

## SANDWELL COLLEGE

### Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting held on Monday 1 July 2024 at 4.00pm Sandwell College

Present:	A Taylor	(Independent) (Chair)
	N Anhu	(Staff Governor, Sandwell)
	R Bearman	(Independent)
	S Lal	(Independent)
	T Sharma	(Independent) (part)
	S Smalling	(Independent) (part)
	J Tew	(Independent)
Apologies:	M Ashford	(Independent)
	N Makin	(Independent)
	G Pennington	(Principal)
	S Powell	(Staff Governor, Cadbury)
Absent:	A Cope	(Independent)
	N Edwards-Yesufu	(Independent)
	T Kaur	(Student Governor, Sandwell)
	B Lok-Shun Hussain	(Student Governor, Cadbury)
	H Singh	(Independent)
	M J Uddin	(Independent)

Also in attendance:

R Pickup	Executive Director, Finance & Resources
B Beaty	Executive Director, HR and Organisational Development
S Griffiths	Director of Strategy and Projects
D Holden	Vice Principal, Curriculum
E Scotford	Clerk to the Corporation
J Stevens	Vice Principal, Quality

		Action
B24.24	<b><u>Welcome and Apologies</u></b>	
	<p>The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting. Apologies were received from Mark Ashford, Neil Makin, Graham Pennington and Sheridan Powell.</p> <p>Alison Cope, Natalie Edwards-Yesufu, Taranpreet Kaur, Bilal Lok-Shun Hussain, Harpinder Singh and Jalal Uddin did not arrive.</p> <p>The meeting was not quorate so discussion took place on the agenda items until Tony Sharma and Sonia Smalling arrived when relevant actions were retrospectively considered ratified.</p>	
B24.25	<b><u>Declarations of Interest</u></b>	
	There were no declarations of interest beyond the standing register of interests.	
B24.26	<b><u>Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 March 2024</u></b>	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 March 2024 which were signed by the Chair.	
B24.27	<b><u>Matters Arising</u></b>	

27.1	Minute No. B24.6.1 – Governor volunteers were encouraged for the Co Vice Chair – a Governor was currently considering the role. Update at next meeting.	Chair of S&G
27.2	<p>Minute No. B24.8.3 – impact on young people of BCC's financial cuts – Governors asked for an update – the College had no further information at this time but there was no impact on student numbers at present.</p> <p>Governors asked what support students had been receiving from BCC.</p> <p>The College explained it took the form of transport support for some students but they would not be adversely impacted as the College would subsidise their transport costs if this was not forthcoming from BCC. The College also received funding from BCC for high needs learners.</p>	
27.2	Minute No. B24.8.5 – opportunities for partnership opportunities between the College and BCC given the LAs' financial situation to be pursued – work in progress.	
27.3	Minute No. B24.8.11 – update on the NHS Smethwick project at the next meeting – actioned, see agenda item 12.	
27.4	Minute No. B24.14.1 – Marketing presentation – copy to be available on Governor Hub – actioned.	
27.5	Minute No. B24.15.3 – financial health score matrix presentation - copy to be available on Governor Hub – actioned.	
27.6	Minute No. B24.15.4 – appendix for management accounts to be circulated – actioned.	
B24.28	<b><u>Committee membership</u></b>	
28.1	<b>Finance &amp; Strategy Committee</b>	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the appointment of Alison Cope and Natalie Edwards-Yesufu to the Finance & Strategy Committee.	
28.2	<b>Audit Committee</b>	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the appointment of Shokat Lal to the Audit Committee.	
B24.29	<b><u>Principal's Report</u></b> <b>Presented by the Vice Principal, Curriculum</b>	
29.1	Recruitment numbers were very strong for next year with application numbers up by 477 compared to last year and the number of acceptances up by 675. This was particularly positive given that a number of colleges were reporting declining student numbers.	
29.2	<p>Governors asked if there was much delay between the offer of a place and acceptance.</p> <p>The College advised that indications were that student numbers would be exceptionally good. Students were more realistic about the grades they needed to get on to their chosen course including A levels.</p> <p>There would be an impact on Central Campus because of the increase in numbers, so timetabling would be carefully planned to address that as well as making best use of new facilities opening in September/October.</p>	

	A slight reconfiguration of the ground floor of Central Campus was being scoped.	
29.3	<p>Governors asked if funding for the different profile of applicants affect numbers dramatically.</p> <p>The College confirmed it was not an issue for the College. This year the income stream for 16-18 was considerably up on target and there was some in-year funding. Apprenticeship income had practically hit target. All funding streams were rated Green.</p>	
29.4	A quality scrutiny exercise had been conducted and the forecast achievement rates for 2023/24 were: 16-18 – 86.7%, 19+ - 87.3%, apprentices – 60.9%, a slight increase on 2022/23.	
29.5	<p>Governors asked where T levels were recorded.</p> <p>The College explained this came under 16-18 provision but so many 16-18 were not doing T levels that it would not materially impact the figure.</p>	
29.6	HR update given. There were some unfilled vacancies which was to be expected at this time of year due to the recruitment cycle, but the College was still in very strong position and industrial relations were at an all-time high. The Principal had looked after staff well during his tenure. There was a focus on mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. Absenteeism was being tackled.	
29.7	<p>Capital developments were highlighted including: signing of the partnership agreement with the NHS, the College would be the main tenant at the hospital learning centre and all health provision was to be moved there. This would be a great benefit to the students because the training was the bridge into employment at the hospital.</p> <p>The new adult centre behind the Engineering Centre in West Bromwich would enable withdrawal from rented provision.</p> <p>The Cradley Heath development continued apace and would bring opportunities in a different market.</p> <p>Work was ongoing at Cadbury to improve the accommodation.</p>	
29.8	Governors acknowledged and asked that their congratulations be passed on to the Careers Team for gaining the Quality in Careers Standard, an outstanding achievement and highly important in the overall skills agenda.	
29.9	<p>The College stressed the need to maintain good quality in the face of increased student numbers.</p> <p>Governors asked if there was a limit on student numbers growth in order to maintain quality.</p> <p>The College advised that there was projected growth in school leavers 16-18 until 2029 following which there would be a natural downward trend. Other colleges might take market share in the meantime, e.g. UCB and health care so the NHS partnership would be important.</p> <p>The College would maintain its philosophy that any student who wanted to study would be guaranteed a place.</p>	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors received the Principal's report.	

B24.30	<b><u>Vice Principals' report</u></b>	
30.1	<p>Quality of education activity was highlighted and would be reported in more detail to LQCC in the autumn term.</p> <p>A personal development programme was to be rolled out to students in the new academic year.</p> <p>Positive comments had been received about recent staff training.</p> <p>A new student app for attendance would launch in September.</p> <p>External quality assurance activity was outlined and was very positive.</p> <p>Actual outcomes against last year and targets for next year were all above average and looking positive.</p> <p>Behaviour and attitude were still very strong in the College.</p> <p>Personal development was rated strongly and continued to be a strength. Activities were outlined.</p> <p>A correction to the SWAP target allocation income was pointed out and should read 'exceeded by 161%' rather than 151%.</p> <p>The estimated achievement rate for 2023/2024 at 60.9% was positive compared to the national average of 54.6%.</p>	
	SS arrived	
30.2	The High Needs department was a success story. The students were at the heart of the College and integrated fully.	
30.3	<p>Governors asked if there was extra paperwork because of the nature of the placements.</p> <p>The College confirmed there was depending on where funding lay.</p>	
30.4	<p>The College highlighted the work of the Lifelong Learning Centre which supported around 15 students with severe complex learning difficulties, with a student-staff ratio of 1:3 and often 1:1. Income generated stood at around £300k. There was an increasing need for it as other FE providers did not get involved in this market. Lifelong Learning was a more positive title than referring to complex needs and gave the students an opportunity to graduate from college.</p> <p>Governors agreed with the benefits of developing the whole person e.g. from a behaviour and attitude and personal development perspective to prepare them for the world of work rather than just focusing on passing exams.</p>	
30.5	A Governor reported their company had recently taken on 23 T level students at short notice and at Week 2 of the programme 22 of the 23 still remained. The students' level of maturity and indication of employability were very impressive. They had picked things up quickly which was a testament to the quality of the College's teaching. The transition from a 2-year full-time course into the workplace led to an immediate return on investment.	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors received the Vice Principal's report.	
B24.31	<b><u>Safeguarding annual report</u></b>	

31.1	See confidential minute	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors received the Safeguarding Annual Report.	
B24.32	<b><u>External Governance Review (EGR)</u></b>	
32.1	Governors were reminded of the background to the need for the EGR and the process which had been followed. The draft report had now been received albeit 3 weeks late so it had not been able to be considered by the Search & Governance Committee and was brought directly to the Board to review. The report had to be completed by 31 July. The DfE had been informed there might be a delay to its conclusion.	
32.2	<p>Governors considered the draft report and noted the points that would be accepted as good practice and the points that would be challenged or queried because of factual inaccuracies, an alternative viewpoint, or to provide context so that the report could be finalised. Governors recognised the need for accuracy as the final report would be a public document.</p> <p>Overall, the report was complimentary and recognised areas of good practice and looked ahead to succession planning while offering suggestions for how to improve governance further.</p>	
32.3	Governors delegated authority to the Chair of the Search & Governance Committee and Clerk to finalise the report with the Reviewer and draw up an action plan. The final report would be brought back to the Board.	S&G Chair/ Clerk
32.4	Governors suggested the report be benchmarked against a governance framework which outlined effective governance. The Chair of Search & Governance reminded that the College had adopted and adhered to the AoC's Code of Good Governance and compliance was monitored by Search & Governance Committee.	
32.5	The Chair thanked Governors for their participation in the process and the Chair of Search & Governance Committee and Clerk for their work on it.	
	<p>RESOLVED THAT:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governors discussed the External Governance Review Report.</li> <li>• Governors delegated authority to the Chair of the Search &amp; Governance Committee and Clerk to finalise the report with the Reviewer and draw up an action plan.</li> </ul>	
B24.33	<b><u>Policies/documents</u></b>	
33.1	<b>Fees</b>	
	Minor points had been updated and there were some minor clarifications the teams using the policy had requested.	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the Fees Policy.	
33.2	<b>Financial Regulations</b>	
	There were few amendments this year as the new College Financial Handbook did not recommend many changes. Audit recommendations were included on 2 items to clarify processes.	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the Financial Regulations.	

B24.34	<b><u>Committees Terms of Reference</u></b>	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the Committees' Terms of Reference.	
	Staff Governor left the meeting	
	<b>**CONFIDENTIAL SESSION**</b>	
B24.35	<b><u>Capital projects update</u></b>	
35.1	See confidential minute	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors monitored the capital projects update.	
B24.36	<b><u>Management Accounts</u></b>	
36.1	<p>The management accounts were very positive. The ESFA financial health scores remained outstanding.</p> <p>The expectation was that the forecast surplus would reduce to £2.5 million to £3 million by the end of the year.</p>	
36.2	Cash was higher due to funding for high needs being received quicker than expected and capital monies, £5.1m FECTF2 had been received ahead of spend.	
36.3	The new College Financial Handbook identified that colleges should have a Reserves Policy which would be put in place in due course.	
36.4	<p>Governors noted that student transport numbers were projected to be £280k more than expected and asked if that was simply because the number of students was higher.</p> <p>The College advised that WM Travel spend had increased partially due to student numbers but also inflation and harmonising of the amount students contributed.</p>	
36.5	<p>Governors noted that apprenticeships were forecast to be £24k short and asked how that linked to earlier comments.</p> <p>The College explained it receives funding through apprenticeships for achievements. Students had to pass assessments before the achievement could be counted. This created a timing lag in the reporting as the activity numbers were more recent than the financials.</p>	
36.6	<p>Governors noted the 5% increase to the TPS contribution from April 2024.</p> <p>The College pointed out that last year the DfE only funded up to April in the original allocation with the final 4 months being funded in the funding updates received over the summer.</p>	
	TS arrived	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors received the management accounts.	
B24.37	<b><u>College budget 2024/25 (incl capital) and 2-year financial forecast</u></b>	

37.1	The budget projected a £1.5m surplus and Outstanding financial health. This contained 2 identified contingencies for performance against skills income and inflationary impacts above the assumptions used.	
37.2	Income was positive and was based on student numbers of 7253, this already stood at 7168 at the end of May. Income growth was £3.6m due to an increase in ESFA income of £4.4m due to inflation, growth in student numbers and additional English and maths funding.	
37.3	Other income was reduced because the interest rate was expected to reduce through the year, causing a reduction in the interest received.	
37.4	Increases in expenditure were detailed particularly in relation to staff costs, exam fees, transport costs and building costs.	
37.5	£275k held in contingency would help with any inflation rises.	
37.6	Cash would drop compared to 2023/24 because FECTF money which was received in advance would be spent. Cashflows would be more erratic going forward due to the large capital spends that would be made and time lag around the £9 million towns fund for Cradley.	
37.7	There was some scope within the Estates capital spend line due to the refurbishment monies received through FECTF money. Central Campus was starting to need big items replaced on M&E due to its age. Works to Central St Michael's worth £0.25m were also planned.	
37.8	The College explained that the second year forecast was set at a high level due to a number of uncertainties including because a new government might be in power, a new leadership team would be in place in November and a new college strategy would be in place.	
37.9	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the College budget 2024/25 and the 2-year financial forecast.	
B24.38	<b><u>College Financial Handbook</u></b>	
38.1	There were few changes arising from the new Financial Handbook other than the need for a Reserves Policy which was already in hand. The Handbook had been monitored from a governance perspective as the Financial Statements Auditors went it in detail at the Audit Committee.	
38.2	RESOLVED THAT: Governors noted the new College Financial Handbook.	
B24.39	<b><u>Risk Register</u></b>	
39.1	Governors monitored the Risk Register, with a focus on the Red rated risks and Finance & Strategy Committee areas of responsibility.  The capital projects current score related to the current position of contracts being signed and works commenced.	
39.2	Consideration was given to removing risk number 30 - ONS reclassification - as the transition was now complete.	
39.3	Governors pointed out that an observation of the External Governance Review draft report was that the Risk Register could be made clearer with more graphical presentation.	

	Governors noted that the Risk Register had only recently been revamped and they were comfortable with the current format and did not feel that the inclusion of graphs would help.	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors monitored the Risk Register and agreed that Risk 30 should be removed.	
B24.40	<b><u>Appointment of Internal Audit Service</u></b>	
40.1	The Audit Committee explained the tender and interview process which had been followed in determining the audit firm to recommend for appointment.	
40.2	Governors were confident that the independence and integrity of RSM could be ensured because of the changes and natural turnover in personnel in both their team and the College teams over time since their initial appointment.	
40.3	RESOLVED THAT: On the recommendation of the Audit Committee, Governors approved the reappointment of RSM as the internal audit service for a 5-year appointment period from 2024/25 based on an annual fee level of £24,325.	
B24.41	<b><u>Minutes of Sub Committees</u></b>	
	The minutes of the sub committees were taken as read.	
41.1	<b>Audit – 19 March 2024, 16 April 2024, 11 June 2024</b>	
	The Committee had managed the process for the selection of the new Internal Audit Service; considered the internal audit progress report; approved the internal audit plan 2024/25; received the global internal audit standards; noted the statutory requirement in the new College financial handbook, received a health and safety update; monitored the Risk Register.	
41.2	<b>LQCC – 18 June 2024</b>	
	The Committee had received a Programme Standards Review on high needs and special needs; received the quality improvement plan, quality strategy annual report, achievement targets next academic year, outcome of visits by external verifiers; safeguarding update, monitored the Committee's responsibilities in the Risk Register;	
41.3	<b>Search &amp; Governance – 10 June 2024</b>	
	The Committee had: reviewed Board membership and committee vacancies; noted that work was in progress on AoC Code of Good Governance compliance; noted that the Committee Chair was liaising with the College contact on the Environmental and Sustainability Strategy. The new Estates Director due to start in September was experienced in sustainability and would collate work in progress.	
	The Chair thanked the Committee Chair for all his help and the additional work he had done over the last year.	
41.4	<b>Finance &amp; Strategy Committee – 13 June 2024</b>	
	Meeting cancelled.	
B24.42	<b><u>HR</u></b>	



42.1	<p>Recruitment – there were currently 54 vacancies – this level was to be expected at this time of year, many were additions to the establishment as a result of the curriculum planning exercise. The College was working to ensure it was attracting talent and continued to work on its employee brand and staff initiatives.</p> <p>New systems were having a positive impact including the Let's Check initiative which monitored retention by complementing the onboarding system so that any themes arising could be addressed.</p>	
42.2	Employee relations - time had been dedicated to negotiating the latest pay award. A new collective agreement was in place, with a one year deal which all trade unions had signed up to. The process had completed more quickly than usual and been confirmed to staff.	
42.3	Wellness – the College had invested in mental health first aiders who had been in place at every exam to help students with anxiety problems. A new area of work was in place to develop internal expertise on suicide. This had led to a partnership with Papyrus. The College was looking at partnering with them for the new academic year.	
42.4	The staff absence rate was lower than last year.	
42.5	<p>Development – the annual CPD week had just completed and feedback was positive. The impact of the development initiatives would be assessed.</p> <p>Governors were reminded of the initiatives developed for staff, e.g. the 'Every Future Matters' programme aimed at developing teachers. There was also a programme for those at entry level roles e.g. cleaners, caters, security team, to identify what development opportunities would be useful for them.</p>	
42.6	Governors found the HR report and the weekly staff newsletter useful in gaining an idea of work within the College.	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors received the HR report.	
B24.43	<b><u>Health &amp; Safety update</u></b>	
	Governors' attention was drawn to the recent fire risk assessment which had recommended 3 main improvements – appropriate storage of electric cars which were a bigger risk than petrol cars; parking spaces near the building to be removed; fire risk assessment strategy particularly because the building's cladding was the same as Grenfell and, although less of a risk as it was not a residential building, did require monitoring as the main strategy was evacuation.	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors received the health and safety update.	
B24.44	<b><u>Schedule of Meetings 2024/25</u></b>	
44.1	Governors discussed the need for an October Board meeting given the imminent departure of the Principal and Vice Principals around that time but decided that a meeting should be held, even if it was a relatively short agenda, as otherwise the next Board meeting would not be until the beginning of December which would be too long a gap between that and the summer meeting.	
44.2	Governors' views on some committee meetings being held on site to be surveyed. Clerk to action.	Clerk

44.3	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the schedule of meetings 2024/25.	
B24.45	<b><u>Schedule of Business</u></b>	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the Schedule of Business 2024/25.	
	SLT left the meeting	
	<b>**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL SESSION**</b>	
B24.48	<b><u>Any Other Business</u></b>	
	There was no other business	
B24.49	<b><u>Determination of Confidential Items</u></b>	
	<b>Minute Nos. B24.31, B24.35-B24.46</b>	
B24.50	<b><u>Date and Time of Next Meeting</u></b> <b>Monday 7 October 2024, 4.00pm</b>	

Meeting ended at 7.15pm