



**Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Monday 21 March 2022**

**Present: -** Mervyn Jones (Chair)  
Abigail Appleton (Principal)  
Peta Darnley  
Professor Robin Baker OBE  
Clive Hodgeman (via Teams)  
Scott Rolfe

**In attendance: -** Tim Williams (Finance Director)  
Linda Watkins (Clerk to the Governors)

The meeting was quorate as there were six Governors present. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. Apologies for Absence**  
There were no apologies.

**2. Declaration of Interests**  
There were no declarations of interest.

**3. Minutes of the Last Meeting**  
Governors agreed that the Chair should sign the confidential minutes of the last meeting held on 22 November 2021 as a true record.

**Matters arising from the Minutes**

- I. Consultants had not been appointed to develop an estates strategy which would be discussed on the agenda; it was understood that the College would have owner rights of its estates strategy.
- II. The Finance Director had contacted Worcester County Council, who administer the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) to ascertain the actual pension increase. [Post meeting email to Committee 22/03/22 confirmed the salary growth assumption is consistent with that used for formal actuarial valuation of the fund. There was a long-term salary growth assumption of CPI + 1.25% to 1.5% per annum.
- III. Cityheart management committee will raise any issues regarding Station Approach including health and safety issues.
- IV. Gender pay gap information had been reported in the Personnel report presented to the Board.

- V. The Principal reported that the family friendly policy had not been amended from maternity leave to partner and paternity leave. Personnel confirmed that the policy followed the relevant legislation. This could be incorporated in a separate paragraph.
- VI. Professor Baker had not had a discussion with the Head of HE regarding product design or progress of digital futures pathways. A report would be prepared outlining research and demand for proposed new courses in future. The IT and Digital Resources Manager is in contact with JISC regarding assistance to spec technology for digital futures.

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the minutes of the last meeting

#### **4. Strategic Implementation Progress Report**

The Principal presented the report outlining progress against the strategic targets highlighting key areas.

External consultancy would be used to ensure the digital curriculum development planning progresses in a timely manner.

Validation of the Level 5 Foundation degrees for enrolment in 2023 is underway. A Governor asked if a cost analysis with KPIs would be prepared for new courses in future to ensure that these are cost effective to offer. It was agreed that a business plan should be prepared for new or significantly changed courses with academic aspect reported to the AQ&S Committee and financial aspects approved by the F&GP Committee.

The Board had approved the Wellbeing Strategy which will be embedded throughout the College. The College completes staff surveys regularly. Ofsted also complete a formal staff survey during inspection. Mental health and staff engagement groups will be launched in the summer term.

Appropriate external support will be used to progress outstanding audit recommendations.

A Senior Marketing Manager and Digital Marketing Manager have recently been recruited. £17K additional marketing budget has been allocated to boost post-January applications this year; this was included in the management accounts. Marketing spend was front-loaded in the autumn.

Overall application comparisons from 2020 to 2022 were provided for FE and HE applications including firm acceptances to date. HE applications are 38% better compared to 2021; firm acceptances are 40% higher than the same time last year. They are at the same level as 2020. The market is unpredictable with no specific intelligence about reasons. The College is maintaining contact with applicants.

FE applications are good overall. Art and Design and Performing Arts applications remain very strong. Digital Futures have had staff sickness resulting in limited opportunities for staff to do external outreach work in schools; this is a missed opportunity which will be a focus for 2023 recruitment. Applications to Foundation and Portfolio programmes are slightly lower at this early stage in the year.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note progress against strategic objectives

**5. Finance Report** [a confidential minute was recorded for 5 II and III]

- I. Management accounts to 31 January 2022 were noted with specific discussion about risks. Increasing utility costs are a major risk with a provision of £14K added to the budget estimating c£43K cost for a whole year. There was a general consensus that the provision for utilities needed to be increased by potentially c50%. The College uses West Mercia Energy (WME) for most of its utility contracts. WME works on behalf of local authorities, NHS trusts, educational settings and charities. The College is waiting for its next set of capped rates, which start from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. This is an extremely volatile market and subject to change.

Payroll costs are increasing with a provision included in the forecast for increases to National Insurance costs from 1 April and an increase to the National Minimum Wage (NMW). This has increased payroll costs by £12K this year with a whole year impact of c£51K.

The Committee agreed: -

- To note the management accounts to 31 January 2022 and budget update which was a useful paper

**6. Premises and Accommodation Report**

Stronger Towns Fund have appointed Kate Darby Architects to design the Digital Teaching Hub. The internal deadline for submission of the outline business case was the end of March 2022 with submission of the final business case in July. An additional Committee meeting would be arranged early in June to examine the business plan; the F&GP Committee has delegated authority.

**ACTION: CLERK**

The business case would be issued to the Committee by email imminently with an update provided at the Board meeting. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL.**

CBRE's appointment to develop an estates strategy had been deferred with reasons outlined. A conditions survey will be required as part of the remit. The College will be required to submit a substantial amount of information and documents to the consultants. SLT has a

high volume of work and fairly limited experience in this area. The priorities to develop an estates strategy have changed since the initial conversation with CBRE. Governors agreed that CBRE's appointment should not be deferred which could include pre-project work regarding the CRC lease. Clive Hodgeman offered to assist the Principal and Finance Director. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL/FINANCE DIRECTOR.** The consultancy budget would need to increase as the project expanded.

The College Student Experience Officer meets regularly with Cityheart regarding Station Approach. There was a question about the defects liability period which was 12 months from completion with handover in September 2021. It would be important to ensure all issues are addressed with an update to be requested from Cityheart. **ACTION: PRINCIPAL.** To date, early bookings for 2022/23 are good; a breakdown between new and continuing students is being monitored.

**7. Health and Safety Report**

There were no RIDDOR accidents during the period to March with three accidents followed up with visits to hospital. The Health and Safety Committee met in March with discussion on improving reporting near misses. Guidelines and flowcharts are being provided for staff to improve processes, the quality of risk assessments and clarity of responsibility. Examples of previous risk assessments are available for staff.

It was agreed that the health and safety report would be prioritised in position on future agendas. **ACTION: CLERK**

**8. Policies**

The Finance Director presented the revised value for money policy outlining some practices used to ensure value for money. It was agreed that it is important to reflect if there are more cost-effective methods to do things when opportunities arise.

The Committee agreed: -

- To approve the value for money policy

**9. Any other business**

**10. Date and time of next meeting**

The next meeting was arranged for Monday 27 June 2022 commencing at 5.00 pm.

**Signed as a true record**

**Chair** ..... **Date** .....