

Boston College

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CORPORATION ON 18 MAY 2022

1. PRESENT

Peter Cropley (Chair), Andy Atkins, Ruth Catlett, David Earnshaw, Claire Foster, Kelly Harris, Heather Lee, David Parnell, Chris Pett, Helen Rumbold, Gerry Tawton, Paul Tomlinson and Nick Worth.

Also in attendance: Janet Hemmant (Clerk to the Corporation), Debbie Holland (Vice Principal: Finance & Corporate Services), Adrian Humphreys (Executive Director: Business, Innovation & Partnerships), Vicki Locke (Deputy Principal) and Sharon Posey (Interim Head of Learner Services).

Apologies for absence were received from Holly Barker, Daran Bland, David Fannin, Axel Sedgwick and Sandra Williamson.

Meeting attendance: 72%

2. MEMBERSHIP

Members were advised that following membership changes there was one position vacant on the Audit committee and one on the Search and Governance committee. Heather Lee had ceased to be a member of the Property Group which meant that there was space on this group too. Members were asked to advise the Clerk if they wished to join any of these.

It was noted that Chris Pett had volunteered to act as the Careers Governor and this was agreed.

3. ACTION LOG

Members reviewed and noted progress made on items listed in the Corporation's Action Log.

4. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

a) Corporation – 10 March 2022

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2022 were reviewed and approved as a correct record.

b) Audit Committee – 24 March 2022

The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2022 were reviewed.

Gerry Tawton asked about a reference to potential incentivisation to reach apprenticeship targets. Adrian Humphries advised that this had been discussed and performance was not an issue at this time. Claire Foster confirmed that incentivisation was not the college's preferred model.

c) Finance and Resources Committee – 28 March 2022

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2022 were reviewed.

Gerry Tawton asked if there had been any movement on HR software. Claire Foster advised that the college was enhancing Software for People and bringing in some monitoring software.

d) Standards Committee – 27 April 2022

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2022 were reviewed.

Sharon Posey told members that the Matrix reaccreditation visit had been successful and the report was being finalised. It was agreed that Kelly Harris, Sharon Posey and Jill Lineham should be thanked for achieving this success.

5. REPORTS

a) Principal's

Members received a report from the Principal on a number of sector and college issues.

Claire Foster told members that the financial and other challenges facing colleges were not getting any easier. Inflation is creating an additional challenge and the college continues to look at new revenue sources.

Claire advised that the college is working on its HE Access and Participation Plan and submission is imminent. David Earnshaw asked if there was anything of concern in the process. Claire explained that the data set for colleges with smaller HE provision is more limited than that for universities.

The position regarding the Mayflower development was noted. Chris Pett asked about the implications of the project being delayed or over budget. It was reported that this had been discussed at the Property Group which was conscious of the project vulnerabilities and risks. The college understands that costs may have to be trimmed to stay within budget. David Parnell commented to that a fixed price contract may not be feasible at the present time.

Chris Pett asked whether the Mayflower development will produce an upturn in revenue. David Earnshaw commented that it will address a number of challenges with the existing estate. Claire advised that it should see increases in footfall for catering and commercial income. There is potential to increase higher education in the iconic building. It also offers an opportunity to extend campus space by putting the Ingelow provision into a currently unused space. In response to a query about the leisure pool, Claire confirmed that it was remaining in its current position and there would be no college liability for it. Heather Lee asked whether there was research demonstrating that higher education would increase in a stand-alone facility. Claire advised that there was experience elsewhere demonstrating this.

A discussion took place on the contents of the Strategic Leadership Plan.

Peter Cropley asked about the staff survey. Claire told members that the college had used an external survey but the data was potentially flawed. The college is designing its own survey to ensure that it can get an accurate picture of staff views. Work has been carried out on making improvements for staff. Ruth Catlett commented on training opportunities and the staff steering group. It was noted that student advocates are needed to promote leadership values and opportunities for students. Claire advised that the college had seen improved attendance at Student Council meetings and stressed

the importance of work done alongside students. It was agreed that the student governors should be asked to encourage others to get involved.

In response to a query about student work experience, it was noted that a significant number of placements had been planned but evidence of completion is yet to be received. The structure for organising work placements is being looked at. Adrian Humphries commented that the college is making sure that work experience is purposeful and meets student needs.

Peter Cropley asked about work to reduce reliance on ESFA funding. Claire told members that the college will take advantage of any opportunities to diversify income. Debbie Holland told members that progress had been made since targets for diversification were set but COVID has impacted on this. Adrian Humphries expressed the view that the college was well on the way to achieving its diversification targets.

Looking at the Productivity targets, Andy Atkins asked for clarification of the financial health targets. Debbie Holland reported that targets relating to financial health were longer term and that college performance had been affected by the pandemic but should recover. David Earnshaw commented that this was a sector rather than college specific phenomenon. Gerry Tawton asked about staff utilisation and Vicki Locke advised that new targets were needed. Claire told members that the college will be looking closely at utilisation and doing everything it can to resolve any issues.

David Parnell queried whether some targets were quantifiable. Claire confirmed that targets need to be clear so that they can be signed off. It was noted that the Plan is a working document subject to constant review and update.

Claire told the Corporation that Heather Marks will be joining the college in June from Stoke College. She appears to be a good fit for Boston College with a values based student focused approach and should complement the existing team.

At the conclusion of her report, Peter Cropley told members that Claire had asked for her contractually agreed salary increase to be deferred and to only take the same increase as other staff at this time.

b) Mayflower Project Approval

Members received a report from the Principal requesting formal approval to proceed with the Mayflower capital project once the government has agreed funding.

Gerry Tawton asked about professional fees. It was confirmed that the college had received £290k already and now needed to carry out further work to meet the project timescales. A government decision on the project is expected in June.

Members agreed that, when government approval is received, the project can proceed with the Finance and Resources committee authorised to take further decisions within the established financial parameters outlined in the business case including the college's capped £525k cash contribution. It was agreed that any additional funding requirement would need to be referred back to the Corporation for a decision.

c) Finance

Members received a report from the Vice Principal: Finance and Corporate Services on a number of financial matters including management accounts to 31 March 2022 and forecast outturn.

Debbie Holland told members that financial performance including AEB clawback is being tracked but it remains difficult to predict how mitigations will affect the forecast deficit for 2021/22. Debbie advised that the financial position for 2022/23 is looking healthier and, in response to a query from Andy Atkins, explained that this was due to additional funding. Claire Foster commented that the college was being proactive to de-risk the adult budget.

Peter Cropley asked about the impact of reducing capital spend. Debbie explained that only high priority capital bids had been looked at and that nothing critical was being deferred. Industry standard requirements had been either agreed or lower cost options identified.

Members noted that the 2020/21 financial health grade had been confirmed by ESFA and reviewed the financial dashboard for governors.

Members considered the potential write off of a debt for student fees. Heather Lee asked if this was a one off situation with no precedent being established and Sharon Posey advised that the circumstances were highly unusual so were unlikely to happen again. Steps have been taken to prevent the situation arising again. Having noted that the debt had been provided for in the reforecast, members agreed that outstanding fees should be waived in this instance.

d) Safeguarding and Prevent Update

Members received and discussed a report from Sharon Posey, Interim Head of Learner Services.

Statistics for safeguarding referrals were reviewed and it was noted that these now included the reasons for referrals. Gerry Tawton asked about Sharon's own safeguarding workload as identified in the statistics. Sharon advised that staff were being trained to share the load. Nick Worth asked about onward referrals and Sharon explained how the college worked with external agencies for support.

e) OfS Reportable events

Vicki Locke confirmed that there was nothing to report.

6. VICKI LOCKE

It was noted that this was Vicki Locke's last Corporation meeting. Members noted that she had made a significant contribution to the college and wished her well in her future career.

7. PAPERS

David Parnell asked if it was possible for draft papers to be shared earlier and suggested that the format could be reviewed. ●

8. NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporation would take place on 6 July 2022