

SWINDON COLLEGE CORPORATION

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON TUESDAY 18 OCTOBER 2011

Members Present

Rob Beale (Chair), Adrian Moore (Vice Chair), Anthony Cohen, Louise Hill, Nick King, Andrew Miller (College Principal), Philip Richmond, Kerry Lyn Rushton, Carol Stone, David Swann, Ram Thiagarajah, Mike Wadley, Peter Wells, Nigel Wichall.

Also Present

Nick Letchet, Deputy Principal
John Evans, Vice Principal, Curriculum and Quality
Alasdair MacDonald, Clerk to the Governing Body

The meeting commenced at 1630hrs in The Training Restaurant.

254/11 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received Faith Butt and James Cheriton. The chair of governors welcomed David Swann to his first meeting of the Governing Body.

255/11 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared in any specific items on the agenda.

256/11 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR OF GOVERNORS

The chair and vice chair of governors left the meeting for this item.

Document No 11/229 refers. **It was proposed by Carol Stone, seconded by Nick King, that Anthony Cohen assume the chair for this item. This was approved unanimously.**

The clerk confirmed that both role holders were prepared to stand for a further academic year. The acting chair asked if there were any other nominations. There was none.

It was proposed by Nick King, seconded by Carol Stone, that Rob Beale and Adrian Moore be re-elected as the chair and vice chair of governors respectively. All members voted in favour.

Rob Beale and Adrian Moore returned to the meeting.

Members agreed the chairs of committee for 2011/12 and the membership of each committee. The resignation of Nick King in December 2011 was noted.

The chair of governors informed the meeting that he would be prepared to take over as chair of the Resources Committee from January 2012, if Peter Wells would take over as chair of the Quality and Standards Committee. The Board expressed its approval for this proposal.

257/11 GOVERNOR BRIEFING

The chair of governors invited members to consider the role of the Board in overseeing a College in which success rates were now outstanding and financial performance was much improved. Whilst there was still scope for improvement, a corner had been turned and sustaining the improvement was now the main priority. He also referred to some pending changes in Governing Body membership, with a recent resignation and two further vacancies in the near future as governors' terms of office ended. The chair of governors would also be stepping down at the end of 2011/12.

The Board needed to think about the key challenges ahead and the mix of skills and experience it would require to address them. He suggested that some further discussion might be undertaken at the Strategy Event on 4 November.

Action: RB/AM/JAM

Andrew Miller informed governors that the College needed to decide how to respond to a request from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) for colleges to bid for additional student numbers. Also, the Skills Funding Agency had announced that it intended to change the funding formula for adult provision in colleges, with a trial of a new methodology to be held in 2012/13.

258/11 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 JULY 2011

Document No 11/23 refers. The minutes of the meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the chair.

259/11 MATTERS ARISING AND OUTSTANDING ACTIONS REPORT

Document No 11/231 refers. Minute 192/11c) - Andrew Miller updated governors on progress with the 'links' programme for 2011/12. All external governors had been asked for 2 dates in 2011/12 for links meetings and most had now responded. It was hoped that this pre-planning would lead to a higher uptake of the programme than in recent years. He thanked governors for their co-operation.

Members agreed that all other actions had either been carried out or appeared on the agenda as substantive items.

260/11 CONFIDENTIAL MINUTE OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 AUGUST 2011.

Document No 11/232 refers. The confidential minute of the meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the chair.

261/11 MATTERS ARISING

The chair of governors informed the meeting that action had been taken to implement the first two resolutions of the special meeting of 2 August 2011. Regarding the third, he reported that the governor in question could not attend the present Board meeting nor the December meeting, and he suggested that her term of office which was due to end in December 2011 be concluded now so that the search for a replacement could begin. The Board agreed with this suggestion and asked the chair to write to her expressing the Board's thanks for service to the College as a governor.

Action: RB

The Principal confirmed that a working group had been established, as requested in resolution one, and it met on 30 September 2011. The group agreed on a number of actions

to improve current practice in risk management, in making statements about ex-employees, and in case management. He would report further to the Board on the implementation of these proposals in due course.

The Board agreed that the Audit Committee should be tasked to review the adequacy of the College's response to the independent investigators' report.

Action: AC/JAM

1655hrs. The chair of governors welcomed Kerry Lyn Rushton to the meeting and congratulated her on her election as a student governor.

The chair also welcomed Amanda Burnside, John Evans and Nick Letchet to the meeting.

262/11 ENROLMENT REPORT FOR FULL TIME STUDENTS

Document No 11/233 refers, introduced by Amanda Burnside. She explained in some detail possible reasons for the shortfall in the 16-18yr old student cohort and the actions taken to date, as well as those planned, to address the situation. The likely impact of the reduced funds for the EMA was discussed.

Andrew Miller explained that the shortfall in student numbers would impact upon the funded learner numbers provided by the YPLA in 2012/13 and it would be essential to exceed target in 2012/13 if the College was to grow in 2013/14 and, thereby, achieve its projections as per the current 3yr Strategic Plan. He informed governors of initiatives, such as the introduction of a limited number of 'A' levels, to refresh the curriculum and grow student numbers. However, he explained that schools were very keen to retain students at 16 as they sought to 're-badge' themselves as 'academies', potentially with 6th forms. 'A' levels rather than vocational programmes might become even more attractive as GCSE scores improved.

In an extensive review of 16-18 enrolments, issues discussed were:

- the likely funding shortfall in 2011/12 and the possible advantages of attracting those who had not yet enrolled with a more generous financial subsidy. However, it was recognised that there would need to be equity in providing financial support and those already enrolled would need to receive the same support.
- the advantages of growing courses with a higher funding weighting such as construction
- local organisations which might provide support funding for students from low income families
- the impact on staff utilisation of lower than planned student recruitment
- promoting strongly the advantages of vocational courses which helped students into work
- promoting the benefits of the XLR8 programme
- the problem of keeping students in education and training in Swindon beyond age 17, when the NEETs cohort traditionally grows
- continuing uncertainty about exactly why student numbers were down with more analysis to be done
- co-ordination of the College's efforts to attract more enrolments through Swindon Borough Council (i.e. NEET projects and the RPA project)
- the adverse effect of the withdrawal of the Connexions' service
- the future impact of a demographic downturn i.e. fewer school-leavers each year
- the importance of growing the College's Level 3 provision and ensuring better internal progression to L3
- using students who had already enrolled as ambassadors to attract school friends who remained undecided

Amanda continued her report with a review of Apprenticeship and Higher Education enrolments where enrolments were broadly in line with targets.

The Board commended the efforts of staff in achieving higher than targeted numbers for the College's own HEFCE funded students. Members agreed that everything should be done to foster good relationships with Oxford Brookes University in light of the University of Bath's likely reduction in its interest in franchising courses to FE colleges.

The chair thanked Amanda for her report which had stimulated so much interest and debate.

Amanda Burnside left the meeting after this item.

263/11 MONITORING COLLEGE PERFORMANCE

- a) Principal's Report – Document No 11/234 refers. Andrew stated that he would like governors' views on whether to a) request an Ofsted inspection and b) submit a bid for an Enhanced Renewal Grant. He guided members through his report first. He was able to report that the redundancy programme had gone smoothly to date although he was aware of some considerable disquiet amongst business support staff in the current phase. Andrew made reference to the Swindon Borough Council research study entitled 'Widening Choice'.

The Board discussed the item in the Principal's Report on 'Capital Projects/Property Strategy/SFA Renewal Grants' in some detail. He assured members that a full review of the Property Strategy would be undertaken at the Strategy Event on 4 November. Projects such as the boiler replacement and the transformation of the Main Hall would be discussed then.

Andrew explained the bidding process for the capital grants offered by the SFA. An initial allocation of £100k was available to colleges in November 2011 with a further enhanced grant of up to £2m subject to a college having a suitable capital project(s) and being able to contribute up to two thirds of the total capital cost up to a maximum of £4m. This was likely to be the only capital support available for some years and the Principal felt that the College should submit a bid even without an approved, updated Property Strategy in place as yet.

Andrew told the Board that Jones Lang LaSalle would work with the College to prepare a bid, without charge. His proposal was for a new building adjacent to the Phoenix Building to house commercial leisure services provision i.e. hospitality, catering, beauty therapy, and hairdressing. This, in turn, would free up space in existing buildings although the overall land space occupied needed to shrink. The temporary buildings and perhaps the Nursery could be taken out of use. The estimated cost was £4m. There were a number of issues about this project still to be considered before it would be put forward as a firm proposal.

The Board gave its agreement for Andrew Miller to continue to work on the proposal and, if appropriate, a bid with a supporting financial plan should be prepared for the Board to approve on 13 December 2011.

Action: AM/NL/JE

The Principal then asked members to consider the case for an Ofsted inspection. Whilst one might happen without College action, John Evans explained that inspections were risk based and Swindon College was deemed to be a low risk at present. The College would need to make a case to the SFA that it was being

disadvantaged in student recruitment and in other areas by still having a Grade 3 as its reference point from the re-inspection in 2009 which followed the failed Ofsted inspection in November 2007.

Members discussed the risks. John advised that the College's success rates were now excellent and this almost certainly eliminated the risk of a further grade 3. The likely response of staff to the pressures of an inspection closely following a redundancy exercise was considered, as was the possibility that pockets of relative weakness in non-academic areas might be found.

It was proposed by Adrian Moore, seconded by Carol Stone, that the Principal should write to the Skills Funding Agency asking that they use their good offices to request Ofsted to inspect Swindon College. Members voted in favour, with one abstention.

Action: AM

Andrew concluded his report by informing the Board that two FoIA requests for information about the McKie case had been received to date, and one request for information citing the Data Protection Act. Legal advice had been taken in responding to these requests.

- b) College Success Rates 2010/11 – Document No 11/235 refers, introduced by John Evans. He guided members through the various graphs showing Long Course Success Rates which showed how outstandingly the college had performed in 2010/11 with the 16-18yr old L2 and L3 cohorts and the 19+ L1-L3 cohorts all at or above the national 90th percentile. Only 16-18yr olds at Level 1 were marginally below the 90th percentile. John also presented information on the framework success rates for Apprenticeships which were above national average Success Rates.

The Board asked the Vice Principal to congratulate all College staff on this excellent performance.

- c) Operating Statement 2011/12 – Document No 11/236 refers. Andrew Miller explained that this document contained the key actions and developments, with any associated targets, which would be implemented in 2011/12 to achieve the College's strategic objectives in support of the 6 strategic aims within the 3yr Strategic Plan 2011-14. Reports on performance would be brought to the Quality and Standards and Resources committees at each of their meetings with by exception reports brought to the Board.

Anthony Cohen left the meeting at 1815hrs.

- d) Key Performance Indicators 2011/12 – Document No 11/237 refers. Andrew explained that this report differed from the 2010/11 KPI report in content but more particularly in presentation style with bar charts, in the main, being used to provide an easy visual indication of how the College was performing against its various targets and against the previous year's performance. As with the Operating Statement, the KPI report would be brought to the committees for a more detailed review of performance in areas relevant to their remits, with significant variances only reported to the Board' attention.
- e) Risk Policy, Risk Register and Risk Management Plan – Document No 11/238 refers. The Principal reported on the discussion held at the Audit Committee meeting on 11 October where the revised policy, register and plan were presented. The committee was satisfied with the continued development of the register and plan but advised

that, whilst the Board must ensure that regularly recurring risks were being effectively managed, there should be a greater focus on strategic risks and threats 'just over the horizon, as well as the opportunities which might offset these risks.

It was proposed by Ram Thiagarajah, seconded by Philip Richmond, that the College's Risk Policy be approved. All members were in favour.

264/11 COMMITTEE CHAIRS' REPORTS

- a) The Quality and Standards Committee, 27 September 2011 – Document No 11/239 refers. The committee chair reported on a very full discussion held on the college's Success Rates which had been reported earlier to the Board. The challenge, increasingly, would be to maintain this high level of performance.
- b) The Search Committee, 30 September 2011 – Document No. 11/240 refers. The committee chair reported the discussion held on the Governing Body's succession plan and the recognition that some important skills and experience were being lost with a recent resignation and future departures as governors came to the ends of their terms of office. The gender imbalance on the Board was also noted. Search strategies were agreed and individuals and institutions were identified for discussions about possible membership or nomination of members.
- c) The Resources Committee, 4 October 2011 – Document No 11/241 refers. The committee chair highlighted issues discussed at the meeting, as minuted in Document No 11/241. Considerable attention had been paid to capital projects as reported earlier to members. The Board expressed concern at the reported theft of keys and at the estimated cost of their replacement.

It was proposed by Nick King, seconded by Nigel Wichall, that the proposed amendment to the Fees Policy for 2011/12 be approved. All members were in favour.

- d) The Audit Committee, 11 October 2011. In the absence of the committee chair, David Swann reported on the committee's discussion of the draft Internal Audit Plan 2011/12 and on the committee's review of the performance of PricewaterhouseCoopers in 2010/11.

It was proposed by David Swann, seconded by Ram Thiagarajah, that the Internal Audit Plan 2011/12 be approved. All members were in favour.

It was proposed by Ram Thiagarajah, seconded by David Swann, that PricewaterhouseCoopers be re-appointed as the College's internal auditors for 2011/12. All members were in favour.

Louise Hill left the meeting at 1830hrs

265/11 CLERK'S REPORT

Document No 11/243 refers. The clerk briefly summarised the content of Annex A to his report which set out a number of the outcomes from the Governing Body's own self-assessment process, namely the Quality Improvement Plan for 2010/11, a self-assessment questionnaire on the Governing Body's performance, the annual KPIs, a questionnaire on the chair of governor's performance, and the committees' annual performance reviews. The clerk suggested a number of areas for quality improvement which the Board might like to consider for 2011/12.

It was confirmed that the Governing Body's performance and self-assessment for 2010/11 would be concluded at the Strategy Event on 4 November when a short statement and grade would be agreed for inclusion in the Leadership and Management section of the College Self-Assessment Report.

The Governing Body agreed its annual Business Plan 2011/12 as shown in annex B to Document No 11/243.

266/11 CONFIDENTIAL REPORT ON COLLEGE RESTRUCTURING

Andrew Miller tabled a document on his proposals to restructure the College's senior management team. He explained that this was, in part, a response to the need to reduce staffing costs in line with the College-wide programme, but also an opportunity to create a more effective senior team structure reporting to the Principal. He explained his intended changes and governors discussed these proposals in some detail.

It was agreed that Andrew would clarify his intentions in one or two areas, as well as reflect on feedback received, and a brief final discussion would be held at the Strategy Event on 4 November 2011.

Action: AM

267/11 AGENDA SETTING AND MEETING ASSESSMENT

Document No 11/244 refers. Members completed their meeting assessments and returned them to the clerk. The effectiveness score for the meeting was 1.87.

The following comments were made by governors on their assessment forms:

- Very good questioning on issues raised, debate and chairing
- A bit noisy from next door
- Important discussion on enrolment
- Useful discussion on possible new building
- Later start time inconvenient for me
- Support for seeking an Ofsted inspection
- Wonderful result on success rates
- A lot of vital stuff was rushed through without real consideration
- Much of the meeting consisted on the Principal/SMT reporting and the membership trying to absorb a mass of information
- Room was adequate but noisy in early stages.

268/11 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next scheduled meeting of the Governing Body will be held on 4 November 2011 at 0930hrs in the Main Hall in the Phoenix Building.

195/11 ITEMS NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Part of minute 263/11 will be withheld from publication.

The meeting closed at 1835hrs.