

GOVERNORS FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Tuesday 21st February 2023, 5.30pm
Remote via online video conference platform

DRAFT MINUTES

PRESENT:

Mr M Belfour, Foundation Governor, Chair
Mr G Thompson, Principal
Mr N Sheta, Foundation Governor, Vice chair
Mrs E Preece, Staff Governor
Mrs S Medicoff, Foundation Governor

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs M Searle, Director of Finance & Resources
Mrs E Lewis, Clerk to the Governors
Mr C Graham, Associate Principal (observing). Joined at 5.41pm

The meeting was opened by Mr Belfour at 5. 30pm. It was quorate throughout and all participants could see and / or hear one another.

1. **Opening Prayer:** offered by Mr Thompson
2. **Apologies:** Mr Graham for delayed arrival. All were present.
3. **Declarations of Interest:** there were none.
4. **Minutes of meeting held on 15th November 2022:** Circulated in draft on 6th December 2022 and included in the papers were agreed to be a true and accurate record to be signed by Mr Belfour in due course.
5. **Review of confidential minutes:** It was confirmed that the matter which had been the subject of confidential minutes since 25th February 2020 would, as agreed at the meeting of the full Governing Body on 22nd March 2022, remain so classified until review again in March 2023.
6. **Matters Arising:** There were none that would not be picked up by the agenda.
7. **Tracking of actions from previous meetings:** It was noted that since the previous meeting, with the agreement of Mr Belfour and Mr Sheta, two bids had been submitted to the Conditions Improvement Fund (CIF) 23 / 23. The full governing body had given agreement to the provisional commitment of £129,182.75 college funds at its meeting on 8th December 2022.
8. **Premises and Accommodation:**
 - 8.1. **Project reports and plans:** Mr Thompson introduced the “Capital Projects, Accommodation and Premises Report, February 2023”, which had been included in the

papers for the meeting.

Current and Future Capital Projects and Strategic Issues: Mr Thompson described good progress with the Wave 4 T Level Capital Fund project and said that hand-over was expected immediately after the Easter holiday in April 2023. The refurbishment would also provide an office for the Clerk to the Governors. He advised that the new area would be colour-themed to match the Business Hub. Mr Thompson confirmed that, with a few variations, the project was on budget within the contingency limits.

Condition Improvement Fund 2023/24: Mr Thompson reviewed the two bids, prepared with advice from Barker's Associates, that had been submitted to the fund in December 2022. The report included a description and breakdown of costs of each project. The first bid was a resubmission of the water and pipework project which had been unsuccessful the previous year. The project was costed at £655,084.90 to which the college would contribute £66,163.57 (10.1%) if the bid was successful. The grant funding requested was £588,921.33. Mr Belfour noted that there was £169,772.70 budgeted for water supply works in the Annual Programme of Works (APW) 22/23. The second bid was for grant funding of £560,933.12 to refurbish six areas of flat roof in urgent need of repair across the estate. The college contribution would be £63,019.18 (10.1%)

The outcome of the bids was expected in "Spring". Mrs Searle advised that if the bid for the water pipe work was not successful some of the work would be budgeted to the APW 2023 / 2024.

Mrs Medicoff commended the completion of capital projects within contingency but had noticed expensive furniture costs on the APW. She asked whether there was a process in place to avoid similar issues occurring in the future. Mrs Searle outlined the regime of regular project management and internal meetings which reviewed and monitored costs and orders for furniture. Mr Thompson explained that free standing furniture was excluded from the bids and had been budgeted in the APW. He assured the committee that the supplier had sourced items at good prices and the uniformity of colour theme in T Level areas would mean items could be moved around. Mr Thompson said that monthly spending accounts had to be submitted to the ESFA to check that the grant was being used for the purposes it was awarded for. Mrs Medicoff acknowledged the level of scrutiny in place.

Strategic estates review: Mr Thompson reported that the topographical survey and a conditions survey had been completed. The *Estates Strategy review 2022 – 2025* had been received in the papers for the meeting. Mr Thompson prioritised two elements of the review in need of attention and investment.

i) Development of an area of "The Quad" to erect a semi-permanent structure to provide some warmer, sheltered outside space for students, which could also be attractive as an all-weather space to customers hiring space at the college. Mr Thompson advised that some preliminary feasibility work had been undertaken which indicated that, subject to tender, the project would cost an estimated £100k inclusive of VAT. Mr Thompson proposed to include this in the APW budget for 2023 – 2024. In preparation an application for planning permission was to be submitted.

(ii) Mr Thompson outlined the rationale behind an application to wave 5 of the T Level Capital Fund for 50% of costs to refurbish and install specialist equipment in an area on the first floor. He explained that the project would support the launch and delivery of a new T Level, Media, Broadcast and Production to be added to the curriculum offer in

September 2024.

Mr Thompson acknowledged that the costs were high as presented in the report, and he and Mr Belfour emphasised the impact on the college finances (drop of £507k in cash reserves) in 2023 - 2024, the consequence of under-recruitment of students for the current year. This was set out in the table of costs and narrative for this project. Mr Belfour highlighted to the committee that the total cost to the college, if the bid for 50% matched grant funding was successful, would be £445,535. He put this into context of the cashflow reports and the forecast £260k cash balance at the end of July 2024. That amount was held in the Barclays account with a base amount of £1m on deposit with Scottish Widows.

Mrs Seale explained that the figures illustrated a worst-case scenario and would be subject to grant funding yet to be confirmed. She said that the per capita rate for T Level students was higher than for students on other courses, and that cohort was expanding. Actual funding allocations were expected in March. Mr Thompson explained that currently the T Level offer was in addition to BTEC courses but there would be a gradual shift to T Levels. The target was to attract students to the college with the T Level offer.

It was noted that the outcome of the T Level bid was expected in July 2023.

Mrs Searle advised the committee that there was unspent APW budget this year and two extra grants yet to be allocated which could offset some of the spend.

Mr Belfour explained that the college had always been in a position of very good cash balances but that the buildings were old and needed to be made fit for the future.

Mrs Searle emphasised that there was no compulsion to accept the grant funding if the bid was successful.

Mr Sheta commented that including a range of T Levels in the curriculum created a strong strategic advantage as not many other local colleges were offering them. He expressed a preference for the T Level project over the proposed outdoor shelter.

Mrs Searle said that it was unlikely that all three bids would be successful. She reinforced that the key assumption in the financial plans was recruitment of students and affordability would hinge on that. Her view was that the CIF bids should be accepted as the contribution was only 10.1%. She acknowledged that the T Level capital funds if awarded would future proof the college and the decision to accept or not would need careful consideration.

Mrs Medicoff asked whether the equipment in the bid – which was costed as half of the total amount – would have a limited life as it was specialist and might, therefore, require a reinvestment to upgrade it. She wondered whether a cost per student had been calculated and how expensive that was. Mr Thompson said that a top specification had been included which could be reviewed. He explained that whilst some of the equipment was technical, some was rigging which would have a longer life. If the bid was successful a cost per student and the longevity and affordability of the equipment would be assessed in more detail. Mr Thompson reminded the committee that next year would be the final year of T Level funding and, whilst affordability had to be taken seriously, this opportunity to move forward and create suitable facilities may not be available again.

Mrs Searle confirmed to Mr Belfour that the profiling of grant funding had changed and that the next financial return to the ESFA would be in July 2023.

The committee accepted the submission of the application, which Mr Sheta had supported at the time it was due in, and agreed that the decision to proceed with the

project would be taken after enrolment for 2023 – 2024 was known.

Mr Thompson would report in full to the meeting of the governing body on 21st March 2023.

Health and Safety: Mr Thompson noted the recruitment of Jonathan Hitchinson, now in post and making an impact as Health and Safety Compliance Officer.

Sustainability: Mr Thompson advised that progress would partially depend on the outcome of the CIF bids. He announced that the provision of mobile solar panels as resources for engineering students had been provided from the strategic development fund – to contribute to reducing the deficit of green skills in London.

Annual Programme of Works 22/23: Mr Thompson referred to the colour coded budget / actual expenditure table in the report and commented that the APW was more or less completed for the year other than the water supply work which was subject to the outcome of the CIF bid.

The report was accepted with thanks and acknowledgment of the full exposition of the big projects in the plan.

8.2. Estates & Accommodation Strategy 2022 – 2025 (updated Jan 2023): included in the papers for the meeting.

The report had been mostly picked up in the previous item and was noted to have been updated to include completed works. The planned addition of another new T Level, Health and Science in 2025 was highlighted. The development of a Pastoral Hub had been deferred to next year.

Mrs Medicoff referred to the provision for targeted growth in student numbers as one of the foci and asked if an eye was being kept on whether that was realistic. Mr Thompson said that forecasts were based on predicted growth in the number of 16 – 19-year-olds up to 2026 but acknowledged that it was ambitious and information updating those demographic reports was difficult to find. He confirmed the strategic goal was to increase the college roll to capacity. Mrs Medicoff acknowledged that it was flagged on the risk register. Mr Thompson asserted the need to recruit to the forecasted number and confirmed the measures in place to be competitive with local sixth forms. He reported a good number of applications so far for 2023 entry whilst emphasising that the challenge was converting those to enrolments. Keeping the estate contemporary and up to date would support the measures in place to retain the interest of prospective students and keep them warm up until enrolment.

9. Financial Report: Mrs Searle

9.1. Monthly commentary and accounts: Subsequent to the distribution of the agenda, monthly accounts with commentary and cashflow reports for January 2023 had been circulated to all governors. It had been realised that the SAGE account sent out was not the correct version (it wasn't consolidated with the corporate accounts) but this did not affect the cashflow or accounts and Mrs Searle confirmed that the commentary was based on the right figures.

ACTION: Mrs Lewis to email the correct SAGE report to all governors.

9.2. Treasury Monitoring Report: Mrs Searle introduced the report on investments which had been included in the papers for the meeting. The report showed £400k on deposit in a Barclays Premium Account – a savings account with instant access which had been

opened in January 2023, with Mr Belfour's agreement, to take advantage of a better interest rate for surplus funds.

Report noted.

- 9.3. **Rateable value:** Mrs Searle reported that the consultant had secured a rebate of £58k and the case remained open.
- 9.4. **Banking review:** Mrs Searle confirmed that she was satisfied with the good, responsive service being provided by Barclays Bank. She was pleased to have a nominated bank contact.
- 9.5. **Friends of St Francis Xavier Fund:** Mrs Searle noted a balance shown in the accounts of £680 in the restricted reserves used to fund prizes including the annual Keohane award. No action would be required whilst sufficient money was in it.
- 9.6. **Staff pay:** Mr Thompson advised there was no movement with regard to teacher pay and three further dates for strike action in March had been announced. Mr Thompson and Mr Sheta reported the negotiations between unions and NJC (National Joint Council).
Mr Thompson said that support staff had accepted an offer as reported at the previous meeting. He updated this to advise that lower pay points had been uplifted in response to changes in the national minimum wage level.
10. **Funding update & financial projections / plan and returns:** Mrs Searle confirmed that no returns were due currently and that the funding allocation in March would feed into the budget planning and financial forecasting ongoing process.
11. **Accountability Agreement:** The DfE Guidance on Accountability Agreements, December 2022, had been included in the papers for the meeting. Mr Thompson explained this was another requirement which had emerged from the Skills Bill. He said there were two parts to it- the Department was still working on its alignment it to the new FE Colleges Financial Handbook. Part two would be a college statement (10 – 12-page document) covering its plans and purpose and skills needs strategy, who the college is working in partnership with and how it is engaging with LSIPs¹. Mr Thompson explained that initially part two had to be written and signed off by the Governing Body by 31st May 2023. However for this year only an extension to 31st July 2023 could be agreed with the ESFA Territorial Lead. Mr Thompson said he had made a start on the statement. Once agreed it would have to be published on the college website and may form part of the strategic conversation (in the diary for 14th June 2023). Production and publication of an accountability statement would be annual.
12. **College Insurance tendering plan:** Mrs Searle informed the committee that the contract was coming to the end of five years and re-tendering would normally be due. However, she explained that the ONS decision to reclassify colleges as public bodies could require contracting with the government insurance scheme ("RPA"). The revised financial handbook would not be published until March 2024 to give guidance. Mrs Searle had contacted the current insurers who were fully aware of the uncertainty and had indicated that they would agree to a one year extension to the existing contract.
Mrs Searle sought the agreement of governors. Mrs Medicoff asked whether the extension was likely to be on favourable terms and whether there was an alternative plan if not.

¹ Local Skills Improvement Plans

It was agreed that Mrs Searle should contact Hettle and Andrews to obtain terms for a one-year extension.

13. **Non-Core business / income generation update:** The business report with financial projections had been included in the papers for the meeting as presented to the Board of Directors of SFX Corporate Services Ltd at its meeting held on 2nd February 2023. Mrs Lewis, Chair of the Board, introduced the report which was taken as read. Additionally it was noted that Mrs Lewis would remain as a Director of the Trading Subsidiary after her retirement from the college.
Mrs Medicoff noted that Nightingales Nursery was covering its costs but reporting low occupancy and asked whether there was a time scale over which to let it run or expand? Mr Thompson explained that the nursery was very small, limited to 20 places so the capacity to return a large profit was not there and this was not a driving factor. It had been hit by covid in a good year. Mrs Searle said that some better months were forecast. It was emphasised that the nursery provided a “perk” for the college and was used by staff. It would also provide work experience for students on the new childcare T Level launching in September 2023.
14. **Tuition and other Fees: (ref Article of Government 20, fees framework): Annual review of Charging Policy.** Mr Thompson introduced the Charging Policy update for 2023 – 2024 which had been included in the papers for the meeting. He recounted that it had been overhauled substantially last year and highlighted the minor updates to this revised version presented for agreement.
The policy was agreed as presented and would be recommended to the Governing Body for approval and adoption at its meeting on 21st March 2023.
15. **FMCE improvement plan:** The RAG rated monitoring report reviewing progress against the two areas for improvement arising from the FMCE² agreed in November 2022 had been included in the papers for the meeting. Mr Thompson reported the data for student applications which showed an increase compared with the previous four years. He said the number was continuing to increase and now stood at over 2000. Whilst this was promising the key to achieving the target number was conversion from application to enrolment. He had confidence in the current marketing team.
Mr Sheta noted the promising development of a partnership with Surrey County Cricket Club. Mr Thompson said it had come about very quickly and outlined the opportunities it would bring for both students and, potentially, income generation.
Report noted.
16. **Any other business:** there was none.
17. **Risk management:** The current (autumn 2022) risk register and policy had been included in the papers for the meeting – it was being updated for discussion with the Audit Committee the following week. This committee had been asked to consider any new risks emerging from its discussions or modifications to be suggested to existing risks / mitigation on the register.
Mrs Medicoff asked whether there were any risks associated with opening the college for rentals in the area of safeguarding? Mr Graham³ confirmed that all customers were

² Financial Management Control Evaluation

³ Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

required to submit their safeguarding policies and risks assessments to the Lettings Manager for checking. He said the policies and arrangements were usually standard and appropriate. He commented that most rentals happened when the college students were off site (evenings and weekends). Specific arrangements would be made if the rental was taking place during college time and action would be taken if hirers randomly passed through the building. All visitors, including lettings customers, would be required to sign in at reception during college times. Mr Belfour asked whether the college would check that leaders had DBS clearance. Mr Graham said this would be in the safeguarding policy of the organisation and if it wasn't it would be followed up.

Mrs Medicoff referred to the risk for students who had not experienced written exams and might be scared of them – she asked what contingencies were in place to mitigate that. Mr Thompson described the range of support that was being delivered including a series of mock exams and opportunities for timed exercises in class. The college would again work with *Elevate* and organisation which supported exam skills.

18. Review of meeting: The agenda items had been thoroughly discussed and members had appropriate skills and experience.

19. Date of next meeting: Tuesday 20th June 2023.

The meeting ended at 7pm