

**SANDWELL COLLEGE**

**Minutes of the Board of Governors meeting  
held on Monday 7 October 2024 at 3.00pm  
Tomorrow's People, Bennett's Hill, Birmingham**

Present: A Taylor (Independent) (Chair)  
N Anhu (Staff Governor, Sandwell)  
M Ashford (Independent)  
N Makin (Independent)  
G Pennington (Principal)  
S Powell (Staff Governor, Cadbury)  
T Sharma (Independent) (part)  
H Singh (Independent)  
J Tew (Independent)

Apologies: R Bearman (Independent)  
N Edwards-Yesufu (Independent)  
S Lal (Independent)  
S Smalling (Independent)  
J Stevens Vice Principal, Quality  
M J Uddin (Independent)

Also in attendance:

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

		Action
B24.51	<b><u>Welcome and Apologies</u></b>	
	<p>All present were welcomed to the meeting. Apologies were received from Richard Bearman, Natalie Edwards-Yesufu, Shokat Lal, Sonia Smalling and Jalal Uddin and accepted by Governors.</p> <p>Apologies were also received from Julia Stevens.</p> <p>The Chair had been delayed so the Vice Chair chaired the meeting until his arrival. Proposed by NM; seconded by MA; agreed unanimously.</p>	
B24.52	<b><u>Declarations of Interest</u></b>	
	There were no declarations of interest beyond the standing register of interests.	
B24.53	<b><u>Board membership</u></b>	
	<p><b>Resignation – Alison Cope, Independent member</b></p> <p>Governors noted the resignation of Ms Cope.</p>	
B24.54	<b><u>Minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 July 2024</u></b>	
	RESOLVED THAT: Governors approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 1 July 2024 which were signed by the Chair, subject to a slight amendment to Minute No. B24.35.	

B24.55	<b><u>Matters Arising</u></b>	
55.1	Minute No. B24.32.3 – External Governance Review – the final report had been distributed to the Board by email. An action plan was being drawn up to go to Search & Governance Committee on 21 October 2024 for consideration and presenting to the Board at its meeting on 2 December 2024.	Chair of S&G
55.2	<p>Minute No. B24.44.2 - Governors' views on some committee meetings being held on site to be surveyed – those Governors who had not yet replied were asked to do so.</p> <p>Governors' annual returns – most were completed via Governor Hub now. Governors were asked to ensure they had completed all their annual returns as soon as possible as there were reports and returns which had to be prepared from the annual returns for various agencies so the information was needed urgently now by the Clerk.</p> <p>Governors asked if there had been any formal response from the authorities to the External Governance Review.</p> <p>The Vice Chair explained that the College was not charged with giving them a copy but would confirm on the College website that the review had been completed. Colleges were taking a variety of different approaches to how to display their information but the action plan would be available for viewing via link on the website.</p>	
B24.56	<b><u>Leadership Report</u></b>	
56.1	The Principal welcomed the Board to the first visit to Bennett's Hill and explained the use of the site and its evolving development. It was reverting back to the original ideals of being an advice centre. There was some concern about the position of the building because the College did not own it so could not make significant changes to the internal structure which was a disadvantage. Colleges were not precluded from buying assets with its money at present so consideration of purchase of the building was recommended as a good investment for the future.	
	AT arrived and took over the chair	
56.2	<p>Presentation given on the position and development of the College by the whole college team over the past 10 years during the current Principal's tenure, including comparison statistics between then and now of student numbers, student achievement, financial position. The College was well placed to continue its success.</p> <p>The Principal thanked the Board for its support in allowing the opportunity to undertake the work necessary to make these achievements.</p>	
56.3	Leadership report presented. The report condensed into one document all the usual separate reports to provide an overview of progress and current position.	
56.4	The College had enrolled very well this year with its largest ever intake: by the end of the week enrolment would stand at 8600 students, 500 more than last year. This was hoped to finally translate into 7400 funded students. The College continued to enrol throughout the year and by January/February could have around 7600 funded students. This made the College one of the largest colleges nationally.	

56.5	This would trigger in-year growth, the criteria for which was 200 funded students more than the previous year. Student numbers last year were 7070. 50% of the growth would be paid in-year equating to £1-1.5 million not budgeted for. Next year the full benefit of the funding increase would be realised, an increase of £2 million.	
56.6	Achievement rates for last year were very positive, slightly up on 16-18 and slightly down on 19+. The adult curriculum offer was changing. The College had a high number of young adults and this was an area for improvement in the future. The National Average (NA) had also been dropping.	
56.7	All capital projects were on track: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cradley Heath should be ready during November 2025.</li> <li>- The health project would come online in the next 16-18 months.</li> <li>- The new building at the rear of the Engineering Centre should come on stream in November. Use of the building is being considered.</li> </ul>	
56.8	The money for the capital projects was wholly funded by grants received which included £6.7 million for refurbishment works.	
56.9	As the College had been so successful at securing funding, it might have to keep some buildings until others opened, e.g. West Plaza. There were over 700 more students than when the capital projects were planned.	
56.10	This was the final year of the current College Strategy which would need to be refreshed. The College was weighted towards a 16-18 institution. Consideration would need to be given to whether or not to diversify away from that approach to take the College forwards.	
56.11	Ofsted frameworks were changing with removal of the single word judgment. The Board would need to look at what that would mean specifically for quality improvement.	
56.12	The landscape of the new government was different. Colleges were now in the public sector. There would be alignment of the devolved authorities which might lead to more control over colleges.	
56.13	Governors enquired as to the finalised curriculum for the Cradley Heath campus yet.  The Principal advised that a working group had been aligned to this. The College had a number of new buildings coming on stream and their purpose needed oversight and development. This would be a key area of focus for the new leadership and Board. The current team's advice was to focus on creating on operational plans for asset development and develop a framework to provide oversight because of their complexities.	
56.14	As mainly 16-18 focused, the College was disproportionately impacted by curriculum change, i.e. BTECs which were seen as competing with T levels. Around 2000 students could be impacted by this change. The College had recruited well to T levels with 450 this year but that still left a large number. Navigating how to put programmes together that would suit those students needed careful attention.  The DfE was conducting a review to be completed by the end of the year. The College had participated in the review. The Principal was more optimistic than he had been that some of qualifications would survive.	

	<p>The College's focus on curriculum reform and T levels would continue but the Principal recommended not rushing into decisions until the situation was clearer as some qualifications felt to be vital might be preserved.</p> <p>Governors asked what was the timescale for a decision on curriculum reform.</p> <p>The College advised that the commitment was for a short phase review to be completed by the end of this calendar year which would suggest that the outcome would be negative. An overlap might be allowed between BTECs and T levels if the change would severely impact students, e.g. progress to HE for BTECs.</p>	
56.15	<p>A corporate memory exercise was underway as considerable knowledge would be lost with the departure of the Principal and Vice Principals. This would include the background to a topic, reasons why decisions had been taken and final thoughts on remaining issues.</p>	
56.16	<p>One example of the corporate memory exercise was fire risk.</p> <p>The Grenfell enquiry final report had been recently published, which reminds people of the issues relating to the cladding on that building. Governors were reminded that similar material was identified and tested at Central Campus following the Grenfell fire. The use of Central Campus is very different to a residential block such as Grenfell and the College's fire strategy for Central Campus is one that helps mitigate the cladding risks.</p> <p>Governors received a brief history of the building of Central Campus, including alterations during the design and build phase which lead to changes to this form of cladding. Detailed debates took place and a Governor committee set up to look at the technicalities of the matter. The Board took best advice and did what it thought was right in the context at the time. Central Campus was one of the few college buildings in this situation, not owing to the cladding itself but because the building exceeded the risk height of 18 metres in parts.</p> <p>The College had submitted proposals to replace the cladding, at the time of the Grenfell fire but these requested were not approved by the Department for Education, given the focus of the fire strategy being to clear the building as quickly and safely as possible, which followed a board recommendation to follow a strategy focusing on preservation of life not buildings.</p> <p>The cladding is one element within the fabric of the building and needs to be considered in that context. The College has engaged with a new chartered fire engineering to undertake a holistic review the College's approach as the most prudent measures and make further recommendations.</p> <p>The College had asked how it could ensure preservation of business continuity but if the building was exposed to that sort of fire the damage would be too great and the only real solution what to replace the cladding with a less combustible version. An internal working group was in place to consider all aspects of this matter.</p> <p>The College continues to assess its fire risks, and the latest assessment recommendation are being acted upon, including working with a fire risk specialist company in relation to the benefits (or not) of further compartmentalisation of the floors within Central Campus. These matters are kept under review, including considering if there was any more it could do in the short to medium term, including if the DfE could</p>	

	<p>be approached again now that colleges were part of the public sector to see if funding was available for replacement.</p> <p>It is expected that outcomes from the reviews will come as a report to the Board.</p> <p>A fire evacuation was carried out at Central Campus a couple of weeks ago and the whole building was evacuated in less than 10 minutes.</p> <p>The College had checked with its insurance company following Grenfell whether anything had changed or if they were still happy to insure the College. They confirmed there were with no changes.</p> <p>The Principal recommended that the matter be kept under review but stressed that the College had done everything it could do at the time and up to the present.</p>	
56.17	The College was following a robust marketing strategy to focus on student attraction which had been very successful this year.	
56.18	There were staff recruitment challenges but the College continued to attract talent to the organisation. It was important to continue to add to the suite of benefits, examples given including the employee assistance programme. Professional development for the forthcoming year was outlined.	
56.19	<p>Governors recognised that the Annual Strategy and Development Day was postponed from May 2024 so that the Board could consider the future direction of the College with the new senior team.</p> <p>Governors were encouraged to read and familiarise themselves as much as possible with the FE sector to understand the landscape in which the College would be operating.</p>	
56.20	Governors noted the challenges of curriculum change and cladding needed to be addressed. The Principal had stressed that growth was important: to the College, its reputation, feasibility and finances. Over the last 10 years student numbers had increased from 2400 to 7400 which reflected 5,000 young people who otherwise would not have had the opportunity to experience the Sandwell approach to learning. The management style/approach had set high standards with its relentless drive for every young person to succeed. This approach had been demonstrated in the College's commitment to the revival and resurgence of Cadbury College.	
B24.57	<b><u>Policies</u></b>	
57.1	<b>Safeguarding</b>	
57.1.1	The Safeguarding Policy was updated annually in line with the latest Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) guidance. There were no major changes this year.	
57.1.2	The Safeguarding Link Governor gave an update on his meeting on 30 September 2024 with the Vice Principal, Curriculum, and the Safeguarding Manager. Notes of the meeting would be circulated with the papers for LQCC and the Board. There was nothing adverse to report. The College's safeguarding approach against a difficult background was exemplary.	

57.1.3	<p>Governors noted that Paul Smith, Safeguarding Manager, would provide continuity at this time of management change and asked who would take responsibility for this area in the new senior team.</p> <p>The Link Governor advised that it would fall within the remit of the new Deputy Principal. The Safeguarding Link Governor would support when necessary as Governors had overriding responsibility for safeguarding.</p>	
57.1.4	Governors approved the Safeguarding Policy.	
B24.58	<b><u>Provisional Management accounts 2023/24</u></b>	
58.1	The position was broadly in line with expectations with a £2.3 million surplus which would increase slightly to £2.4 million when the final adjustments are put through. This included finalising the pension figures.	
58.2	Cash was on plan with just £48k difference on a planned spend of £17 million.	
58.3	<p>The College had received £5.8 million in advance in FECTF with £750k due from the Towns Fund. This resulted in net cash of £5m received ahead of spend.</p> <p>Governors asked if the government would reclaim that money.</p> <p>The College confirmed it had not yet indicated this, but if they followed the same approach as other areas of the public sector, this would be through requiring organisations to use the government banking services. This has the overall impact of cash balances being used to offset the national debt whilst leaving the money with constituent organisations.</p>	
58.4	<p>In response to a Governor's question, the College confirmed that it had broadly £7 million in unallocated cash and needed at least £3 million to maintain its obligations.</p> <p>Governors asked how this affected the current financial rating.</p> <p>The College explained how the calculation worked.</p>	
58.5	<p>Governors asked if other FE colleges in the West Midlands with capital projects had similar funding to the College from external sources.</p> <p>The College explained that the Towns Fund had worked in its favour and in its approach to bids its own contributions were kept low. Cadbury remained the only area the College had had to contribute matched funding to.</p>	
B24.59	<b><u>Risk Register</u></b>	
59.1	A verbal update was given as the committees had not met to have the opportunity to review the Risk Register.	
59.2	Student numbers and quality had been positive as per the Principal's report.	
59.3	Fire risks would be reviewed through the Finance & Strategy Committee.	
59.4	The Principal observed that the document was quite lengthy and challenging to understand if Governors did not know the detail behind the risks. Many risks were interdependent so if they were combined with subsets this could reduce the size of the Risk Register considerably.	

	<p>Committees looked at the areas of risk under their responsibility. The Audit Committee reviewed the Register in detail so might be better referred to as the Audit and Risk Committee.</p> <p>Governors reminded that the Audit Committee looked at process rather than the detail behind the risks to avoid stepping into operational matters.</p> <p>Governors agreed to consider renaming it as the Audit and Risk Committee.</p> <p>Governors observed that the Risk Register had expanded over time and risks had been added following Board discussions. Responsibility was split mainly between LQCC and Finance &amp; Strategy Committees. Governors suggested that the Risk Register be reviewed again to see if it could be simplified.</p>	
B24.60	<b><u>Minutes of sub-committees</u></b>	
	There had been no sub-committee meetings since the last Board meeting.	
B24.61	<b><u>Any Other Business</u></b>	
61.1	<b>Towns Fund</b>	
	<p>The Chair advised that £4 million was available from the Towns Fund due to the withdrawal of a project which could be redirected to an existing connected project. This might be able to be redirected to the existing hospital project.</p> <p>Discussion took place about the College's current agreement with the hospital and the possible options which were: to take extra space; to use for state of the art equipment and facilities.</p> <p>Governors supported pursuing an expression of interest for and options for use of the funding.</p>	
B24.62	<b><u>Determination of Confidential Items</u></b>	
	Minute No. B24.61.2	
B24.63	<b><u>Governors' farewell to the Principal and Vice Principals</u></b>	
	The Chair and Governors bid farewell to the Principal and Vice Principals, thanking them for all their hard work, support and commitment during their time with the College and presentation of gifts made.	
B24.64	<b><u>Date and time of next meeting</u></b>	
	<b>Monday 2 November 2024, 4.00pm, Sandwell College</b>	
	Staff and Staff Governors left the meeting	
	<b><u>**CONFIDENTIAL SESSION**</u></b>	
B24.61 NFP	<b><u>Any Other Business cont'd</u></b>	

Meeting ended at 4.50 pm