

SANDWELL COLLEGE

**Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting
held on Monday 24th March 2025 at 4.00pm
Boardroom, Central Campus**

Present:	J Tew	(Independent) – Chair
	L Capper MBE	(CEO Principal)
	N Anhu	(Staff Governor, Sandwell)
	M Ashford	(Independent)
	N Makin	(Independent)
	S Powell	(Staff Governor, Cadbury)
	S Smalling	(Independent)
	A K Daulke	(Student Governor, Sandwell)
	H Babajan	(Student Governor, Cadbury)
	T Sharma	(Independent)
Apologies:	H Singh	(Independent)
	S Lal	(Independent)
	M J Uddin	(Independent)
In attendance:	R Pickup	Executive Director, Finance & Resources
	B Beaty	Executive Director, HR and Organisational Development
	I Oldacre	Director of Estates and Capital
	A Gordon	Deputy Principal
	E Brennan	Vice Principal
	F Chalk	Interim Governance Advisor

	Cadbury Campus Principals gave a welcome to the College campus to the Board of governors.	Action
1	<u>Welcome and Apologies</u>	
	The Chair (JT) welcomed all present to the meeting. He reminded governors that the committees have scrutinised the papers, however, this didn't exclude further scrutiny and questioning. LC stated that in future, appendices will be sent out separately to make the papers easier to negotiate. Apologies were received from Harpinder Singh, Shokat Lal, and Jalal Uddin, and were accepted by Governors.	
2	<u>Declarations of any new personal or business interest or conflict with any agenda item</u>	
	There were no new declarations.	
3	<u>Chair's Business</u> Update on Chair and Governor recruitment Away Day programmes	
	Governors noted that a meeting of the S&G committee had been held immediately prior to this Board meeting. The Committee has made recommendations to the Board for the following appointments, and was unanimous in its recommendations: The Board discussed prospective candidates namely: 1. Gareth Amison 2. Johnny Shah	

	3. Rachel Barlow Governors were reminded to keep this information confidential until appointees are notified. Governors noted that there are further interviews taking place on 31st March for 2 more governors and the Chair interviews. Any appointments will be recommended to the Board at the 9th May Away Day, when a short formal meeting will be held.	
	The Board resolved to approve the recruitment panel's recommendation of these governors' appointment to the Corporation, subject to the necessary regulatory checks being carried out.	FC to write and commence induction
	The Board discussed the proposed agendas for the upcoming Away Day programmes on 28 th March and 9 th May.	
	Governors noted the agendas and attendance was discussed.	
4	<u>Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Governors held on 2nd December 2024</u>	
	Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Governors held on 2 December 2024 were reviewed and approved by Governors as a correct record of the meeting.	
5	<u>Matters Arising</u>	
	Governors were assured that all actions are either complete or scheduled for reporting to the summer term meetings. Governors were advised that a Twilight Training session will be put on for governors 4th June on Apprenticeships Governor Link visits are to take place in the summer term and governors were encouraged to fit one visit in before 9th May Away Day if possible.	FC to arrange All gobs to participate
	<u>STRATEGIC AND DEVELOPMENTAL</u>	
6	<u>Principal's Report</u>	
	Executive Summary and Priorities The College remains strong financially, and following in-year enrolment, the enrolment has reached over the stretch target, which will financially benefit the College in future years. The College is also ahead on applications, and conversions will need to be made to keep students engaged until the start of the academic year. Capital projects are on track time wise and financially. Colleagues are working hard to ensure delivery of curriculum areas as viable business plans to ensure the buildings are suitably utilised. There is some financial uncertainty in the FE sector currently, with the funding picture for next year not yet clear. The drivers of income such as in-year growth funding has been capped at two-thirds of the expected budget. Some announcements are still awaited, for example on staff pay and NI contributions – to what extent they will be covered by the Department. Opportunities exist around construction, with an engineering programme being launched by the Government, and potentially technical colleges to support this. This programme has incentives for employers, which potentially allows Sandwell Colleges (SC) to work with partners to deliver. Conversations with the Mayors Office have taken place, the presentations from	

which have been shared. There is a strong will for collaborations of stakeholders across the region. As the largest college in the West Midlands, SC is a key leader in the sector, and are working collaboratively on the 'Sandwell Story', as this is an area of focus for the WMCA. The College is looking to expand its adult learning by about another £1m, working with others across the area on this. Such a strategy will help to diversify the income of the college. On the 16-18 cohort, marketing has been scaled up and brand recognition is up by over 200% and brand sentiment is up by 75%, so a greater penetration has been made to support momentum on 16-18 recruitment. Curriculum reform does give SC further opportunities for recruitment in technical education, particularly through T Levels at Cadbury. Space allocation will need to be well managed to fit the growth the College is seeking. There has been some good alumni activity and activity linking to other schools in support of growing and developing the colleges. Community cohesion is being worked on, following incidents in the locality of Sandwell campus. Most incidents are often in the town centre or by the metro, but are often incorrectly portrayed as being outside Sandwell college. Students are being engaged in this work. There is a continuing focus on culture, with work being launched at an all-staff event in the summer, supported by some pulse surveys measuring metrics such as communication. The feedback to date has been very positive. The FE context and policy areas such as Get Britain Working, the College is working with DWP and WMCA to look at how it can contribute to this agenda. Current partnerships being developed are: Adult Learning Strategy with DWP, Local Authority and WMCA; Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, and Midland Metropolitan Hospital; an Employer recognition award was made for Sandwell College and hydropower dynamics, and other awards won were noted. The College is working with two other colleges around the Gatsby standards, which is a key part of the College's strategy. The Chair suggested a twilight training on funding in FE as this is a complicated picture. Governors noted that Sandwell Colleges can be a key part of the solution to social issues in and around Birmingham. The Community Cohesion plan is looking at safety of students, and this includes fencing to safeguard students. There is some temporary fencing for which planning permission is being sought for permanent fencing, to better support students and improve the visual frontage appearance of the College. The College is working with other stakeholders such as the Police and security team to make this more effective. The Annual Conversation with WHCA and FE Commissioner was held and NM attended, from which a letter of summary goes to the ESFA. NM advised that they were interested on stakeholder voice – this was high on their agenda. Their feedback was positive, in particular the partnership working and the impact of this. NM advised that they were also interest in the Gatsby standards integration across the curriculum, work experience, leading to positive outcomes. Governors asked about the centralisation of the College services or otherwise. How does each site, particularly the smaller ones, ensure they are fully engaged in college life, such as safeguarding, student experience and facilities? The engineering building project has raised some of these issues that is informing business planning going forward to ensure there is a level of service across all campuses, whilst maintaining the appropriate cost base.	FC to arrange
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	RESOLVED: The Board received the report.	
7	<u>Learner Voice report and short film</u>	
	Governors received an update on Student Service progress, alongside activities and outcomes of learner voice activities. It was advised that this report had been scrutinised by LQCC committee, where members had been asked to review the content of the report and provide feedback on the effectiveness of student services and learner voice activities, providing further recommendations to enhance evaluation of the impact on the learner experience.	
	<u>Discussion</u> The quality and careers standard were noted, as was collaborative working taking place to shape the careers provision going forward. There is a focus careers guidance for vulnerable students. The tutorial programme is very responsive to student needs, and further issues are planned based on student need and feedback from community cohesion work. Learner voice is being broadened to include all student groups and whole college student surveys are being re-introduced. The student governors talked about the student services they have benefited from. These included support with CV writing, external college trips, support through re-sit of exams, work experience at the Hospital, the Student Union short courses on soft skills. A video of students commenting on the how Student Services has support them, was played to governors. Governors noted that student attendance on vocational courses as well as Maths & English has gone up as a direct impact of increased student service work. Governors asked if there is anything that Ofsted's new Toolkit will want to see in regard to student service provision. Ofsted will want assurance NC are obtaining student voice and then what actions will be taken as a result of it. There is now a better practice of capturing this throughout SC. The Ofsted framework has an inclusion bent to it. Once it is approved, details will be shared with governors. Governors noted that the videos should give a balanced view and a critique of the area under discussion. It could be used to focus on a particular area such as English resits. Governors reflected that the message delivered on the video has been authenticated by direct conversations elsewhere with governors.	Videos to include broad perspectives
	Action: A video will be delivered to each board to enable governors to hear more from student voice, as recommended to the External Governance Review.	
	Governors resolved that they are assured of the effectiveness of student services, and that the evaluations undertaken together with suggested further actions to determine the impact on the student experience, are satisfactory.	
8	<u>Curriculum Planning</u>	
	Governors received a report on the actions being taken by the College in response to the Level 3 qualifications reform following DfE update of December 2024. They were advised that this report has been scrutinised by LQCC committee, who were asked to review the information provided on qualifications reform and the steps the College has taken to revise its curriculum offer.	

	Discussion: As late as yesterday, it was informed that further T Levels have been pulled, so it is a constant changing picture for the college, which is a challenge for curriculum planning. Work is ongoing with employers and there is a strong T Level working group in the college and strong connections externally as part of planning. The next steps and key dates for curriculum planning were noted, as aligned to the new strategic plan and financial modelling.	
	Governors resolved from the information provided on qualifications reform and the steps the College has taken to revise its curriculum offer, that they are assured it meets the needs of students and the College maintains a viable offer.	
	Action: The Board will regularly receive updates on adult provision, as well as 16-18s delivery. Governors asked for an update on the position of AAQs to the next meeting. Student governors left the meeting	
9	<u>College QIP and Teaching and Learning Update</u>	
	Governors received a summary update on the 9 QIP priorities, and progress against the actions being taken as well as indication of impact measures from Term 1 of the academic year. The report also provided a summary of the outcomes of Curriculum Reviews which assess the quality of teaching and learning. They were advised that this report has been scrutinised by LQCC committee, who were asked to review and comment on progress made against the priorities, and the outcomes of the Curriculum Reviews completed to date	
	Discussion: Governors noted that due to the late start of the QIP due to previous leadership circumstances, most of the progress items are orange, and it is anticipated that many will be achieved by the time the Board receives an update in the summer. A local HMI is supporting teams looking at the quality of teaching and learning and pedagogy to ensure students are receiving a good educational experience. Consistency in the quality of T&L is supported by a refreshed T&L strategy and Quality strategy that came to the Board in the Autumn. This will ensure a greater level of assurance in the quality of T&L. The rag rating will focus on the Impact rather than the action, so this should be better seen by the summer term. A strong focus on personal development was enquired on by governors, to ensure softer skills are developed for progressing to a job or further study. Curriculum Intent is often focused on these softer skills, particularly at the lower levels. It is measured through tutorials, which may be actions from a student's EHCP. The College can also measure it through progression and the leavers' data the College has, which shows the holistic development, not just the academic achievement of students.	
	Governors received the report and resolved to express satisfaction with the progress made against QIP priorities and outcomes of the Curriculum Reviews.	
10	<u>Safeguarding Report</u>	
	Governors received an update on Safeguarding at the College. They were advised that this report had been scrutinised by LQCC, who were asked to review the contents of the report and offer evaluation and guidance where relevant.	
	Discussion: Changes noted this academic year included an 18% increase in incidents – some of this due to an increase in student numbers and the promotion of the service so more students are accessing this.	

	Mental health is the highest number of incidents, particularly at Cadbury. This is being explored to draw out the issue further. This increase in reporting is in line with the National picture. The College is actioning the increased number of incidents by ensuring all mentors are Level 3 Safeguarding trained, to support safeguarding leads. The Police incident report includes community incidents, not just incidents taking place in the College. A Safeguarding Board is being developed; a Link Governor (the Chair) is engaged with this board, as are external partners. The Chair gave an update on his findings, including that the students are expressing their increased confidence in accessing the reporting system. Governors applauded the work that the College is doing on Safeguarding - the excellent data interpretation, the transparency of reporting, particularly in providing a safe place for students allowing them to feel safe enough to disclose through the system available to them at the College. There is a sector project to address misogyny, which may result in an increase in disclosing. An Insight Safeguarding report will be available for the next meeting.	
	Governors resolved to be assured that the college has appropriate policies and procedures in place to safeguard students, including compliance with Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) and the Prevent Duty, and that the additional actions on student voice were appropriate.	
	Action: Insight Safeguarding report to come to the next meeting	EB
	<u>FINANCE AND RESOURCES</u>	
11	<u>Management Accounts & Budget Timetabling</u>	
	Governors received an update of the current financial performance and financial position of the college, enabling informed decision-making and accountability.	
	Discussion: Currently, the College is at break-even and looking at a year-end surplus of £250k. There is much financial uncertainty from the College's funders, and it may not be until May when confirmation is gained. An uplift rate of just over 3% for next year is to be applied, although the detail is not clear. Income is £140k down due to two-thirds of growth funding being received rather than the full amount. However, the budget did not include any funding to be received for NI rise of staff pay, so any funding on this is likely to mitigate the £140k lost. The KPIs remain on track for Outstanding financial performance. The Spring Statement is due this week which is likely to show OBR growth figures to be lower than first expected and therefore cuts may be required. Hopefully, by May, there will be some certainty. Governors asked for clarity on the £2m more income and the spend being almost equal to this. How much £2m spend is on the growth from income, or is on spend elsewhere? £1.2m expenditure is on agency, a lot of which is due to the extra growth, although £250k is for the NI increases. Student Transport and Exam Fees are also up due partly to growth. Also, the bills for transport have gone up considerably more than inflation or budgeted, and also alignment on the transport across postcodes has necessitated a rise. Another agency cost rise is due to difficult to recruit permanent security team members with the appropriate capability.	

	Governors discussed income/expenditure variances and the approval process. The Financial Regulations and Scheme of Delegation will be reviewed in June. When some tuition funding was withdrawn, the decision was taken at Board to continue that work from other funding. The Board has oversight of the achievement of the budget as a whole, rather than individual lines. FC advised that the Financial Regulations are being reviewed and the Board will discuss and approve this and the Scheme of Delegation within it that shows who is responsible and accountable at each level of the organisation.	
	Governors resolved to be assured on the financial stability of the college to enable delivery of the strategic objectives, and to be assured that structured financial planning aligns budget setting with strategic goals, allows timely review, and ensures compliance with regulatory guidelines.	
	Actions: Financial Regulations, including the Scheme of Delegation, will come to the June meeting	FC / RP
12	<u>Capital Projects Update Report</u>	
	Governors received an update on the delivery of Estates Capital projects, including the current position on cost, programme and any risks. They were advised that the F&S committee had scrutinised this report.	
	Discussion: Work is ongoing with the MEC project to finalise this and enable curriculum delivery. Cradleigh Heath is on time and on budget. For Cadbury College, further works are being done to refurbish the first floor, and some external works to give a better external visual appearance and address flooding issues. This work will take place over the summer once exams are finished. Governors noted the current progress, milestones, and next steps. Public funding compliance has been ensured, seeking governor approval for this through a written resolution. There is an internal estates committee to scrutinise this work, get best value for money, and to plan for further areas of government funding aligned to local skills areas, such as engineering. This is all tied into curriculum planning and student experience. Governors discussed procurement and value for money considerations. Value for money often depends on timing and when a quick turnaround is required, the procurement structure used does add value through timely delivery of the product.	
	Governors resolved to be assured that these capital projects deliver the intended benefits within agreed parameters.	
13	<u>KPI Report</u>	
	Governors received an update on the Colleges performance against the KPIs across curriculum, quality, people and finances for the 24/25 academic year. They were advised that this report had been scrutinised by the committees.	
	Discussion: These KPIs were set in December against the 4 pillars, for which there is an executive lead against each. Governors noted that many of these KPIs have been discussed on other items	

	on the agenda. They sit within SLT and are part of the College's internal assessment structure.		
	Governors resolved they are satisfied with the performance to date against the KPIs, that suitable progress has been made against the majority of KPIs, and that the improvement actions, if effectively implemented, will bring about the required progress.		
14	<u>HR & Organisational Development Report</u>		
	Governors received a report on the work and impact of the College's Human Resources and Organisational Development functions. They were advised that this report had been scrutinised by the F&S committee.		
	Discussion: Recruitment, wellness, development, and employee relations were covered within the report. Recruitment challenges are ongoing with teaching vacancies noted as a national challenge. Building employer brand is a key focus, of which investment in a staffing position is having a positive impact. The Wellness Strategy will be launched in April, and has received good external feedback. An annual wellness report will come to committee to assess the impact of the strategy. Employee relationships will commence shortly and may be challenging due to the challenging financial picture within the sector. Governors asked if it would be useful to have a Link governor for Wellness? Yes, this is something that would be really beneficial to support the Board's understanding for this work.		
	Governors resolved to be assured that the college's wellbeing strategy 2025-27, when effectively implemented, will support its mission, operational effectiveness, and legal compliance; and that senior leaders are creating a well-managed, motivated, and high-performing workforce that will support the college's long-term success		
	Actions: A link governor for wellness to be sought		FC
15	<u>Risk Register</u>		
	Governors received the risk report, noting that it had been scrutinised by the Audit Committee who had been asked to comment on and review changes to the Corporate Risk Register, and to note that a new risk register, heatmap and board assurance framework will be presented in June.		
	Discussion: Governors noted that this will be the last meeting to receive the Risk Register in this format. There will be a new risk register provided, following work on Risk Appetite at the Governor Away Day on 9th May.		
	Governors resolved to be satisfied that the right risks are being monitored and that the mitigating actions are satisfactory.		
	Actions: Risk appetite to be discussed by the Board at the Away Day in May		Governors
16	<u>Update from Committee meetings</u>		
	16.1	Search & Governance 21.10.24 and 3.2.25	
	It was noted the substantive item had been covered earlier on the agenda under 3.1, and 17.1 & 17.2		
	The Committee chair advised on matters of challenge and assurance, and asked		

	the Board to consider the following actions : 1. Respond to emails from the College on setting up governor link visits, and complete such visits by the end of June.	Governors
16.2	Audit Committee 19.11.24 and 11.3.25	
	The Committee chair advised on matters of challenge and assurance, and asked the Board to consider the following actions : 1. Note the uncertainty in FE funding climate with delayed announcements and reduced in year growth 2. Approve the updated Health, Safety & Welfare Policy, including governance accountability and a link governor for H&S. 3. Note the upcoming finance system migration and confirm oversight of associated risk mitigations 4. Support the development of the Board Assurance Framework, ensuring risk appetite discussions are scheduled in the next academic year.	
16.3	Finance & Strategy 21.11.24 and 13.3.25	
	The Committee chair advised on matters of challenge and assurance, and asked the Board to consider the following actions : 1. Scrutinise progress on capital projects & financial systems. 2. Oversee the impact of HR strategy & wellbeing framework as it develops. Governors noted the new Finance System as a risk for the organisation. The system is currently working at the testing stage, and is currently working well. The implementation of the system will take place in May and will report back on this at the June meeting. As discussed at Committee, it was noted that it is a standalone system, not currently linked to HR or other areas e.g., payroll	
16.4	LQCC 28.11.24 and 12.3.25	
	The Committee chair advised on matters of challenge and assurance including the QIP, and asked the Board to consider the following actions : 1. Have oversight of management actions to mitigate English GCSE resit decline of about a third year on year, of which some impact from Ed Excel 2.0 grade boundaries (ensure appropriate resources are allocated to improve pass rates). This decline has been halted. 2. Monitor attendance and review strategy impact once it is launched in September 'Project Attendance' 3. Keep under review, safeguarding trends and rising mental health concerns Governors noted that student governors from the Digital department attended the Committee, which facilitated a useful discussion on progression in this area.	
17	<u>Consent Agenda</u>	
17.1	<u>Note of exceptional Meeting Board reappointments – Tony Sharma.</u> <u>Approved a further term of office</u>	
17.2	<u>Written resolution to appoint John Tew as Chair and Nil Makin as Vice Chair approved</u>	
17.3	<u>Written resolution for procurement route for contract c£1m engineering MEC building 3 approved</u>	
17.4	<u>Written resolution Approval of SAR agreed and sent to Ofsted</u>	
17.5	<u>Health & Safety Policy for approval, as recommended by committee</u> ACTION: The above items were noted, and the H&S policy was approved for publication on the website.	

18	<u>Review of Meeting</u>	
	Governors were asked to consider implementing a new process for reviewing the effectiveness of the meeting and in doing so, to consider the following questions. 1. Did we receive the necessary information in the right format and at the right time to have an appropriate discussion and take any necessary decision? 2. Did everyone who wanted to contribute get the opportunity to do so? 3. From this meeting, are we clear on how the organisation is moving forward to achieve its objectives and priorities? 4. Is everyone clear on the actions, where applicable, they need to take as a result of this meeting? 5. Our time was well spent. 6. From this meeting, are we clear of the value we have added? Governors resolved to approve the process and to monitor its implementation as the process evolves	
	ACTION: Further work to be continued by the Clerk and introduce the process from the next meeting.	FC
19	<u>Confidential Items</u>	
	19.1 Approval of the confidential minutes from meeting on 2nd December – see confidential minute	
	19.2 Pay Award discussion – see confidential minute	
	19.3 Capital Item – see confidential minute <i>All Executive members and staff governors left the meeting after this item</i>	
	19.4 R&P committee update – see confidential minute	
20	<u>Date and time of next meeting</u>	
	Monday 30 th June 4-7pm Central St Michael's	

The meeting ended at 7.45 pm.