

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporation Board of North Hertfordshire College, held on Monday 6 February 2017 in Room C103, NHC, Hitchin.

PRESENT

Richard Alberg (Chair)	Paul Holgate
Lynne Ceeney (Vice-Chair)	Rob Irving
Jo Charles (Staff Governor)	Peter Johnston
Sam Coath (Student Governor)	Vernon McClure
Nick Chesher	Ruth Orpwood
Matt Hamnett (Principal/CEO)	

IN ATTENDANCE

Kit Davies (Deputy Principal, NHC)	Paul Harte (Group Finance Director)
Lucy Hann (Managing Director, Hart L&D)	Robert Dale (Clerk to the Corporation)

ITEM 1a: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Apologies for absence had been received from Jeremy Newman.

ITEM 1b: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Richard Alberg declared that he was a director and shareholder of Corndel Ltd, a business operating in the apprenticeship market. This created a conflict with Hart Learning & Development Ltd (Hart L&D) which would be managed by Richard withdrawing from meetings when Hart L&D matters were discussed and by separate circulation of such papers. The position would be kept under review.

Action: Ensure future Hart L&D papers were distributed separately.

ITEM 1c: MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2016 were signed as an accurate record of proceedings.

ITEM 1d: MATTERS ARISING/ACTIONS

Actions had been addressed or were on the agenda for this meeting as follows:

- Develop a draft report to inform members about the Group's financial position. **Action in progress.**
- Arrange Governor Conversation activities. **Action complete.** Arrangements made for w/c 6 March 2017.
- Amend the Schedule of Delegation, recirculate, and make available. **Action complete.** Schedule amended and added to Sharepoint area.
- Circulate the agreed revised Terms of Reference to the Remuneration Committee. **Action complete.** Circulated and added to the Sharepoint area.

ITEM 2: RATIFICATION OF RESOLUTION PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED

A paper proposing to give security for bank borrowing had been agreed by the Board by email. Legal advisers to Lloyds Bank had asked for extra wording to be included, and the amended resolution issued with the meeting papers. **The Board resolved:**

- that the Principal/Chief Executive be authorised to offer suitable capital assets (namely, the Goldsmith Centre, Letchworth and the Stevenage Campus Building) as security for overdraft and loan facilities offered by Lloyds Bank plc and that:
 - (A) Matt Hamnett (the Principal/Chief Executive) and Vernon McClure were authorised to execute any deed or document relating to such security including, without limitation, the legal charges in the form presented to the meeting; and
 - (B) that that any deed or document relating to such security, including, without limitation, the legal charges in the form presented to the meeting are authorised to be delivered and dated;
- in accordance with the articles of governance of North Hertfordshire College Further Education Corporation.

ITEM 3: CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

- We remain confident that we are doing the right things to improve teaching and learning – and are starting to see evidence of impact. Full year outturn data would be critical for inspection.
- The financial position remained tight. Cost control in NHC and Corporate Services and the growth of Hart L&D, would be critical for 2017/18.
- The finance team had substantially improved the position in respect of debts and aged debts and was implementing more effective accounts payable/accounts receivable processes.
- Corporate Services was giving better support to the business, with HR handling complex changes including TUPE transfers into the Schools Trust and Hart L&D. More work was needed on Management Information but progress was evident.
- Work to optimise the estate was progressing well. In-year maintenance was being managed very well by the estates team, within a constrained budget.
- The Area Review continued, but with no material changes under discussion.

Question: *What were staff numbers in different parts of the Corporate Services team?* This information would be circulated.

Action: Circulate information about the number of staff in Corporate Services.

Question: *How was quickly is staff recruitment being completed?* The position had improved and the average time to hire was c25 days. There were 'hard to fill' vacancies in both Hart L&D and NHC – but these were in areas where candidates were hard to source, rather than because we were not content with the HR service.

Question: *How effectively were new systems performing?* Implementation of both Finance and MI systems continued, but this was reaching the point where both systems can support business-as-usual activity.

Question: *Was there confidence in data for the Ofsted visit on 28 February?* Yes. We were confident that we had the data needed to support our position – and can show progress in our use of data since inspection. More work was in hand to create a systematic dashboard for the SMT.

ITEM 4: REPORT FROM THE CHAIR OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE

The Audit Committee had met on 26 January 2017 and had considered:

- Work to address recommendations from internal and external audits, including improving the Risk Management policy and strengthening the finance function.
- A new Whistleblowing policy and a Fraud/Whistleblowing report. The latter summarised one case investigated under the Whistleblowing policy. The conclusions included a finding that procedures for handling petty cash needed to be strengthened but that there was no evidence of inappropriate conduct.

Question: *What action had been taken to tackle the VAT issues identified through audit?* Foundations for better practice had been set and a former VAT inspector had worked with the team to identify priorities and extend experience. A report on potential over/underpayment of VAT was in preparation, but no forecast was available yet.

Question: *How appropriate was our approach to VAT recovery?* An analysis of our approach would be tabled for discussion at the next meeting of the Audit Committee.

Question: *What was the position of our Saudi and Fit4Less operations?* The Saudi colleges were forecasting a better outturn this year than planned and the risk of having to provide more resources to support them was reducing. Gym operations were expecting to hit the business plan outturn (a loss of c£100k) in 2016/17 and there were options to mitigate losses which the CEO was taking forward.

ITEM 5: STUDENT VOICE

The Chair welcomed the Student Union President to his first meeting.

His priority for the year was to help students improve engagement with the College, with teaching and learning, with each other, and with the community. This had begun well with the foundation of some new student societies and campaigning on mental health awareness, women in engineering and anti-bullying. The culture week across all campuses had been well-received.

The Student Parliament had been well-attended and identified changes that would help students – eg larger lockers able to accommodate motorbike helmets – as well as reflecting on challenges about Maths and English (M&E) teaching. The Students Union was working with Claire Cooper at the behest of the Quality & Innovation Committee to explore ways to promote M&E attendance.

Question: *What was the level of student engagement with the SU?* There had been a good turn-out for the site representative meetings and student forums. The recent Parliament meeting had been disrupted by a power failure, but had about 60 to 70 students present at the start. The SU recognised the importance of showing that student views were listened to and acted upon if possible.

Question: *What could the Board do to support this work?* The forthcoming governor conversation sessions would enable governors to see and listen directly to the student body and show their support for the SU priorities.

ITEM 6A: NHC UPDATE

The agreed Path to Good was being followed and several indicators showed that the Board could be confident about the future:

- Actions to improve teaching and learning were having an impact;
- The student survey showed many positives;
- There had been a big improvement in M&E resit results in November.

NHC would continue to need to look for efficiency in delivery as well as quality; there might be lessons from other colleges which maximised use of a small estate footprint.

Question: *What was the position over the proposed closure of the Sports Hall to non-student use?* Keeping the facility open for extended hours was costly, but it was valued by the community. The balance between focussing resources on students and making facilities available to the community was a delicate one and communicating the factors affecting this had been poorly handled. The facility would stay open in the short term whilst options for its long term operation were considered.

Question: *Would more Curriculum Quality Reviews (CQRs) be carried out?* Yes. All curriculum areas would be reviewed before the end of the year under a robust and intensive process, for which teams receive little notice (as in an Ofsted inspection).

Question: *How was the performance of Traineeships?* The recent CQR had highlighted good practice, and identified a few areas of focus for the rest of 2016/17 – including Maths and English (a particular challenge within the Traineeship model).

ITEM 6B: PMLD OPPORTUNITY – BOARD UPDATE

A building, currently leased by the Hart Schools Trust, could be converted into a facility to support students with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD). Feasibility studies were under way and there was evidence of need in the North Hertfordshire area, which the Group could meet. Questions remained over the availability of capital funding for conversion work and evidence that provision would be sustainable in the medium term. Governors asked:

Question: *Would the Group develop and run a PMLD operation?* Yes. Delivery of such services was an area of excellence for NHC. Hertfordshire was inadequately served, and demand for existing specialist facilities at Oaklands exceeded supply.

Question: *Did we have the skills to provide a high quality service?* Yes, in terms of teaching and education. Other skills (eg medical and therapeutic) would be needed. A national expert in this field (Dr Rhona Tutt) lived in Letchworth and could be contacted for advice and support. If the development went ahead, the location next to the Jackie's Drop-in Centre would be convenient.

ITEM 7: HART LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Following his declaration of interest, the Chair withdrew from the meeting and the chair was taken by Lynne Ceeney. Developments highlighted included:

- Sales were slow immediately before the apprenticeship levy came into force, as affected businesses were deferring recruitment until they could benefit from it.

- Hart L&D was taking 230 learners into its direct delivery from a sub-contractor that had caused concern about the quality of its provision. TUPE would have applied in respect of the tutors, but none had chosen to join the business.
- Performance was good, with success rates and attendance strong. Functional Skills outcomes could be better and the team was working to embed delivery into vocational programmes in the same way as in the college. A change of Awarding Body and extra support for students would improve the position.
- Traineeship recruitment had been slow but was recovering.
- Overall, there was a risk to the forecast level of contribution at the year end, but costs were also being tightly controlled. The main priority was to secure as many of the potential deals currently in play as possible.

Question: *What was the main obstacle to completing deals?* Because so many were coming to a head in the next six weeks, resources would be stretched very thin. Bid writers and a commercial modeller were joining the team shortly which would help. The other main barrier was client willingness to make decisions quickly.

Question: *Was there a debrief process if deals were not secured?* Yes. That would be a standard process, although few bids had yet gone to formal tender.

Question: *What was the mechanism for identifying business?* There was a clear focus on opportunities in sectors where the Group had experience and expertise and selectivity about which opportunities to bid for – eg a focus on the potential reward for the effort. Securing the first few contracts was vital in building credibility for the future.

Once this discussion had finished, Lynne Ceeney recalled Richard Alberg to the room and he resumed the Chair.

ITEM 8: PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

The Board endorsed the proposed Terms of Reference. There were some issues for the Search Committee to consider including recruitment (eg for the Hart Schools Trust Board) development and succession planning. The Chair of the Trust would join the Corporation Board at the start of April once the Area Review had been completed.

ITEM 9: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Airbus Discovery Space

- Launched in partnership between Airbus Defence and Space and NHC, led by Nick Chesher, this aimed to encourage students to consider STEM careers. It was set up along charitable lines, intending to promote its educational facilities to a range of users, with NHC focussing on school-age children. Financial support from the Airbus Foundation minimised financial risk to NHC, and college students could support the project as a learning opportunity.
- The Board agreed to hold its next meeting at the facility, and asked that a structured discussion opportunity be created to draw on a wide range of perspectives to develop the programme. Governors asked:

Question: *Could the facility be promoted through the educational media and by presentations at conferences?* Yes, editorial space was being secured in a training journal. The Bloodhound car project might be a worthwhile model. Outreach events and links to businesses wishing to deliver social value were worth pursuing.

Action: Workshop ideas for development and discuss at the next Board meeting.

Governor Handbook

- Members welcomed the creation of this comprehensive document, which would be extremely useful for new joiners.

Action: Kit Davies to meet Paul Holgate to explain data included in the document.

ITEM 10: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Monday 3 April 2017, at the Airbus Discovery Space, Stevenage, starting at 18.00.

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Signed – Chair of Governors

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Date

CORPORATION ACTION LOG

Meeting	Minute Reference	Summary of Action	Lead/timing
06/02/17	1a.	Distribute Hart L&D papers separately.	Robert Dale 24/03/17
06/02/17	2.	Circulate information about the number of staff in Corporate Services.	Robert Dale 24/03/17
06/02/17	9.	Workshop ideas for development and discuss at the next Board meeting.	Kit Davies 17/03/17
06/02/17	9.	Explain data included in the Governor Handbook to Paul Holgate	Paul Harte 28/02/17