

**Minutes of the Corporation Meeting Held on
Tuesday 15 October 2024**

Present: Damien Bourke, Simon Boyle, Phill Brown, Malcolm Bruce, Jonathan Frankham, Michael Ginger, Nicky Littler, John Lyne (Chair), Jackie Moores, Jemma Newton, Elaine Price, Remell Thompson-Bell, Atta Ul Rasool

Nils Elgar, Clerk to the Corporation

In Attendance: Dave Dobson (Vice Principal Finance and Infrastructure), Leon Dowd (Deputy Principal Quality and People), Rob Goldstone (Head of Estates), Nicola Welland (Deputy Principal Curriculum)

ACTION

24/25.01 Apologies for Absence

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to accept the apologies of Amanda Bromley and Kirk Cornwall. **Accepted**

24/25.02 Declarations of Interest

It was noted that Jonathan Frankham had a standing declaration that he was an employee of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), the College's principal funder and regulator. **Noted**

It was noted that Phill Brown had an interest in the TRET Update (see minute 24/25.09), as the Board would be invited to appoint him as a Member of the Tame River Educational Trust.

24/25.03 Health and Safety Annual Report 2023/24

The Head of Estates reported the following points:

- (i) there were no RIDDOR reportable accidents in-year;
- (ii) there had been ongoing attendance issues of members of the Health and Safety Committee and so a different membership would be in place for 2024/25. Notably, the Assistant Principal (for the key curriculum areas of Construction, Engineering, Automotive and Work-Based Learning) was joining the Committee. These were the curriculum areas where most accidents occurred and it was thought that his contribution in this forum would be helpful;
- (iii) illness had been introduced as a category on the accident register in 2024/25. This was to capture occasions when staff left College during the working day for reasons of illness;
- (iv) an external health and safety audit had been commissioned at the start of the academic year. Of 33 areas investigated, 25 were found to be compliant, with eight identified as having 'room for improvement'. 13 recommendations were made which included:
 - that the College's Health and Safety Policy be reviewed on an annual basis (currently biannual);

- review existing fire risk assessments to ensure all College areas and activities were covered (to be done internally or externally through a third party);
- that fire doors be inspected monthly in areas of high footfall;
- that permits to work were issued by a suitably trained individual to ensure these were issued correctly (for example ensuring that all contractors had received DBS enhanced checks). It was reported that a new system for checking in contractors had been adopted that was separate from that for visitors;
- an action was to secure a health and safety action tracker. The College had a system in place but this was not user friendly. The College had adopted a new web-based compliance solution (iAMCompliant) that facilitated managing everyday health and safety, statutory reporting, and staff training requirements, as well as estates management.

Governors noted the Principal's comment that the iAMCompliant system was very user friendly.

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to note the Health and Safety Annual Report 2023/24. **Noted**

The Head of Estates left the meeting at the end of this item.

24/25.04 Minutes of the Meeting Held on 2 July 2024

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2024. **Approved**

24/25.05 Matters Arising

On Minutes 23/24.88 (May Finance Report), the Vice Principal Finance and Infrastructure reported that the Motor Vehicle building had opened at the start of the year with no delays. Snagging was underway. The demolition of remaining buildings had taken place and site works would be completed within two weeks. The site of the former buildings would be grassed over and left until a decision was made about what to do with this area. Governors would get an opportunity to visit Motor Vehicle at the Governor Learning Visit planned for Tuesday 14 January – immediately prior to the Governors' Dinner.

24/25.06 Principal's Report

The Principal reported the following items:

- enrolments were up 320 on allocation, which would be worth over £2.1m in additional income if they all stayed. If in-year funding was granted for this growth, then this was likely to be about £1m. She had been in discussion with the Assistant Director of Education at Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (TMBC) on supporting a bid for exceptional growth

- funding. The outcome of this was uncertain. 16-18 learner numbers would grow further in-year, for example through the provision provided by the Princes' Trust;
- (ii) sufficiency 2025/26. Growth for 2025/26 was known and a continued growth in numbers was expected until 2031. However, there were insufficient places in Tameside for post-16 provision. It was proposed that she and the Chair would write to the Department for Education (DfE) regarding growth funding. The College was now full, with all opportunities to create additional teaching space exhausted. One option, to address this, was to lease commercial space, the other being to get some portacabins brought onto the Beaufort Road site. In-year growth funding was needed to fund any development. The College would also retrospectively trigger a growth case for 2024/25. Management were clear that the College could not undertake the required capital work at its own risk. However, if this additional growth funding was not realised, then TMBC would likely need to accept an increase in NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training) in the borough;
 - (iii) exams results would be outlined in the following agenda item. However, the apprenticeships achievement rate was 60.3% against a target of 57%, which represented a significant improvement on the 48.3% achieved in 2023/23. The achievement rate was already 33.6% for 2024/25;
 - (iv) the College was hosting seven of the WorldSkills UK national competition finals in November: covering the areas of automotive and engineering. An invitation would be sent to Governors in due course.

Issues considered by Governors included:

- (i) the requirements for any lease of commercial property and identification of suitable properties;
- (ii) whether a direct approach to the Mayor of Greater Manchester for growth funding would be helpful. It was noted that the Mayor had no leverage or access to 16-18 funding;
- (iii) that the importance of the issue of sufficiency was such that it needed to be a standing item within the Principal's Report.

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to note the contents of the report. **Noted**

24/25.07 Closure of Quality Improvement Plan 2023/24 and Provisional Outcomes 2023/24

The Deputy Principal Quality and People reported the following points:

- (i) Leadership and Management:
 - attendance strategies had been effective, robust targets were in place and closely monitored;
 - management of apprenticeship provision had improved. Robust performance management was in place.

Apprenticeship achievement rate was 60.2% (+3.2% points above the target of 57%);

- actions in GCSE Maths and English had been implemented. Improvements were evident in 16-18 provision. This remained a focus of improvement for both 16-18 and 19+ provision in 2024/25;
- good improvements were made on the majority of courses identified below;

(ii) Quality of Education:

- a community curriculum had been effectively developed;
- the Deputy Principal Curriculum had successfully led actions to improve teaching CPD;
- good progress had been made to ensure most learners were better prepared for the technical qualifications in Electrical, Carpentry & Joinery and Computing. Further focus would be given on improving Plumbing in 2024/25;
- achievement rates improved in L3 Animal Care, Floristry, L2 Cabin Crew, L3 Travel, L3 Computing;
- further focus during 2024/25 would be on improving achievement rates for AAT, L2 Animal Care, L2 Travel;
- improvements in retention rates were evident in A Level Religious Studies, Government and Politics, Psychology and Sociology. Further focus would be given on improving Geography in 2024/25;
- progress made in value-added on Geography, Art & Design, Film, Sociology and Computer Science. Further improvement was required in Government and Politics, Religious Studies, Business Studies, Law, Engineering, Photography and Graphic Design;

(iii) Behaviour and Attitudes:

- overall College attendance was slightly below targets. Attendance was a national issue, including in schools. Attendance at GCSE Maths and English remained a challenge;
- the attendance of care experienced learners was on target and the attendance of other vulnerable groups was improved;

(iv) Personal Development and Safeguarding actions:

- a good range of enrichment activity, other than sport / fitness related activity and particularly supporting wellbeing and mental health, had been developed. Engagement of learners was well above 2023/24;
- student voice strategies had been developed well to ensure the voice of single sex groups and LGBTQI+ and non-binary students informed the development, and measured the impact of, wellbeing and safeguarding related strategies;
- good progress had been made in evaluating and improving the focus on meeting the skills needs.

The Deputy Principal Quality and People also provided a summary of the provisional outturn for 2023/24:

- the overall College achievement rate was 85.4%, a decline of 0.4%-points since 2022/23 and 1.2%-points above national average (NA);
- at 85.2%, the 16-18 achievement rate had improved by 0.6%-points since 2022/23 and was 3.5%-points above NA;
- at 85.9%, the 19+ achievement rate had declined by 2.2%-points since 2022/23 and was 1.1%-points below NA;
- the main priorities for improving achievement rates included:
 - GCSE Maths and English;
 - 19+ and Level 1 / Entry achievement rates;
 - value-added on targeted A level courses.

Issues considered by Governors included:

- (i) the thanks of the Chair to both Elaine Price and Malcolm Bruce on their scrutiny and support in relation to driving up quality;
- (ii) how the QIP actions that had been RAG-rated 'red' would be taken forward. It was noted that these areas for improvement would roll over to the current year;
- (iii) whether there was any sign that the government's policy on English and Maths was likely to change. It was noted that nothing had been announced to date.

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to note the contents of the report. **Noted**

24/25.08 Provisional Outturn 2023/24

The Vice Principal Finance and Infrastructure reported the following points:

- (i) at its meeting on 4 July 2023, the Board approved a budget in 2023/24 with a surplus of £138k (before FRS 102 pension costs). Following a funding announcement during the summer, at its next meeting on 17 October 2023, the Board approved a revised budget, with an operating surplus of £496k (before pension costs). Then, following the mid-year review, the budget was revised once again with an operating surplus of £1,335m (before pension costs);
- (ii) the management accounts showed a provisional operating surplus of £1,397m (before pension costs). The favourable variance was made up of £548k favourable income, £882k adverse variance in pay costs and £397k in favourable variance in non-pay costs. The final outturn might vary from this as work was ongoing in respect of capital projects (specifically the demolition of buildings) and final bursary reconciliations;
- (iii) the external audit had commenced that week and would conclude by the end of the month;
- (iv) the overall financial health grade for the College was expected to remain 'outstanding' for 2023/24;
- (v) cash reserves at the year-end were higher than expected (£7,688k versus £7,298k);

- (vi) cash was expected to stay strong past the year-end, which would ensure that the College could continue to operate effectively on a day-to-day basis.

Governors were content with the report as presented.

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to note the Provisional Outturn for 2023/24. **Noted**

24/25.09 TRET Update

The Deputy Principal Quality and People gave a presentation that covered the following points:

- (i) a history of the co-construction of the Tame River Educational Trust (TRET) that initially involved four schools:
 - at present Droylsden Academy was the sole school within the Trust.
 - Mossley Hollins High School had agreed to join TRET and was currently an Associate School (with a formal agreement in place), but had been unable to convert to an academy and join TRET due to unresolved Private Finance Initiative (PFI) issues and associated risks;
 - Hyde High School was one of the original co-constructors of TRET but subsequently withdrew. After three successive 'requires improvement' Ofsted judgements, it was the subject of an Academy Order to join TRET in April 2024. Although the Academy Order was withdrawn in September 2024, its Governing Body decided to voluntarily convert to an academy and join TRET, and had recently signed an Associate School Agreement;
- (ii) key issues relating to TRET:
 - the development of TRET has been drawn out over a significant period of time;
 - PFI issues and associate risks remained the biggest issue for the development of TRET;
 - due diligence was underway on both Mossley Hollins High School and Hyde High School;
 - financial challenges. These included a reduction in reserves at Droylsden Academy to fund that the capacity building for TRET to take on other schools and the associated costs of conversion;
 - Performance. Both Droylsden Academy and Mossley Hollins High School were rated 'good' in their latest Ofsted inspections. Hyde High School was judged 'requires improvement'. These judgements were reflected in the school results;
 - TMBC had stated that they were fully supportive of TRET. However, this support had not been reflected in their ability to progress the PFI issues impacting Mossley Hollins High School and Hyde High School to allow them to academise and join TRET;
 - the DfE considered TRET able to improve schools and grow;

- TRET had a strong Trust Board Members. However, with the resignation of Karen James, there was a vacancy for a Member on TRET

Issues considered by Governors included:

- (i) the palpable sense of frustration at the slow pace of progress in developing TRET;
- (ii) that schools were required to give impartial Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG), regardless of their link to a particular academy trust.

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to approve the appointment of Phill Brown as a Member of the Tame River Educational Trust.

Approved

24/25.10 Reserves Policy

The Vice Principal Finance and Infrastructure reported the following points:

- (i) following the release of the revised Financial Handbook by the ESFA, the AoC recommended that colleges had a Reserves Policy that sets its principles for all elements of financial reserves. The recommendation was to have this in place for the 31 July 2024 year-end, so approval by Chair's Action was sought from the Chair in advance of a review at this meeting;
- (ii) the Policy was drafted based on advice from the Charities Commission and Generally Accepted Accountancy Practice (GAAP);
- (iii) the overall principles within the Policy included:
 - to maintain sufficient free reserves to enable the College to meet its charitable purpose and continue to provide a public benefit to current beneficiaries;
 - to balance the expenditure of income on current beneficiaries against ensuring that facilities and services had sufficient investment to improve and endure for future beneficiaries;
 - to maintain a level of reserves that was prudent for the College to be considered a going concern but may include unexpendable reserves such as reserves applied to tangible fixed assets and reserves designated for or restricted to a certain purpose;
- (iv) the Policy would be assessed as part of the financial statements and the two key benchmarks were as follows:
 - cash balances – retention of a cash balance of £4.0m at the end of the financial year, which was double the FE Commissioner's recommendation of £2.0m;
 - reserves – a general reserve value of £17.1m, which was approximately 50% of the expected annual income at the end of the year to protect operations in the following year against in-year changes to funding rules, the uncertainties of student recruitment and commercial income generation.

Consideration should also be given to the negative impact of the revaluation of defined benefit pension schemes to the levels of reserves. Where the level of reserves may be perceived to be below the 50% level, these should be added back in or taken off if there was a favourable balance to identify the underlying reserve position.

Governors were content with the Policy as presented.

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to approve the Reserves Policy.

Approved

24/25.11 Update on Governor Engagement and Development Activities

The Clerk to the Corporation reported the following Governor engagement and development activities had been recorded since the date of the last Board meeting:

- (i) 23.08.24 – Enrolment – Kirk Cornwall and John Lyne. Feedback on this had been shared with Governors via email;
- (ii) 11.10.24 – Meeting with Student Governor Candidates – John Lyne. This took place with the Deputy Principal Quality and People and the Clerk to the Corporation. The overall process was outlined. He indicated that following the meeting, candidates could put their name forward for election by their peers. Results would be known by the end of the week;
- (iii) 15.10.24 – Governor Learning Visit – Victoria E-floor and the iHub: Phill Brown, Jonathan Frankham, Michael Ginger, Nicky Littler, John Lyne, Jemma Newton, Remell Thompson-Bell and Atta Ul Rasool. E-floor had been recently refurbished and was now the base for English and Maths. Classrooms had been finished to a high specification. Bifold doors had been used for the walls, which allowed the classrooms to be opened up into larger spaces, which would come in useful for group working and exams. A new central staff room had been provided for staff and their co-location was thought to generate benefits in terms of sharing good practice. A demonstration was given of the new iHub (a 360° projection room), with the potential for teaching and learning outlined.

Simon Boyle reported that he had attended the College's Open Day on 12 October 2024.

24/25.12 Items for Noting

(i) Chair's Action

Governors were referred to the Reserves Policy that the Chair had approved via a Chair's Action over the summer period so that it was in place for the end of the academic year.

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to note the Chair's Action that had been taken since the date of the last meeting.

Noted

(ii) **Use of the Seal of the Corporation**

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to note that there had been no use of the Seal of the Corporation since the date of the last meeting.

Noted

(iii) **Final Report on Governor Attendance 2023/24**

Resolved: The Board of Governors resolved to note the Final Report on Governor Attendance 2023/24 (84%).

Noted

24/25.13 Time and Date of Next Meeting – Thursday 21 November 2024

Governors were reminded of the change in date of the next meeting to Thursday 21 November 2024, which would be held via Teams.

The Chair then advised Governors that this would be the last meeting for Elaine Price before she stood down at the end of her term of office. He thanked her for her contribution and commitment over the past four years on issues relating to curriculum and quality, the areas of apprenticeships and meeting skills needs, the College self-assessment process and especially in relation to the Ofsted inspection that the College had earlier in the year.

Minutes formally approved by the Corporation:

Chair

Date