

MINUTES

South Essex Colleges Group Corporation Board Via Microsoft Teams Tuesday 10 December 2024 at 18:00

Date and timings:	18:00 to 19:40
Location	MS Teams
Present (Governors):	Sally Dicketts (SD) (Chair) Rick Olver (RO) Gerry Bender (GB) Denise Brown (DB) (Group CEO) Jo Brooker (JB) (Staff Governor) Aaron Thompson (AT) Seye Awolusi (SA) Andrew Overs Dowsett (AD) Kate Merritt (KM) Kianna Smith (KS)
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
Apologies	Noel Gibb (NG)
Item	
00.00 Agenda	
00.00 Chair's welcome and introduction.	SD welcomes everyone to the meeting.
01.00 Ratification of Corporation Board Membership.	<i>18:20 KS, RO and GB leave the meeting.</i>
01.01 Student Governor- Kianna Smith.	The Corporation Board <u>RESOLVE TO APPROVE</u> Kianna Smith as the FE Student Governor.
01.02 Support Staff Governor- Tina Booth.	The Corporation Board <u>RESOLVE TO APPROVE</u> Tina Booth as the Support Staff Governor.
01.03 Independent Governor- Rick Olver.	The Corporation Board <u>RESOLVE TO APPROVE</u> Rick Olver to extend his term as Independent Governor by one term (4 years).
01.04 Independent Governor- Gerry Bender.	The Corporation Board <u>RESOLVE TO APPROVE</u> Gerry Bender to extend his term as Independent Governor by one term (4 years).

18:23 KS, GB and RO rejoin the meeting.

02.00 Preliminary items.

02.01 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest.

Apologies were received from Noel Gibb.

02.02 Urgent business notified in advance.

None.

03.00 Minutes and matters arising.

03.01 Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2024.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

03.02 Matters Arising.

There were no outstanding matters arising from the minutes of the meeting 21 October 2024 that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

RO asks when the final figures for the performance reviews will be available? AM notes that RB will send these out to the Corporation Board.

ACTION: Report to be produced and emailed out to the Corporation Board on staff reviews when they take place and when they should take place and how many have taken place this year

STRATEGY.

04.00 Curriculum, Quality and Learner Experience.

04.01 Quality Improvement Plan [QIP].

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO DEFER THE APPROVAL** the Quality Improvement Plan pending further work.

AF presents the QIP noting that the Ofsted report has been incorporated into this. AF details that the English and Maths [E&M] issues are still ongoing and South Essex Colleges Group [SECG] needs to focus on this for the next 2-3 years to incrementally start to increase outcomes.

RO asks about the E&M situation noting that this has been an issue for a long time and if there is a plan to resolve this? AF confirms that attendance is a key problem and he is meeting with Hayley Phare, Executive Director for Curriculum to discuss this and come up with an action plan. AF details that attendance for E&M is low across the Group with the exception of Basildon Town Centre [BTC].

GB comments on the initial assessment and notes his disappointment that this was not completed in a timely manner. GB asks about the emphasis on the new approach to E&M from the new Government? AF notes that this is a Government matter and SECG need to progress on this Government strategy. AF details the need to focus on the attendance.

KS gives feedback from her peers noting that they do not feel that the lessons are advanced enough. AF thanks KS for her feedback and notes that particularly at Southend City College learner feedback is being used to put in place actions in relation to poor teaching.

AT asks if attendance is physical attendance and can this move to have some online element? AF confirms that attendance must be physical attendance as it is part of the conditions of funding.

SA asks for feedback on the outcome of the current SECG current strategies for E&M? AF notes that the current strategies are not working and there needs to be a change of direction to get some impact.

JB gives some feedback on one of the new E&M teachers and notes how fantastic they are citing one specific example, who is going to be filmed, to highlight outstanding teaching to the other tutors. JB also gives feedback on the mindset of the learners that have already failed at E&M and the need to focus on their resilience to improve their attendance for E&M. AF gives praise for this idea and notes that a lot of CPD has been given to the E&M staff.

KM asks if there is something that BTC is doing that could be mirrored across the other sites? AF details the brilliant management of the learners at BTC but adds that BTC is a very small site (380 learners) which makes this easier, however this approach could possibly be explored at Luckyn Lane and Stephenson Road.

SD comments that the QIP is very clear on monitoring but lacks detail on raising the quality of learning. SD adds that there needs to be more detail on how SECG will engage and have inspirational learning through thoughtful teaching. SD reflects on the Southend City College and how the English classrooms are really engaging but the Maths classrooms are not well designed.

SD queries how SECG will design the curriculum so that English is intricately linked for the vocational elements. SD cites the importance of the timetabling for E&M and if the vocational areas reinforcing the importance of the E&M lessons.

SD notes the need to meet the learners where they are at reviewing how they have been taught previously to build on their preexisting knowledge, instead of trying to teach the learners another new methodology. SD agrees that a radical new approach needs to be taken in E&M however, this approach needs to be reflected in the QIP.

SD adds that the personal development elements of the QIP did not come out strong enough and needed to be more explicit especially given the Ofsted feedback in this area.

ACTION: The Corporation Board to receive an updated QIP once the innovative solutions for the E&M issues are ready to present.

04.02 Self-Assessment Review [SAR]/Ofsted.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the SAR.

SD notes that the Corporation Board are delighted with the Ofsted outcome.

RO notes that EDI does not really stand out in the SAR or in the Corporation Board papers and this needs to be more explicit. DB notes that EDI is implicit in everything SECG does but it is not explicit in reporting generally and this needs to be changed.

05.00 Finance and Resources 2023-2024 Accounts.

05.01 Financial Statements and Regularity Auditor report.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** Financial Statements and Regularity Auditor report.

ZM gives a brief presentation to the Corporation Board giving detail on the papers and the top line points.

ZM notes a breach of the Managing Public Money Treasury rules due to a severance payment made via ESS Ltd.

ZM details the material uncertainty around the Averley site and the need to get further assurance from the ESFA and DfE. ZM adds that this assurance is being sought from the DfE and he is meeting with the DfE tomorrow.

SD asks for the consequences if the DfE ask for the £3.25m additional funds from this site? ZM notes that this charge has not been noted on Land Registry and the DfE would not have been aware of this if it wasn't for this audit recommendation.

ZM emphasises the risk around cash for South Essex Colleges Group (SECG) and details that the EBITDA is now much stronger. ZM highlights the reduction in the operating deficit.

RO asks about the Backstage Centre Ltd and if that is forecast to make a loss? ZM notes that this is currently but active steps are being taken with an options appraisal to review the best way forward.

SD congratulates ZM on the impressive reduction of audit recommendations (from 61 to 11) and also the improved EBITDA in very challenging circumstances. SD thanks ZM on behalf of the Corporation Board.

ZM details the full audit recommendations to the Corporation Board.

SA asks about the tracking of the Audit recommendations and how these are progressed? ZM notes that these are done via a tracker and this is presented to the Audit and Risk Committee at each meeting.

AD asks when the final version of the accounts will be available for the Governors? ZM details that these will be circulated to the Corporation Board.

ACTION: Final audited accounts to be circulated to the Corporation Board.

SD notes that the Regularity Audit Self-Assessment does give the Corporation Board a helpful overview on points and the Board should be reviewing as a part of their responsibilities.

05.02 Management Letter.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Management Letter.

05.03 Letter of Representation.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Letter of Representation.

05.04 Regularity Audit Self-Assessment.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Regularity Audit Self-Assessment.

05.05 Subsidiary Draft Audited Accounts.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Subsidiary Draft Audited Accounts.

05.06 ESFA correspondence.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the ESFA correspondence.

IMPLEMENTATION.

06.00 Policies.

06.01 Health and Safety Policy.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the Health and Safety Policy.

ZM presents the Health and Safety Policy and the plan, do, check, act feature.

SD asks about the reporting of Health and Safety issues to the Corporation Board? DB notes that this does need to come to the Corporation Board.

ACTION: LJ to ensure that Health and Safety is periodically reviewed at the Corporation Board.

GB asks about the accountability of Health and Safety and if this is a board responsibility? SD notes that this is Corporation Board responsibility and there needs to be a report. DB confirms that if there is a reportable event the Corporation Board is informed straight away.

06.02 HE Fees Policy.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the HE Fees Policy with the outlined amendments.

AT notes line 5.4 in the policy notes a £25 late fee asking how much does SECG profit from this and questions the ethical principal of this for learners that are already struggling? ZM notes that this is very rarely executed as most learners pay fees via the Student Loan Company.

DB notes the reason for the late fee payment that it is cover some of the costs should SECG need to go to a debt collection agency, which is a last resort. DB notes the need to Manage Public Money effectively and this fee builds into that.

AD details the impact on the cash flow and notes that this fee seems to be fair.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO AGREE** to keep the £25 late fee but the Corporation Board will be made aware if this clause is utilised.

KM queries the employer payment section and notes that this should read that they should be 'able' to pay. KM asks that there is consistency in spelling and grammar.

ACTION: Employer payments section to be amended to remove 'un' and the policy is reviewed for consistency in spelling and grammar.

07.00 Governance matters.

07.01 Ratification of Committee Chairs.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the following Committee Chairs:
Governance and Remuneration Committee: Rick Olver
Learner Regulatory Board: Noel Gibb

It is noted that the Chair of Audit and Risk Committee and the Staff Regulatory Board is yet to be confirmed.

07.02 Local College Boards update.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the following Local College Board Chairs:

Southend City Local College Board: Kate Merritt
Thurrock Local College Board: Aaron Thompson

It is noted that the Chair of Basildon Local College Board is yet to be confirmed.

07.03 Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report.

COMMITTEE ITEMS.

08.00 Audit and Risk Committee.

08.01 Minutes of the meeting 3rd December 2024.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the minutes of the 3rd December 2024 Audit and Risk Committee.

09.00 Governance and Remuneration Committee.

Meeting cancelled and therefore item unnecessary.

10.00 Any other business.

AD raises the Poppy Appeal and notes how well this is done at SECG. The Corporation Board details it's thanks to the staff for their work on this event.

AT notes that submitting questions in advance is a challenge with the vast amounts paperwork and wondered if papers could be made available earlier. SD details that there might be a difficulty for the Executive Board members to complete these papers earlier but the point will be explored.

AM details that the Data Dashboard will be ready for all members in January.

SD expresses her thanks to all SECG staff for their hard work this tough term and wishes them a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

11.00 Dates of future meetings.

Tuesday 14th January 2025- Board Development Day- in person
 Tuesday 11th February 2025- Corporation Board- in person
 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

12.00 Board Evaluation.

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

19:18 KS, JB, AM, AF, JS and ZM leave the meeting.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 19:18 hrs

Signed 

Dated 11th February 2025

Item	Actions	Deadline	Lead	Status
Actions from 10 December 2024				
00.00	Meeting timings to be reviewed and checked for consistency and accuracy across all diaries	ASAP	CB	Completed
00.00	Pre submitted questions and answers to be circulated to all Corporation Board members	ASAP	CB	Completed
03.02	Report to be produced and emailed out to the Corporation Board on staff reviews when they take place and when they should take place and how many have taken place this year		AM via RB	AM has emailed RB to request this is completed
04.01	The Corporation Board to receive an updated QIP once the innovative solutions for the E&M issues are ready to present.		AF	
05.01	Final audited accounts to be circulated to the Corporation Board.		CB	Completed
06.01	LJ to ensure that Health and Safety is periodically reviewed at the Corporation Board		LJ	
06.02	Employer payments section to be amended to remove 'not' and the policy is reviewed for consistency in spelling.	ASAP	CB/ZM	Completed