it was relatively easy to manage with one person online. There were more questions to discuss about in person attendance at board meetings and it would be good to get feedback from all members. | |
| **8** | **Committee Reports to note** The Corporation was reminded that there were reports to note on the portal including Learner Voice and the QIP. | |
| **9** | **Feedback from the Planning Day**  Governors commented that the presentation on the development of HE provision had been very useful. The logistics worked well. The discussion on 9 May would be key. The Chair was keen to ensure everyone was in attendance and was happy to speak to anyone who was not able to attend to ensure their views were fed in.  Work on the Strategic Intent would continue with the Deputy CEO on 26 April and the Director of Governance would circulate the details to all governors. | |
| **10** | **Any Other Business**  The Principal, Epping and Redbridge updated the Corporation on the nursery inspection at Hackney which had gone well. The draft report had been received but the final outcome would not be confirmed until the final report was published. (The report was published on 4 April with the provision rated as Good in all areas). | |
| **11** | **Date of next meeting –9 May – Board meeting and Strategy day, 11 July Board meeting**  Members were reminded of the meetings in the summer term. The Strategy Day was on 9 May and there would be a Special Board meeting in the morning session to review the merger and to make a decision on the final resolutions. | |