

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATION BOARD  
THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER 2024**

**Location:** Boardroom, Burslem campus / Microsoft Teams

**Time:** 09:30

|                |  |           |
|----------------|--|-----------|
| Present:       | Jeremy Cartwright, Chair   | In person |
|                | Antoinette Lythgoe, Interim CEO and AO (and CFO)                 | In person |
|                | Sally Garratt  | Remote    |
|                | Rob Fisher   | Remote    |
|                | Bernard Kumeta   | In person |
|                | Hannah Molloy  | In person |
|                | Jo Mountney  | In person |
|                | Tom Nadin  | Remote    |
|                | Ben Richards   | Remote    |
|                | Steve Sawbridge  | Remote    |
|                | David Shufflebottom  | Remote    |
|                | Chrissy Pawliszyn, Staff Governor                                | In person |
|                | Jenny Scrivens, Staff Governor                                   | In person |
|                | Mekdes Mideksa, Student Governor                                 | In person |
|                | Farhad Arian, Student Governor                                   | In person |
|                | Wendi Brennan, Student Governor                                  | In person |
| <br>           |  |           |
| In Attendance: | Cath Brierley, Deputy Principal                                  | In person |
|                | Nova Abela, Chief People Officer                                 | Remote    |
|                | Kay Kavanagh, Director of Governance                             | In person |
|                | Angela Brooks, Executive Director of MIS and Reporting           | In person |
|                | Emma Brannen, Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality (Item only) | In person |
|                |  | Remote    |
|                | Dave Hopley, Assistant Principal Student Experience (Item only)  | Remote    |
|                | Sue Hutchinson (Beever & Struthers) (item only)                  |           |

| No.        | Action  |
|------------|---|
| <b>1-6</b> | <b>See Confidential Minutes</b>   |
| <b>7</b>   | <p><b>Welcome &amp; Apologies</b><br/> <i>The Executive Director MIS, and Staff &amp; Student governors joined the meeting.</i></p> <p>Apologies for absence were received from Lisa Thomson and Annabel Kiernan.</p> <p>The Chair welcomed the new Student Governors to the Board.</p>                           |
| <b>8</b>   | <p><b>Declaration of Interest in any of the items on the agenda</b><br/>           The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on agenda items to be discussed. No specific declarations, other than for paid positions, were made, and standing declarations were noted.</p> |
| <b>9</b>   | <p><b>Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024</b><br/>           Governors <b>approved</b> the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024 as an accurate record.</p>   |
| <b>10</b>  | <b>Action Progress Report</b>   |

Governors received the action process report, noting that the 2 actions were both complete.

## **11 Financial items**

### **1. Annual Report of the Audit Committee**

The Director of Governance presented the report explaining that the report is a requirement of the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice and details the activity of the Audit Committee for the 2023/24 academic year.

The Chair of the Committee added that 'Reasonable' is the highest level of assurance that can be given and the Audit Committee proposed the approval of the report by the Corporation Board.

Governors **approved** the Annual Report of the Audit Committee.

### **2. 2023/24 Financial Statements Audit Management Letter**

*Sue Hutchinson (Beever & Struthers) joined the meeting*

The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that the financial statements had been previously reviewed by the TF&R Committee and the Audit Committee, with the Audit Committee recommending them for full approval by the Corporation.

The accounts are prepared on a 'going concern' basis, giving assurance that the College and EBS (Stoke) Ltd will continue in operation until at least December 2025.

Governors noted that they confirm that there is no information that the auditors are not aware of.

The financial statements confirm that there are effective arrangements of governance and risk management in place, and also provide a true and fair view of finances and the use of public funds for the purpose they were given.

All KPIs are green, with a healthy EBITDA and outstanding financial health.

Sue Hutchinson confirmed that it follows a substantially complete audit. Once the November accounts are received, Beever & Struthers will be able to sign the final financial statements 2023/24 and the Letters of Representation.

Sue Hutchinson added that it had been a positive audit process, with the 2 recommendations being accepted by the College.

There were no questions.

Governors **approved** the 2023/24 Financial Statements.

No questions.

Approved.

### **3. Going Concern Review**

The Chief Financial Officer introduced the report, confirming that several aspects had been considered, including:

- Level of cash reserves
- Cash flow forecast
- Current 24/25 position

- ESFA agreement of outstanding financial health for 2023/24 and based on the budget for 2024/25, 2024/25 too
- Continued compliance with bank covenants, with regular banking arrangements now in place (support removed)

#### 4. Reconciliation with July 2024 Management Accounts

Governors noted the reconciliation with July 2024 Management Accounts, gaining the assurance that, as the accounts are produced monthly, there are few changes.

#### 5. Letter of Representation

Governors received three letters of representation; two for Stoke on Trent College and one for EBS (Stoke) Ltd.

Sue Hutchinson gave further details of two ongoing national cases in relation to Harpur Trust and Virgin Media/Ntl. The Virgin Media/Ntl case is ongoing, with the impact likely to be known over the coming months.

Governors **approved** the Letters of representation.

#### 6. Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire (RSAQ)

The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that a previous version of the RSAQ was approved by Governors up to the point of the departure of the previous Principal & CEO. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that no changes had been necessary from that time to now.

Governors **approved** the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

### **12 EBS (Stoke) Ltd - Annual Report & Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2024**

The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that the EBS (Stoke) Ltd - Annual Report & Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2024 had been reviewed and approved by the EBS Board of Directors.

The financial statements had been audited by Beever & Struthers who confirmed a clean audit report.

The College will not be providing a Letter of Support to EBS (Stoke) Ltd for 2024/25. The Directors have not requested a letter of support and, should the College provide one, DfE approval would be needed. Both the College and EBS (Stoke) Ltd are 'going concerns' and there is no requirement for a letter of support.

Governors **approved** the EBS (Stoke) Ltd - Annual Report & Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2024, and **agreed** to there being no letter of support offered.

### **13 Learner Voice & Enrichment Report**

The Assistant Principal Student Experience thanked Governors for their joining of Learner Voice events and Learner Council.

The report summarises the enrichment program year to date and Governors noted the positive start to the year.

We have recently delivered a targeted 6-week Enrichment Programme to 3 groups of Level 1 Childcare learners which has received positive feedback and allowed us to signpost to other activities within the Enrichment Programme.

Participation to date is up 4% in terms of cross-college extra-curricular enrichment.

The data in the report now includes all enrichment across all areas.

We have an active Student Council and meetings take place on a monthly basis at each campus with over 25 learners in attendance each month.

The Students' Union Executive Committee are leading on the AoC and Pears Foundation Youth Social Action Ambassadors programme 'Challenge Stoke on Trent College' 2024/25, working on a project in relation to homelessness in Stoke on Trent in partnership with Stoke City Football Club Community Trust.

We have 19 learners on-programme for Challenge South Africa, now in its 20<sup>th</sup> year.

A Governor asked why there is a larger difference between extra-curricular and all enrichment data. The Assistant Principal Student Experience explained that this is due to the nature of the curriculum areas. Students do have opportunities to let us know what enrichment activities they would like to do. We are also aware that there are lots of activities taking place, but these aren't always captured - we are working to improve this.

A Governor **suggested** some future topics for the Talking Heads videos could include:

1. Student experience differences between Burslem and Caudon campuses
2. How the building works are impacting student life

These were noted. There were no further questions.

#### **14 Safeguarding/Prevent Annual Report**

The Assistant Principal Student Experience presented the report, explaining that this had previously been reviewed and discussed at the CQS Committee.

Mental Health and Wellbeing remain the main concerns, with most concerns managed in-house with wraparound services.

A Governor **asked** why attendance and punctuality had a marked difference between the two campuses. The Assistant Principal Student Experience explained that this is due to support from the mentor team and the interventions in place at each site (last year the team supported the attendance officer). The focus on attendance this year remains and we look at cross-college teams to support this.

Due to the increase in learner numbers, the capacity in the safeguarding team has been increased. Nationally, increased volumes are being reported. The Chief Financial Officer added that the potential growth funds being received could be used for additional posts (behavioural support officers and mentors). This is already in progress, with adverts being in place.

A Governor asked if the concerns by ethnicity reflect the College as a whole. It was confirmed that data isn't available; however, it seems to correlate in terms of networking across the school sector. The College also has a large provision of ESOL foundation, the vast majority being unaccompanied asylum seekers whom we typically we see a lower level of concerns from as they have a lot of support already in place externally.

**Action:** Assistant Principal Student Experience to compare the gender and ethnicity profiles to College averages for the next CQS Committee meeting.

*David Shufflebottom left the meeting.*

A Governor asked if recent Ofsted reports from other colleges are viewed in relation to safeguarding to gain insights into trends. The Deputy Principal confirmed that they are, and any insights are shared with Heads of Learning across the College.

A Governor requested further explanation regarding the incident around lanyards. The Assistant Principal Student Experience explained that it was an isolated incident, and the student involved subsequently went through the disciplinary procedure.

*The Assistant Principal Student Experience left the meeting.*

## **15 Management Accounts Oct 2024**

The Chief Financial Officer presented the Management Accounts to October 2024, confirming that the College remains in outstanding financial health and that bank covenants and KPIs are expected to be met.

There is potential for in-year 16-18 growth, which will be confirmed mid-February/march.

Tuition fees remain a focus, and exam costs are higher due to student number growth.

The cash position remains strong and the College has exited business support with the bank.

There were no questions.

## **16 Interim CEO & AO Report**

The Chief Financial Officer and members of the SLT presented the report.

Key messages included:

- The SAR and QIP are now finalised (on agenda)
- Continuing trajectory with outward-facing partnerships
- Positive conversation with the ESFA concerning T Levels
- We have received 658 full-time applications for 2025/26, 256 up from this time last year, following 2 very busy open evenings
- Level 3 pathways are increasing, for T Levels and the new L3 academy.
- Space planning exercise is continuing – nearly complete
- Progression is strong
- T Level numbers are good with 81 learners on 8 T level programmes across the College.
- Exceptional in-year growth last year, followed by an increase of 300 learners this – a marker of activities, particularly marketing, who are nominated for an award.
- Staff surveys and pulse surveys have been completed in-year, with high levels of engagement.
- Wellbeing focus continues with CPD and policy development.
- Cultural differences between campuses remains a focus.
- A refreshed People Strategy has been discussed by the TF&R Committee
- We are reviewing digital literacy in the context of AI, to assist in supporting the workload of staff.

- Staff accolades continue, which have been well attended and reach around a 3<sup>rd</sup> of staff.
- The Interim CEO and AO has met with all local MPs, attended the World Craft City event in London, visited the 'Stoke by numbers' bus and attended the launch of broadcast media suite.
- The Marketing department have been nominated for the FE first award for communications, following the summer comms campaign.

Governors **asked** the following questions:

- Has there been more reaction to the L3 academy? The Deputy principal advised that it is promoted at every event, promoting the benefits for learners.
- Is growth due to sustained activity of the College, and is it likely to continue? The Deputy Principal explained that it is due to College activity, and an increased birth rate. It is likely to increase again in 2025/26. There is also an increase in place requirements in city schools, which will impact us in future years.

*Ben Richards left the meeting.*

## **17 SAR 2023/24**

*The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality joined the meeting.*

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality presented the SAR confirming the judgements made following internal and external validation:

- Quality of Education - Good
- Behaviour and Attitudes - Good
- Personal Development - Outstanding
- Leadership and Management - Good
- Skills Needs – Strong
- Study Programmes – Good
- Adults – Good
- Apprenticeships – Good
- High Needs – Good

The overall Judgement is Good.

Main area of strengths include:

- The College provides a well-aligned curriculum that supports learner progression, with 96% advancing to positive destinations due to effective partnerships and skill-focused initiatives.
- Behaviour and attitudes are very good, with tailored interventions supporting attendance, exemplary student behaviour, and a robust safeguarding framework.
- The College's Skills Hubs and partnerships with employers and educational institutions address regional skill demands, enhancing curriculum relevance and resource quality.
- Leadership and management are effective, with strong strategic focus, rigorous quality assurance, and a supportive internal culture, contributing to continuous improvement

Areas for development align with the QIP priorities and include:

- Improve retention rates for 16-18 learners on Level 1 and Level 2 courses, as well as for Adult learners at Level 2 and Entry Level through targeted support and engagement strategies.
- Raise achievement levels in underperforming areas, particularly for 16-18 learners in Hair and Beauty, Art and Design, and Business, and for Adult learners in Level 1 and Entry Level ESOL programmes
- Reduce the achievement gap between learners on free school meals and those who are not, with tailored support to address individual learning and support needs.
- Increase High Grades achievement in GCSE English and Maths, focusing on learners who enter with low prior grades, to align more closely with national averages.
- Ensure consistent and accurate recording of outcomes and milestones in EHC Plans to support effective tracking of progress across vocational programmes.

A Governor asked why we used the two particular colleges for external validation. It was explained that we have shared best practices in the past and Wirral Met College has a similar demographic.

A Governor explained that the SAR was discussed in detail at the CQS meeting and that resulted in a more detailed conversation being requested, to give more assurance, particularly concerning retention. The 'Good' judgment now feels appropriate, with a strong focus continuing this year. The Chair of the CQS Committee added that more Governor time will be dedicated to the SAR next year.

Governors **approved** the SAR.

*Rob Fisher left the meeting.*

## **18 QIP update**

The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality explained that the QIP had been reduced to 7 priorities, these being:

1. Adult retention
2. 16-18 retention
3. Quality of Education in underperforming curriculum areas
4. Attendance – closing the gap between vocational and English & maths
5. High-grades attainment for English and maths
6. Improved retention of FSM learners
7. Improved consistency of EHCP and high needs learners progress monitoring

There were no questions.

Governors noted that this was the last meeting for the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality before they leave the College, and thanked the Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality.

*The Vice Principal Curriculum and Quality left the meeting.*

## **19 Data Dashboard Report**

The Executive Director of MIS presented the report and the appendices.

Governors noted the updated format and chart details, and that the report had been discussed at the CQS Committee.



There were no questions.

## **20 Performance Measures / KPIs 24/25**

The Deputy Principal presented the report which had previously been to the TF&R Committee.

High grades for English and maths had a KPI of 23% and we achieved 14%. The KPI has been reduced for 2024/25 to 18%. Resits in November were focused on learners close to the grade boundary and who completed the booster sessions. In 2024/25 there are circa 1200 learners for GCSE maths and circa 1100 for English (up from circa 800 for each last year).

Apprenticeship achievement 2023/24 was 60.3% which is below KPI but above the national average. Apprenticeship achievement 2024/25 is currently 34.7% versus a max possible of 73.6%

Attendance is steady at 85.3%, up on last year.

Future Skills Pledge employers' group is currently at 6 vs a target of 10 for 2024/25.

There were no questions.

## **21 Capital Update**

A Capital update was provided by the Chief Financial Officer.

Cauldon campus:

The lift shaft is in, and the steel frame is erected. The first floor is going in this week. We are 'on program' in respect of time and budget.

Burslem campus:

Low voltage diversions are taking place along with mine grouting commencing shortly.

Krol Corlett are claiming for some ground investigations, which could have a financial impact and delay the project. An update will be provided to Governors when more details can be confirmed.

T Level wave 5 projects are completed and launched.

Planning permission for the Green Technology Skills Centre has been received.

The Estates Strategy will be updated and will be informed by the space utilisation project. This will be brought to the Board in the summer of 2025, in line with the next round of capital funding.

A Governor asked if there was any update following the space utilisation project. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed that the project is underway looking at rooms, sizes, utilisation, and timetabling. The plans for capital transformation at both campuses are also being considered. An update is expected imminently, which will be shared with the Board.

## **22 Risk Report & Register**

The Director of Governance presented the report confirming that the Audit Committee had also reviewed the report and risk register.



4 risks have been changed since the last meeting:

- R001: Residual overall risk increased from 12 to 15. The risk has been increased due to the retention issues the College is facing predominately in some adult and Study Programme provision with learners not staying to complete their courses.
- R014: Residual overall risk increased from 8 to 12. The risk has been increased due to the retention issues the College is facing predominately in some adult and Study Programme provision with learners not staying to complete their courses.
- R015: Residual overall risk decreased from 12 to 8. The risk has been reduced following confirmation from the PMO that there is no cash sweep liability for FY24.
- R022: Residual overall risk increased from 4 to 6. With a change in leadership at the CEO level at the College this risk has been increased to allow the transition of the new Principal to build extremal relationships with stakeholders and the wider community in Stoke and the region.

A new risk has been added:

- R023 Failure to put in place appropriate group structures and agreements for the College and any subsidiaries. This new risk has been added to capture the (low) risk associated with the review of EBS (Stoke) Ltd's financial arrangements and the review of the Memorandum of Understanding between the College and EBS (stoke) Ltd.

On the request of the Audit Committee, R017 has been removed as a risk. This risk has been removed due to the impacts of the ONS reclassification all being managed, on an ongoing basis.

Governors **received** the risk report and risk register.

## **23 Governance & Chairs Reports**

Governors noted the committee slides and minutes.

Governors **approved**:

- Green Technologies Procurement Strategy
- Anti-Bribery Policy
- Discipline & Appeals Procedure
- Freedom of Information Act Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Privacy Notices
- Prevent Policy

Governors **received** the Annual Health & Safety Report

## **24 Governor Link Visit Reports**

Governors noted the link governor report on Digital.

## **25 Review of meeting, and Cycle of Business**

Governors valued the meeting and thanked the SLT for the reports.

## **26 Any other items of urgent business**

There were no items of urgent business.

**27 Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting is 20 March 2024 at 09:30.

There being no further business, the meeting finished at 12:00.