

MINUTES

**South Essex Colleges Group Corporation Board
MS Teams
Tuesday 3 September 2024 at 17:00**

Date and timings: 17:00 to 18:52

Location MS Teams

Present (Governors): Sally Dicketts (SD) (Chair)
Rick Olver (RO)
Gerry Bender (GB)
Denise Brown (DB)
Sue Leonard (SL)
Jo Brooker (JB) (Staff Governor)
Aaron Thompson (AT)
Seye Awolusi (SA)
Paul Gribbon (PG)
Andrew Overs Dowsett (AD)
Noel Gibb (NG)
Francesca Phillips (FP) (HE Student Governor)
Rachel Sanders (RS) (HE Student Governor)

Minutes Carrie Brown (CB)- Head of Governance

Clerk to the Corporation Lana Jackman (LJ)- Executive Director Governance and Strategy

In attendance Adam Fahey (AF) Deputy CEO- Curriculum and Quality
Zed Mohammed (ZM) Vice CEO- Finance
Ansar Mahmood (AM) Vice CEO- MIS, IT and Marketing
Jayne Sheehan (JS) Vice CEO- Innovation
Hayley Phare (HP) Executive Director Curriculum

Apologies

Item

0. Agenda

01.00 Chair's Welcome and Introduction.

SD welcomes AD, NG, FP and RS to the meeting, formal introductions were given to the group.

02.00 Minutes and matters arising.

02.01 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2024.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

02.02 Matters Arising.

There were no outstanding matters arising from the minutes of the meeting 9 July 2024 that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda. It was noted that the actions from the previous meeting have been completed.

03.00 Briefing on the curriculum reforms and the strategic impact of the reforms for South Essex Colleges Group.

HP gives a presentation for the Corporation Board on the curriculum reform noting the scope and timeline for curriculum planning detailing that the falling recruitment numbers trend needs to be reversed. HP details that the SECG curriculum planning process will begin in October and conclude by Christmas in line with the recommendations made by the DfE curriculum efficiency and effectiveness review.

HP gives a detailed update on the reformation of qualifications noting the new national skills body and the review of Post-16 Level 3 and below reforms noting that the DfE will place a one year pause on the removal of the 16 to 19 funding from qualifications assessed as overlapping with T Levels in construction, the built environment, digital, education, early years, health and science.

SL says SECG must think about the vocational courses oversubscribed and the local need for them. SL adds that SECG needs to compete with schools in the local area on T-Levels and vocational recruitment.

RO states the need for the Governors to be more fully briefed on Curriculum Planning including receiving a more detailed scoping document. SD responds that the Governors' role is to monitor the strategic issues and not monitor the day-to-day operational elements of the plan. SD adds that this is not about what is being taught but what the philosophy of learning and career pathways are at the college. SD highlights that the away day will address more of these points.

NG raised four points:

- 1) T Levels – NG asks what is the take up at the Group (23/24) and what was the retention rate? In addition generally what is the learner & staff view around them?

HP responds that SECG does perform well with T-Levels with DB adding that SECG was an early adopter of T-Levels. DB notes that retention on T-Levels is an issue due to the placement element with learners often being poached by the employers who have facilitated the placement before learners have completed their course.

- 2) SEND achievements – NG notes that Strategic Goal 1 is focused on qualifications and is conscious that this can be restricting for SEND learners; As we know, the results for SEND learners are ipsative so how are they presented to the Board?

HP confirms that the SEND provision is being reviewed and actively discussed at the moment with that holistic context at the forefront.

- 3) Outreach - given the levels of deprivation in the communities SECG serve, what is the range of the outreach for SECG and what's on offer? NG adds that he appreciates it's also a funding issue, does that come from the AEB?

- 4) SECG strengths - what are the college's strengths in curriculum delivery? Do you think it matches local/regional need or is that the piece of work you intend to do?

HP to respond to these points via email to ensure that a full, detailed response is received.

GB asks how the curriculum will meet the individual learners and the local area's needs. HP notes that the local area's need will cater to the individual need and ensure that the curriculum offer is delivered appropriately for the individual.

04.00 Learner Outcome Outlook.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Learner Outcome Outlook report.

AF presents the Learner Outcome Outlook report noting SECG set performance targets of 84% for overall learner achievement, 91% for Adults and 80% for 16-18s. At 30/08/24, overall achievement for 23/24 is 83.0%, 84.9% for Adults and 80.5% for 16-18s. With 7.9% (1359) of achievement still outstanding, 2023/24 achievement is up by 6.2% on the previous year for 16-18s, and 5.1% down for Adults. There are 312 unconfirmed outcomes at 16-18 and 1047 at 19+. AF notes that SECG is looking to land between 82-83% once all achievement has been accounted.

SD asks what is the outstanding area of the group? AF details that the Level 3 provision (87.9% achievement which is significantly above national benchmarks), the provision at Basildon Town Centre and the creative industries provision at Southend City College. AF notes the Level 1 provision has increased by 20%.

SD asks what are the key areas for concern? AF responds GCSE High Grades and Thurrock.

NG asks if a detailed document is provided later in the academic year with the starters and leavers for each level and how special needs are presented? NG asks if this could also be presented by postcode to factor in the deprivation areas. AF notes that SECG do have all this detail particularly for SEND learners which are achieving at the same level as the other learners on its dashboard. DB comments that all Governors can have access to the live digital dashboard if Governors wishes to view the data and the cross referencing.

RO notes the improvement from last year, particularly in apprenticeships.

SL asks why the high grades are so low and what actions are being taken to improve the high grades results? AF responds that the attendance and retention for E&M is consistent, and the learners will have the opportunity to improve, however the teaching is not at the level required to meet the learners willingness. DB notes that change in Edexcel grade boundaries did not aid the high grades. AF notes that a plan for this area will be put in place and highlights that the staffing in this area has changed.

NG asks if there is a disparity between local school results and the SECG results? AF notes that there is and comments that this does need to be addressed.

SD thanked AF for the report and notes that the destinations report would be interesting to review as this links to the SECG broader mission and values.

05.00 Recruitment/Enrolment Update

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the recruitment/enrolment update.

AM presents the update noting that there is a slight increase in the 16-18 allocation which has been set by the ESFA at 4,488 (+16 on the previous year). AM notes that the 4706 has increased by 36 learners this week, AM notes that SECG has now gone past its allocation, but attrition needs to be accounted for due to the churn between now and day 42. AM details that Adult recruitment takes place all year and is successful and should reach the 110% target.

SD asks if the 505 apprentices are all paid for and not Past End Date (PEDs) and therefore unfunded]? JS responds that SECG have 77 PEDs but for context this time last year this was at 262 and a lot of work has been done to achieve this reduction.

RO asks for an update on the HE enrolment? AF notes that HE enrolment doesn't start for another week for 143 learners have been invited to enroll into the first year, 18 who have come via clearing however this is short of the 180 target.

SD asks the percentage of learners that internally progress? AM to show SD this on the data dashboards.

06.00 Finance update.

06.01 CFFR submission.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the CFFR submission paper.

ZM presents the CFFR submission paper noting that this includes a 2-3 year plan with future forecasts. ZM details the following key points, SECG is looking to be *requires improvement* and highlights the work that has taken place to clean the balance sheet. ZM comments that SECG is cash tight, and resources will need to be managed accordingly.

ZM asks the Corporation Board to note the risk section in the paper. ZM notes that finance is now back in house as the joint venture agreement has been disbanded, however staffing for this area is an issue. ZM comments that SECG has a Gold Interim Audit Recommendation for internal controls highlighting the progress in this area.

NG asks about the increase in agency staff and the workforce percentage this applies to. ZM details that this is high, it was £2.5m last year, it is £1.8m this year, this has been achieved by both reducing the numbers and the rates that SECG is paying. ZM details that is 6.1% of the workforce which is lower than the sector average.

NG details the jump of the High Needs costs £0.3m to £2.5m? ZM answers that this is due to the challenge that SECG is putting to the LA which has resulted in an increase in funding. AF adds that some detail about the cumbersome process for this funding but the rise from £0.3m to £2.5m is due to the LA reassessing the funding, as previously SECG was underfunded.

PG asks about the moderation process and if there are updates on this? ZM responds that the ESFA are looking to take stock after the CFFR.

AD asks about the issues of the audit accounting adjustments and if these have potential for adjustment or interpretation? AD notes the increase in the audit fees and asks about the drivers for this. ZM gives a brief update on the audit process and asks to meet with AD outside of the meeting to give a detailed response to these queries.

07.00 Governor Recruitment.

07.01 Formal approval of Kate Merritt- Independent Governor.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** Kate Merritt as an Independent Governor to Corporation Board and Southend City and Thurrock Local College Boards [LCB] until 8th October 2028.

07.02 Formal approval of Dr. Marco Steel- Independent Governor.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** Marco Steel as an Independent Governor to Southend City LCB until 8th October 2026. This is with a view to review this in January 2025 once he has passed the introduction process on the LCB. The Board will then decide on the recommendation of the LCB to move Dr. Steel to the Corporation Board.

08.00 Governance matters.

08.01 Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 (KCSIE).

The Corporation Board were reminded to review Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024 and to confirm that they have read and understood its contents. A deadline of 30th September 2024 is given for completion.

SD notes the importance of this for the upcoming Ofsted visit.

08.02 Governors to complete the Declaration of Interest, Related Party Forms and Code of Conduct.

The Corporation Board were reminded to complete and return the Declaration of Interest, Related Party Forms and Code of Conduct. A deadline of 30th September 2024 is given for completion.

08.03 Registration of Interest to Chair

- Local College Board Southend City College
- Local College Board Basildon College's
- Local College Board Thurrock College
- Staff Regulatory Board
- Learner Regulatory Board
- South East Institute of Technology

CB asks the Corporation Board to register their interest in Chairing the Boards stated above via email by 30th September 2024. The time commitment was outlined for each Board noting that these each have 3 meetings per year.

09.00 Policies.

09.01 Safeguarding Policy.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the Safeguarding Policy.

AF presents the updated Safeguarding Policy and notes that there are no significant changes, and any changes are details in the additional document.

AT notes the section 7 amendment to add the gender questions in LGBTQ+ groups and asks why this is separate to the vulnerable questioning? DB notes that this has been added due to the society not fully accepting that the LGBTQ+ learners are not as accepted as vulnerable.

FP asks 4 very pertinent questions regarding the safeguarding procedure noting:

- Section 1.4 the wording around learners not being allowed to leave the meeting room could this be reviewed and there might be circumstances where a learner might feel distressed in one room
- Section 5.1 states that if there are more than one staff members present during the disclosure of abuse only one staff member has to make a report, could this be reviewed to both staff members or a collaborative report to ensure accuracy?
- Section 5.4 could there be some clarification as to why there is confidentiality and information sharing agreements in relation to allegations of sexual violence or abuse?
- Section 6.3 point three asking is there is a procedure for assessing if informing the next of kin will be harmful? For example, if the next of kin removes access to a mobile phone but the mobile phone is being used to access mental health support etc.

It was agreed that these questions should be reviewed outside the meeting and full responses would be circulated to the full Corporation Board. DB notes that some elements of this procedure are due to the SECG statutory responsibilities as there was a change from the Government to increase the parent's right to know and whilst these are within the existing legislation SECG must comply. If these points are not within the SECG discretion they will have to remain in the procedure.

PG notes how helpful the additional summary document was for detailing the changes within the policy.

Meeting moved to confidential items with JB, RS and FP leaving the meeting.

11.00 Any other business.

12.00 Dates of future meetings.

Tuesday 8th October 2024- Corporation Board- in person
 Monday 21st October 2024- Board Development Day- in person
 Tuesday 10th December 2024- Corporation Board- via MS Teams
 Tuesday 14th January 2025- Board Development Day- in person
 Tuesday 11th February 2025- Corporation Board- via MS Teams
 Tuesday 18th March 2025- Strategic Leadership Workshop- in person
 Tuesday 6th May 2025- Corporation Board- in person
 Tuesday 3rd June 2025- Corporation Board- via MS Teams
 Tuesday 24th June 2025- Board Development Day- in person
 Tuesday 15th July 2025- Corporation Board- in person

13.00 Board Evaluation.

Governors are encouraged to provide feedback on the meeting and background documentation.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 18:52 hrs

Signed.....Dated.....

Item	Actions	Deadline	Lead	Status
Actions from 3 September 2024				
04.00	Destinations report to be added to the next Corporation Board agenda	05/09/2024	CB	Completed
05.00	SD and AM to meet to discuss the data dashboards	08/10/2024	CB/AM	
06.00	ZM and AD to meeting to discuss the auditor issues	08/10/2024	CB/ZM	In progress
08.01	All Governors to confirm via email that they have read and understood Keeping Children Safe and Education	30/09/2024	ALL	
08.02	All Governors to complete and return Declaration of Interest, Related Party Forms and Code of Conduct	30/09/2024	ALL	
08.03	Registrations of Interest to Chair the Boards outlined in 08.03 to be emailed to CB	30/09/2024	ALL	
09.01	Safeguarding Procedure queries to be reviewed and responded to with the response shared with all Governors	01/10/2024	AF/CB	