

MINUTES

**South Essex Colleges Group Corporation Board
7E.03, Southend City College, Luker Road
Monday 21 October 2024 at 11:30**

Date and timings:	11:30 to 14:07
Location	7E.03, Southend City College, Luker Road
Preent (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) Paul Gribbon (PG) Noel Gibb (NG)
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 Roney Brooks (RB) Executive Director People and Organisational Development
Apologies	Andrew Overs Dowsett (AD) Sue Leonard (SL) Kate Merritt (KM)
Item	
0. Agenda	
06.00 Chair's welcome and introduction.	SD welcomes everyone to the meeting.
07.00 Preliminary items.	
07.01 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest.	Apologies were received from Andrew Overs Dowsett, Sue Leonard and Kate Merritt.
07.02 Urgent business notified in advance.	None.
08.00 Minutes and matters arising.	
08.01 Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024.	The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024 were <u>APPROVED</u> as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

08.02 Matters Arising.

There were no outstanding matters arising from the minutes of the meeting 3 September 2024 that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

STRATEGY.**09.00 Group CEO presentation- including Ofsted.**

DB gives a Group CEO presentation to the Corporation Board which were framed around the Strategic Objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: including success with the Turing Scheme, SECG now has 9 advanced teachers in English and Maths however there is a recruitment issue for Southend City College (this needs to be addressed). AI in teaching and learning has been embedded with good ethical practice.

Strategic Objective 2: DB notes that the Ofsted good will provide an issue for staff retention and details some of the negative feedback from a minority of staff in the Ofsted survey as well as noting the very positive feedback from some staff. DB confirms that the Joint Negotiation Committee will change to a Joint Consultation Committee to give the name a more genuine and authentic relationship.

NG asks if staff taught across sites? DB responds that this has been minimised to aid with staff well being and ensured that travel costs were kept to a minimum.

GB how can Governors aid with dissolving the myths around the staff survey? DB responds that widening the distribution of the positive social media posts and expanding the positive external image of SECG will help to bolster positivity in the staff team.

SA asks about the assurances around the use of AI systems? DB notes SECG uses platforms that are cloud based, some are purchased, and some are free, AM has oversight of what is downloaded, what is heavily used, and his team reviews all security aspects. AM notes that SECG has Cyber Essentials Plus and SECG is developing its own AI cloud to ensure that other elements of AI can be used safely including Copilot.

PG reflects the high staff turnover in previous years and notes the improvement in this area.

SD asks what culture is SECG trying to develop and in the staff, reviews are behaviours reviewed as a part of the process? DB agrees and notes that a staff competency framework and management competency framework are in development, this should assist in developing a unified culture of respect and professionalism.

JB notes that there are behavioural standards and professional standards. DB confirms that this is what SECG is trying to incorporate into its teacher standard. SD commented that it is not just about the behaviours of staff and students it is also what behaviours and attitudes are rewarded by the group.

Strategic Objective 3: ESFA moderation feedback is still awaiting, finances are tight with some efficiency restructures in the organisation to improve efficiency, a business case will be submitted for growth based on 16-18 numbers within the ILR, Cyber Essentials Plus has been achieved. AM adds that SECG has made the biggest investment that this college has ever made in IT.

RO notes that the environmental points do not come through in this report? DB acknowledges that this aspect of the strategic plan has not had much progress against it however, ZM notes that there is going to be a sustainability committee to drive this forward.

AT asks about the restructuring impact on the College staff? DB notes that this does impact staff turnover and staff morale, but these structures are measured and isolated. DB adds that this is about trimming excess and reviewing processes to drive efficiency. DB highlights how this is being reviewed strategically to prevent section 118 notices which have a damaging impact on whole staff morale, recruitment and brand image.

GB asks why does it take so long to get a response from the ESFA? ZM responds that ESFA are looking at the SECG performance this year, and also how the current audit progresses.

Strategic Objective 4: DB reflects on the strong Ofsted Good grading with outstanding features in various areas and notes the strong team spirit for the inspection. DB notes that there needs to be improvement in English and Maths including organization in Southend in addition to the High Grades concern. DB details there needs to be a focus on specific areas to get to Outstanding and emphasises the work required on English and Maths. DB highlights that the recent learner survey is the strongest that this college has had. SECG was admitted to the Global Community College Leaders Network.

Strategic Objective 5: DB notes that the CEO of Thames Freeport has mentioned that he is interested in investing in colleges, including SECG. DB also notes the Group success in bidding for the Skills Accelerator Fund a collaborative bid developing curricula around hydrogen power, this bid was in conjunction with other IoTs in the region.

ACTION: DB and SD to meet with CEO of Thames Freeport, Martin Wheatley.

10.00 Curriculum, Quality and Learner Experience.

10.01 Quality Improvement Plan.

The Quality Improvement Plan [QIP] was deferred due to the Ofsted Inspection.

SD asks that the QIP is focused on actions that are achievable within the academic year with more complex issues, such as English and Maths, having a three year rolling plan in place to resolve the weaknesses.

10.02 Centre for Innovation and Employer Engagement update (including IOT).

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Centre for Innovation and Employer Engagement update (including IOT).

SD notes the apprenticeship numbers and asks why are these not increasing? JS this is due to lack of business interest and also lack of learner interest. JS details the staffing issues in engineering and building services mean that SECG cannot recruit further in these areas despite their being high demand. DB notes that this needs some consideration.

AT gives positive feedback on the clarity of the use of acronyms within the report

10.03 Learner Outcomes.

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

AF presents the latest Learner Outcomes.

SD notes that it would be helpful to highlight what has impacted these results and what can be replicated next year to maintain this trajectory. SD highlights the gap between Ofsted Good and Outstanding the need to focus on what will give SECG the biggest impact.

10.04 Creative People and Places update.

AF provides the Corporation Board with an update on the Creative People and Places update highlighting that this project fits in with the SECG ethos.

SD asks about the liability should someone legally challenge the organisation? AF confirms that the liability would be with the Creative People and Places Board.

11.00 Finances and Resources.

11.01 Draft FY24 management accounts.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the draft FY24 management accounts.

ZM presents the FY24 management accounts emphasizing that SECG cash days are tight (these figures currently include ring fenced monies) and that cash is currently being managed on a daily basis, creditor payments are carefully monitored as part of this monitoring.

SD and AT give positive feedback on the report presentation including the RAG rating.

AT asks about the definition of support and loss making for the subsidiaries? ZM confirms that this is a part of the conversation that SECG is having with the ESFA.

SA asks about the measures that have been taken to improve the SECG EBITDA from the reforecast? ZM responds that this has been done by controlling expenditure and managing non pay. ZM notes the work that has taken place on controlling agency costs which have significantly reduced year on year promoting and challenging efficiency without compromising quality. SA acknowledges the significant improvement in this area from previous reports. ZM notes that SECG financial health is border line requires improvement/inadequate with cash days being the significant driver for this.

SD asks about the cash days and when is the worst time for cash days? ZM notes that this current time is the worst for cash, and this is managed on a day-by-day basis.

ACTION: SD asks that the cash position is made more explicit in the report so that the Corporation Board can have more oversight of this area.

11.02 Learner number update.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the learner number update.

AM presents the update noting the R04 submission which is vital for the impact on the financial settlement for next year.

RO asks about the impact of the lower HE numbers? DB notes that HE numbers were cautious in the budget and therefore the impact is lessened, however, the HTQ numbers are lower and will be subject to claw back. DB comments that learner numbers for HE are lower nationally and only losing 30 learners is positive. SD confirms that HE recruitment was a pleasant surprise given the national picture.

SD notes that the report would be improved by adding data on the local market. SD asks about the progression rates between levels and up to degree? **ACTION:** AM to send this out to the Corporation Board.

11.03 ESFA moderation update.

Discussed in item 09.00.

11.04 ESFA closure March 2025 update.

LJ updates the Corporation Board on the ESFA closure that has been announced and it will be incorporated into the DfE 31st March 2025 centralising the funding and assurance functions.

IMPLEMENTATION.

RB joins the meeting 13:15

12.00 HR Report.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the HR Report.

RO asks if there are any national benchmarks for recruitment. RB notes that there is no national benchmark, but the data reflects the process from when they go into the system to the start day and the length of time taken to recruit can be impacted by notice periods.

SD asks what have we done to improve the sickness absence rates? RB responds that there is a new policy in place at removing the Bradford system and gives a simpler and clear procedure. RB adds that the employee assistance programme has also aided the reduction in sickness days. RB confirms that the upturn is expected to continue this year.

SA asks about the costs of sickness and what the plans are currently in place? RB responds that the employee assistance programme cost is £10k. RB notes that sickness costs will be added into future reports.

NG notes the increase in depression absence and asks about how the criteria for this classification? RB responds that the classification comes from staff reporting.

AT asks about the tracking of annual leave and how annual leave is used? RB notes that SECG do monitor and check that staff are using the annual leave within the timeframes.

SD asks if Return to Work (RtW) interviews happen and if managers have been trained on these? RB confirms that this is the case.

SD notes the improvement in retaining staff and asks what has contributed to this? RB responds that this is due to increased staff pay and improvement in employee engagement. DB notes that SECG have London competitors, and they have London waiting on salary, this impacts on our ability to recruit and on staff turnover.

ACTION: SD asks that the recruitment figure reporting is from the moment someone resigns as this would be a useful figure.

ACTION: turnover to be broke down by the range of staff.

ACTION: Report to be produced on staff reviews when they take place and when they should take place and how many have taken place this year.

RB leaves the meeting 13:37

13.00 Policies.

13.01 Financial Regulations.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the financial regulations with the amendments outlined below.

SD asks for policy changes in addition to a sheet outlining the changes, within the policy the changes are highlighted in red so that they are swiftly visible.

ACTION: references to Policy and Resources Committee to be removed from the regulations.

AT asks that is the review date needs to be amended? ZM notes he would like this to be reviewed annually in the December each year. **ACTION:** Regulations to be reviewed annually at December Corporation Board.

13.02 Financial Policies.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the financial policies.

14.00 Governance matters.

14.01 Ratification of Committee Chairs.

The ratification of Committee Chairs was deferred to the December 2024 meeting.

14.02 Local College Board update.

Deferred.

COMMITTEE ITEMS.

15.00 Audit and Risk Committee

15.01 Minutes of the meeting 24th September 2024.

The Minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on 24th September 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

15.02 Audit and Risk Committee Terms of Reference.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the Audit and Risk Committee Terms of Reference.

The Corporation Board have a discussion about the membership of the Committee and allowing staff members to attend the meeting raising concerns about staff being apart of the risk and financial discussions with a preference to not have staff on the Committee. JB also agreed and felt that they could have limited impact on this Committee. GB notes that the membership specification in the Terms of Reference does narrow down the pool for staffing.

15.03 Internal Audit Plan.

The Corporation Board **RESOLVE TO APPROVE** the Internal Audit Plan.

SD asks if there is an annual internal audit report for last year? ZM confirms that this has arrived in his inbox this is to be distributed to the Corporation Board.

SD reflects on the days that Audit is taking place and felt that these were high. ZM to review these.

DB gives positive feedback on the Internal Auditors.

16.00 Any other business.

LJ notes that a new Student Governor has been found Kianna Smith an FE Student Governor studying T Levels in Broadcasting and she will attending the Development Session.

17.00 Dates of future meetings.

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

18.00 Board Evaluation.

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

There being no further business the meeting ended at 14:07 hrs

Signed 

Dated 10th December 2024

Item	Actions	Deadline	Lead	Status
Actions from 21 October 2024				
02.00	<u>Capital Projects.</u> A 3 year capital investment programme is to be presented to the Corporation Board and includes a cost analysis and review of what SECG would like to invest in.		ZM	In progress
03.00	<u>Subcontracting.</u> Knights contract to be reviewed to ensure that it includes achievement targets and a true cost analysis is completed		JS	Contract has the KPI targets which are



	that includes any non-funded additional training costs for English and Maths.			reviewed on a monthly basis by the Head of the Adult College. Appendix B show the cost in relation to the 20% management fee and includes all aspects of the management process this includes staff development in relation to Maths & English as this is expected under the new subcontracting rules The teaching qualification is being funded by Knights as a full cost course.
09.00	<u>CEO Report.</u> DB and SD to meet with CEO of Thames Freeport, Martin Wheatley.		DB via JH	
10.01	<u>QIP.</u> Focus on actions that are achievable within the academic year with more complex issues, such as English and Maths, having a three year plan to resolve.	25 th November for EB and 3 rd December upload for Corporation Board	AF	On the agenda.
11.01	<u>Management accounts.</u> Cash position to be made more explicit in the report so that the Corporation Board can have more oversight of this area.	03/12/2024	ZM	To be a feature in future Management Account papers.
11.02	<u>Learner number update.</u> Local market data to be added into future reports. Progression rates between levels to up degree to be emailed out to the Corporation Board.	03/12/2024	AM	Paper 03.02
12.00	<u>HR Report.</u> Sickness costs to be added into future reports. Recruitment figure reporting to be measured from the moment someone resigns in future reports. Turnover to be broke down by the range of staff in future reports.	03/12/2024	RB	To be completed in the next HR report.

	Report to be produced on staff reviews when they take place and when they should take place and how many have taken place this year.			
13.01	<u>Financial Regulations.</u> References to Policy and Resources Committee to be removed from the regulations. Regulations to be reviewed annually at December Corporation Board.	ASAP 12/2025	ZM CB	Completed Added into the schedule of business
15.03	<u>Internal Audit Plan.</u> Clinical report of the SECG Internal Audits from last year to be circulated to the Corporation Board	ASAP	ZM/CB	Completed