

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporation held on Thursday, 19 March 2020 at 5.30pm by teleconference.

Present: Michael Priestley (Chair); Norma Boyes; Elaine Clinton; Rebecca Dockray; Peter Ellwood; Beth Gaskell; Nigel Holliday; Phil Jardine; Chris Nattress (Principal); Denise Rollo; Robin Talbot

Apologies: Alison Hampson; Robert Milburn; Tanya Weston; Amie Calvin; Leanne Singleton; Stuart Williams.

Also present: Karen Wilson (Deputy Principal); Daniel Braithwaite (Assistant Principal); Jane Murray (Clerk).

19/20 Minutes

Resolved – that the following minutes held in open session be approved and signed as a correct record:

- 1) 30 January 2020
- 2) 25 February 2020 (special)

20/20 Declarations of Interest

None received.

21/20 Agenda Management

Owing to the quick moving situation, it was agreed to take an additional item at the top of the meeting in respect of Covid-19, with an operational update and governance issues arising, and a second item at the end on a staffing matter.

22/20 Coronavirus Update

As per the urgent action (recorded later on the agenda), the Crisis Management Team had been initiated, with the Board being kept sighted. The team had already been working to migrate staff off site, moving to digital working for staff and students, so were ready for the announcement of closure.

The team had, and continued, to work through a whole range of HR issues and was maintaining communications with staff and students through electronic means. They had also been working with employers and communicating with learners about their policies, including those who were not accepting people onto their site.

The College would close at 1700h with all learning taking place off site for the foreseeable future, fully supported by staff both in their learning and well-being.

Two professional development days were being put in place on Monday and Tuesday for staff to support staff in new ways of working. (*Action since: The second day was cancelled following the introduction of more Government measures*).

Exams had been cancelled, but there continued to be a lack of clarity on how learners would be graded, although further announcements might be expected.

Discussions continued with Cumbria County Council on a regional approach to supporting vulnerable learners (learners with key worker families were less relevant to FE Colleges as students were over 16).

With 250 staff, many of whom were on different contracts, the HR team were being kept busy with a whole raft of HR issues.

The building will be kept open during normal business for a skeleton staff, permit-only, and social distancing will be maintained. Digital services staff would also continue to support staff and students.

It was confirmed that the arrangements included National College for Nuclear. It was noted that there had been one instance of a member of staff at NCfN being asked to self-isolate on return from holiday in Italy. The college had tried to contact Public Health England without success and so had followed the default position of quarantine for 14 days for that member of staff.

It was acknowledged that this was a new way of working and it would be closely monitored. The College would be issuing a clear set of messages, which included the message that unless you are sick, you will have a programme of work.

Asked about mental health issues, each team will have a daily catch up and line managers will be in contact for a courtesy call to check staff are fine. Services of mental health first aiders will also continue during this time.

The Board thanked the Executive and staff for the work they were doing and would look forward to updates.

The Clerk sought some amendments to urgent action under standing order 66 to give greater flexibility, and sought some amendments to the arrangements in place to affix the Seal.

Resolved –

- 1) that arrangements to close the College in line with Government direction be endorsed and contingency arrangements for staff and students be supported.
- 2) That an *additional* paragraph be added to standing order 66, urgent action
“If the Chair, or Vice Chair, are unavailable or unfit, then urgent action may be delegated to any three Governors, two of whom should be independent and none of whom should be a student governor. Wherever possible, urgent action would be taken following documented consultation with all Governors who are fit and able.”
- 3) Noting that the Chair and Phil Jardine as Vice Chair are currently able to witness the seal under Article 21a, to add a further authority under 21a to any member of the Board temporarily appointed as Chair or Vice Chair.

23/20 Key Performance Indicators

As previously advised, learner numbers are under contract. More adult learners are coming through and there is an increased interest in distance learning during the current crisis.

While there had been a push to increase apprenticeship numbers, this was unlikely under the current circumstances.

Staff were anxious to ensure that there was impact on progress in light of digital learning and would be working hard to keep learners on track. Reports will be sent out to parents, in lieu of the parents' evening, which had been planned.

Attendance, although slightly below target, was keeping pace with last year and tutors will be able to take registers from home. Work placements were ahead of the previous year's performance, but a decision was taken earlier in the week to stop work placement activity in anticipation of the measures being put in place. Retention was showing strongly across all areas, which was pleasing.

Asked about the changing picture on apprenticeships, it was acknowledged that there had been previous strong performance, but that economic uncertainty (around Brexit) and changes to the framework had had a detrimental effect generally.

The relevance of the data set was questioned in light of the change in circumstances, however, while acknowledging that the targets may have less relevance, the Deputy Principal was keen to maintain the data set to see what impact the virus would have on data. It was noted that progress weeks would continue to enable monitoring to take place.

24/20 Continuous Improvement Plans

The Assistant Principal felt that excellent progress was being made on the Higher Education Improvement Plan. Asked about progress on some learner voice issues, handbooks had been reviewed and it was hoped that a student mentor for Higher Education would be in place shortly. Improvements to the induction process in some areas were being put in place.

In respect of the Further Education Improvement Plan, steady progress was being made, noting improvements to retention and good progress on reviewing curriculum intent.

25/20 Confidential Session and Confidential Minutes

Resolved –

- 1) To move into confidential session
- 2) That the minutes of the meeting held in confidential session on Thursday, 30th January 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.
- 3) That the draft minutes of the Finance and Corporate Working Group of 24 February 2020 be received and noted.

26/20 Heavy Civil Engineering Centre Update – confidential

The Principal updated the Board on a partnership project.

27/20 Strategic Update – confidential

The Principal updated the Board on several partnership projects, local and national policy issues with an impact on the college.

28/20 Strategic Risk Register – confidential

The Board considered the key risks being faced by the College.

29/20 Management Accounts – confidential

The Board received an update of the financial position.

30/20 Open Session

Resolved – to re-open the meeting.

31/20 HR Update

There had been some improvement in sickness absence recently, although overall still high for the year. Assurance was given that normal sickness procedures would apply during the pandemic, including a requirement for a doctor's note.

32/20 Facilities Update

Health and Safety performance was received and noted, including the fact that progress was being made on the recommendations made on a recent audit report. An updated Health and Safety Policy was received by the Board and approved.

With departmental sickness, it was requested that the cleaning contract be extended for a year without tender, which was approved. It was also noted that legal advice would be sought as to whether there was an opportunity to save some money on the contract or whether hours could be banked towards deep cleaning of the building.

The written resolution to update authority to the Crisis Management Team to act in a crisis was received and noted.

While T-Level funding had already been discussed, it was noted that discussions were continuing around how access could be made to the digital funding stream by combining this funding with planned capital IT funding.

Resolved –

- 1) That the health and safety policy be approved;
- 2) That standing orders be waived and the cleaning contract be extended for a year;
- 3) That written resolution E01/20, as follows, was passed by 15 votes in favour (with the Principal abstaining):

“1) That in a moment of crisis, the Governing Body delegates full authorisation to the Crisis Management Team to act in a manner as they feel fit and will support any such action taken in good faith.

“2) To note that the crisis management team will report to the Governing Body in a timely manner during any crisis event.”

33/20 Stakeholder Report

The Board received oversight of complaints, compliments and surveys. The action being taken in respect of some areas of improvement highlighted in the Higher Education Survey had been discussed earlier in the meeting.

The Chairman noted that there had been one case in respect of further education, where, given the outcome of a SEN Tribunal hearing, he felt that an update on improvements and progress being made on the College's SEN provision would be helpful.

The Deputy Principal felt that changes were being made. She noted a legacy issue in the SEN service and was happy to bring an update to the board before the end of term. The new team had a very different and far more comprehensive approach.

34/20 Confidential Session

Rebecca Dockray left the meeting

Resolved – to move into confidential session

35/20 Confidential Staff Matter

The Deputy Principal sought the view of the Board in respect of the unusual staffing position and home working.

The meeting closed at 1915h.