

MINUTES

**South Essex Colleges Group Corporation Board
7E.03 Southend College
Tuesday 11 February 2025 at 18:00**

Date and timings:	18:00 to 21:00
Location:	7E.03 Southend College
Present (Governors):	Sally Dicketts (SD) (Chair) Rick Olver (RO) Gerry Bender (GB) Denise Brown (DB) (Group CEO) Jo Brooker (JB) (Staff Governor) Kate Merritt (KM) Noel Gibb (NG) Kianna Smith (KS) (Student Governor) Tina Booth (TB) (Staff 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 Steph Pearman (SP) Head of School for English Rosette Mitala (RM) Head of School for Maths Jane Belcher (JB) Head of Safeguarding
Apologies:	Aaron Thompson (AT) Andrew Overs Dowsett (AD)
Absent:	Seye Awolusi (SA)

Item

- 00.00 Agenda**
- 01.00 Chair's welcome and introduction.**
SD welcomes attendees and opens the meeting.
- 02.00 Preliminary items.**
 - 02.01 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest.**
Apologies were received from Aaron Thompson and Andrew Overs Dowsett.
 - 02.03 Declarations of Interest.**
No additional declarations of interest other than those already registered.
 - 02.02 Urgent business notified in advance.**

None.

03.00 Review January Away Day.

- 03.01** Governors share their appreciation of the January Away Day, noting that it is a positive and valuable experience. It provides an opportunity for Governors and the Executive Team to connect, reflect, and build stronger partnerships. Many highlight the honesty, collaboration, and facilitation, with key takeaways focusing on maintaining momentum, fostering collaboration, and aligning the Corporation Board and Executive Team more closely.

SD reflects on developments in the Further Education [FE] sector and emphasises the need for radical transformation at SECG to secure its survival, given market changes that will reduce the number of required FE colleges.

The Corporation Board discusses ideas for the March Away Day, agreeing it should focus on aligning the Growth Strategy, ensuring clarity in communication, and prioritising learners, particularly meeting the needs of Generation Alpha. Governors agree to explore strategic priorities, balance growth and quality, define SECG's niche, and enhance staff involvement in problem-solving and teaching and learning discussions.

SD asks the Board whether an external facilitator is required for the next Away Day. Opinions are divided. SD will work with DB to define an agenda for the 18 March 2025 Strategic Away Day and share it with the full Corporation Board.

04.00 Minutes and matters arising of the previous meeting.

04.01 Minutes of 10 December 2024.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

04.02 Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no outstanding matters arising from the minutes of the meeting 10 December 2024 that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

STRATEGIC ITEMS.

05.00 Growth Report- Finance Strategy.

DB provides an update on population projections for SECG's recruitment areas, stating that these remain stable until 2035, placing SECG in a modest growth scenario. DB notes that AF is reviewing the curriculum and SECG's unique selling point (USP). She highlights the impact of AI, indicating that while curriculum packages will largely remain the same, what and how they are taught will change significantly.

DB delivers her presentation, sharing key insights on market analysis and growth opportunities:

- **Basildon:** Market share has dropped due to school sixth forms and a narrow offer. Recovery opportunities lie in Health and Social Care and Engineering.
- **Thurrock:** SECG has lost 6% of market share, with competitors growing. Expansion is possible in Engineering, IT, and Creative Media.
- **Southend City:** Market share remains stable at 31%. Growth is limited unless the curriculum expands through A-Level programmes.

Adult Education: Participation rates are low, presenting growth opportunities in finance, care, and construction. Expanding digital learning is key, though government funding cuts require a more commercial approach.

Higher Education: SECG continues as a boutique provider of degrees aligned with its strategic values, with growth potential through HTQs via the IoT (£1.75m claw-back).

Apprenticeships: This is a key area for development, targeting £1.5m in growth. Currently, SECG holds only 3% of the apprenticeship market share.

DB concludes by stating that the goal is to reach a £60m turnover by 2030, representing £6.95m in growth, but some of this will require investment in staffing and resources.

Governors raise key questions about market size, transport routes, online learning provision, marketing strategy, and curriculum gaps. Discussions focus on SECG's external perception, facility optimisation, innovation, and community engagement to position SECG as a hub for transformation.

KS left the meeting 19:00

Finance Strategy.

ZM summarises the finance strategy, stressing the importance of achieving 'Good' financial health. He highlights the need to reduce the creditor balance, reinvest in infrastructure, and build AI investment into the digital strategy.

RO asks for clarification on staff utilisation. ZM notes it is currently at 76%, but this depends on systems and processes that need reviewing for accuracy. DB confirms this figure will be reviewed to ensure clarity and reflection of inputs.

SD asks about projected growth numbers and the impact of selling land on SECG's finances, including best- and worst-case scenarios. ZM confirms that this will be presented in future reports.

OPERATIONAL AREAS OF CONCERN.

SP, RM, HP join the meeting 19:40

06.00 English and Maths.

The English and Maths Senior Team introduce themselves and give an overview of their role.

SP notes that she feels that consistency is importance with broad outcomes that are tailored to the learners needs. SP notes highlights of pockets of good practice and good advanced lecturers with a collaborative team. SP details that the lowlights are inconsistency and messy start of the year that lost learners.

RM details that she wants a strong team leadership and clarity in the purpose. RM notes that she shares good practices from various colleges. RM rough start of the year with the timetabling.

SD asks about the attendance with a response noting that attendance is good at Thurrock and Basildon.

NG asks about the learners backgrounds in terms of the E&M and the numbers? SP notes that a number of the learners are disheartened and there the battle is trying to get the learners back on board. RM notes that if the support is more individualized the learners have better engagement. HP notes that a lot of the learners have undiagnosed needs and therefore the support for the learners needs to be structured in a particular way, breaking down learning into small chunks.

KM asks about the strategies for the learners that have had a poor experience outside of College? SP responds that gamifying the learning to build the relationships with the learners. RM noting during the induction week there is a project for the learners that builds that relationship better and it's not just the diagnostic test as there first experience. There needs to be a more positive first experience and bridge the vocational and E&M gap.

GB asks if the lowest ability group will be able to access ALS? DB responds that the ALS support follows the learner.

SD asks how E&M get student feedback? RM notes that this comes from learning walks and also the teachers reporting the learner feedback and focus groups. SD comments that this needs to be done via

the distribution curve, the lowest attending and the highest attending to gain a greater understanding of learner experience.

RO what is the one thing that will really make a difference going into next year? SP notes the grouping and stabilizing the staffing. HP notes that consistency is going to be key.

SD what does success look like? RM hitting the national average for high grades (or beating it). SP walk out the corridor and every lesson has engaged learners and consistency. SP lots of positively for the learners.

SD thanks SP, RM and HP for their time.

SP, RM and HP leave the meeting 20:03.

07.00 Finance Headline Summary.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Finance Headline Summary.

SD asks why the creditor balance is so high? ZM notes that this has dramatically reduced from last year and the money is being managed to improve the cash days. ZM details that the forecasts are prudent as a number of elements have not been built into this figures.

SD asks what the biggest worry is? ZM notes that this is the cash days and if there is enough being done on impact and return on investment.

SD asks about the apprenticeships and why these haven't been capitalized on previously? JS notes that these have been paired back due to staffing and quality but this does need to start going up again.

SD asks if there is a estates strategy? DB notes that SECG is capped at £2m spending on the estate due to the DfE loan.

COMPLIANCE

08.00 Risk Register.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Risk Register.

RO notes that there is an issue about Knights and the subcontracting and the E&M delivery and asks for detail regarding this. JS notes that this is being mitigated and is being worked through with Knights.

08.01 South Essex Colleges Group EDI Report Executive Summary.

The Corporation Board **NOTE** the South Essex Colleges Group EDI Report Executive Summary.

AM details the strength of the reduction of the staff turnover this is due to pay, good staff satisfaction, CPD and the remote working day.

SD asks about the staff engagement via coffee mornings etc? DB notes that coffee mornings have really poor attendance but better engagement in a MS Teams Town Hall meeting. DB details that there is more to do in this area.

AM notes the concerns about the aging workforce, gender pay gap (which will be looked at the pay strategy) and also the BAME staff. AM adds that the process at the moment is very manual but the new HR system will aid with this being less manual. AM comments that there is a issue with the profile of the applicants vs staff recruited.

RO notes the need to have an EDI Report for the learners. DB notes that this is available via the Governor Dashboard and this could be done as a downloaded hard copy at the end of the year.

NG asked that actual numbers are added into the report and that the report is more ambitious in the future.

08.02 South Essex Colleges Group EDI Report.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the South Essex Colleges Group

JB joins the meeting 20:17

08.03 Safeguarding Annual Report.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Safeguarding Annual Report.

JB reflects on the impact of the support board for those learners most at risk, including the learners with additional learning support.

SD asks about how the increase in the workload? JB notes that reporting process has been made much clearer so that staff were much clearer where their role is including the increase in the confidential comments on ProMonitor (which has had a positive impact). JB reflects on the cohort this year which would have been in Year 7 during the pandemic and this has impact there social skill set especially around conflict.

SD asks for the biggest highlight and lowlight? JB notes that Ofsted was a highlight this year alongside the safeguarding team. JB comments the challenge is what is coming about the new policies and procedures and the impact of working together to keep children safe without the additional funding and resource it will be a big challenge.

RO gives positive feedback on the safeguarding team.

SD thanks JB and her team for their work.

JB leaves the meeting 20:30

09.00 Governance.

09.01 Group CEO Attendance to the Global Network for Community College Leaders Conference.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the Group CEO's attendance to the Global Network for Community College Leaders Conference.

09.02 Draft Accountability Agreement.

Deferred.

10.00 Committee Reports.

10.01 Governance and Remuneration Committee.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** a verbal update from RO the Chair of the Governance and Remuneration Committee.

11.00 Local College Boards

The Corporation Board **DEFER** the verbal update on the Local College Boards.

12.00 Student Voice.

12.01 Work Experience update at the Backstage Centre Ltd.

The Corporation Board **NOTE** the work experience update paper.

FORMAL APPROVAL OF POLICIES

13.00 Policies.

None.

14.00 Any Other Business.

None.

ZM, AM, TB, JB and AF leave the meeting 20:56

There being no further business the meeting ended at 20:56 hrs

Signed 

Dated 6th May 2025