

MINUTES

**South Essex Colleges Group Corporation Board
7E.03 Southend College
Tuesday 26 March 2024 at 16:50**

Date and timings: 17:00 to 20:05

Location 7E.03 Southend College

Present (Governors):
 Rick Olver (Chair)
 Gerry Bender (GB)
 Denise Brown (DB)
 Sue Leonard (SL)
 Jo Brooker (JB)
 Aaron Thompson (AT)
 Seye Awolusi (SA)
 Paul Gribbon (PG)
 Roland Anderson (RA)
 Lee Freeman (LF)

Clerk to the Corporation Lana Jackman (LJ)

Minutes Carrie Brown- College Group Clerking and Policy Officer

In attendance
 Adam Fahey (AF) Deputy Principal
 Jayne Sheehan (JS) Vice Principal- Innovation
 Ansar Mahmood (AM) Vice Principal MIS, IT and Marketing
 Zed Mohammed (ZM) Executive Director for Finance
 Simon Perryman (SP) External Board Reviewer
 David Hughes (DH) Chief Operating Officer

Apologies Steve Collins (SC)

Item

0. Agenda

01.00 Chair's Welcome and Introductions.

02.00 Preliminary items.

02.01 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest.

Apologies were received and accepted from Steve Collins.

There were no other new declarations of interest other than those already standing *(in accordance with the requirements of section 177 of the Companies Act 2006)*.

02.02 Urgent business notified in advance.

There was one other urgent business notified in advance, Allergy Policy.

03.00 Minutes and matters arising.

03.01 Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 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 12 December 2023 that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

04.00 Group CEO report.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Group CEO report.

DB gives her Group CEO report update details the recent change to the subject of funding regarding E&M delivery (3 hours for E and 4 hour for M) which are significant challenges, this must be face to face teaching hours. DB details there is currently 5% tolerance for E&M this will reduce to a 0% tolerance and there will be 50% funding reduction should this be breached. AM notes that current SECG utilises the 5% and this will include High Needs learners to have the addition E&M- DB comments that this is currently being challenged by the sector.

SL asks about the preparation for this change and the financial impact of this change. DB responds SECG will move towards 3 hours E&M to build towards this criteria. DB comments that this is looking to be around £1m additional cost from initial calculations. DB adds that the Level 1 curriculum is being reviewed as the additional hours for E&M will significantly change the makeup of that course. DB continues that the E&M recruitment is being expanded.

SL asks what the reaction from the employers will be particularly for the vocational learners? DB notes that Level 1 and Level 2 do not prepare learners for work, they prepare learners for progression.

RA asks for further clarification on the contracts for the advanced E&M. DB notes that this is currently on a short term contract. And SECG is looking into the legal matters around this recruitment. DH reflects on the pay strategy and how E&M staffing issues will distort the pay scales. LF details that this could present a risk to the organisation and needs to be handled carefully. DB confirms that internal staff can register to retrain for the E&M roles.

GB asks about the progression for learners that are not able to progress in E&M? DB responds that internally the learners will progress for vocational elements and retake the E&M however there is an issue when the learner reaches Level 3. DB notes that for some areas they can be switched to an apprenticeship programme in this case.

LF notes the forthcoming General Election and the Labour response to this? DB details that the 4 hours for Maths may decreased but the Labour Party is not looking to change this policy. AF notes that the Labour Party want to continue E&M until 18.

LJ asks about the monitoring process for monitoring the finances of this policy? DB notes this will be done via PRC.

DB notes the TU response to the staff pay offer noting two TU's rejected the pay offer which was imposed for March pay slip. DB details the challenge SECG put to the UCU representation which impacted relations.

RA asks about the percentage of staff TU membership? DB notes that the best guess (as the TU's do not disclose this information) 45% lecturing and 50% support staff. DB notes that this could result in a formal dispute and SECG will have contingencies.

04.01 Strategic Project Update.

Deferred.

04.02 Ofsted Monitoring Update.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the Ofsted Monitoring update.

DB gives the Committee an update on the recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit noting that SECG had one 'Significant Progress' and two 'Reasonable Progress' grading.

AF notes that the draft report has been received and there has been a request to review two sections, particularly one section around Level 2 business learners not knowing how to keep themselves online which SECG have requested is removed from the report as was not discussed at any point during the monitoring visit and therefore is not appropriate to be included in the report. AF details that the final report has not been received yet.

DB details that there is no read across from the Ofsted Monitoring report to any full inspection report.

05.00 Future Governance Structure- reflecting the College model.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE** the new Governance Structure as presented subject to clarification around the PRC and ARC Committee.

DB reflected on the SECG structure noting that the current Governance Structure does cover the regulatory, financial and strategy well it does not serve the staff, students, local communities and employers as well as hoped. DB presented a new Governance Structure that reflects the SECG local college structure. DB reflected on the small size of the Board and how all Board members should be updated on finance and quality matters. DB notes that each College campus Local Council would have an SLT lead (DB- Southend, DH- Basildon, AF- Thurrock). Each Local Council would include more student, staff and employer representation. DB notes that the IOT and HE will continue as separate boards in reflection to feedback from the Board Development Day.

DB notes the LCB's will not be decision making Boards in terms of financial elements. DB details that the regulatory board has now been divided into a staff and learner centred boards. DB notes that the proposal of 3 Corporation Board meetings per year is not possible due to timing issues.

RO notes that the East Kent Colleges Group uses a similar model to what is being presented and they have an Awarding Winning Governance.

SA asks if this change in structure comes from Change Management? DB notes that change management is reflected in the timescales and adding in the additional support for this.

SL asks about market testing to get the communities involved? JS responds that key employers and local councils have detailed that they would be interested in being involved in the Local College Boards. JS reflects on how this will build into the curriculum strategy for each College.

SL asks about the implications of the Southend City status for the College? DB notes that Southend City is settling into its City status and a lot of ground work has been done in this area. DB details that the largest support will need to go to Thurrock Campus.

AT asks if there would be an issue with ARC members reviewing PRC elements in a Board. DH notes that the new Financial Handbook does not require a finance committee and the Audit and Risk Committee needs to have a firm Terms of Reference.

AT asks about Link Governors? DB notes that Link Governors will no longer be required as they will align to the location and not subject areas. DB details that SEND link and E&M link Governors will continue.

LF notes that the routine and timings of Governance and engagement with employers with the IOT Board and student governors. LF details that the new structure will resolve some of the issues.

LJ asks about the impact on her role and the Policy and Clerking Officer role? DB notes that the impact and changes to these roles will be discussed outside of the meeting. **ACTION:** LJ and DB to discuss the impact of the new Governance structure on the Executive Director for Governance and Policy and Clerking Officer roles.

RO asks about the requirement and the specifications around these roles. DB notes that these will be added into the Terms of Reference.

PG asks who will oversee the regulatory boards? DB notes that the HE Board will be chaired by the Senior Officer and the IOT will be Chaired by an employer.

GB asks about the Governors responsibility to oversee what is happening at the Local College Boards and how this will be reviewed? DB notes that this will be done at the Corporation Board.

The Corporation is recommended to:

- adopt the governance structure outlined in appendix 1.
- agree the revised subsidiary structure outlined in appendix 2.
- agree the phased implementation of the new governance structure.
- agree to map out our assurance-based governance framework.
- Agree to have two regularity boards twice a year.

All Agreed

06.00 Finance Update.

06.01 Year End accounts Audit update 2021-22

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the year end accounts audit update 2021-22.

06.02 Draft annual report and accounts for July 2023.

The Corporation Board **NOTE** the update on the year end accounts for July 2023.

DH details that he has had a positive meetings with the Auditors and all subsidiaries will be signed off this week. DH notes the issues around the PTS accounts and how this will be moved forward.

DH notes that the Group accounts now have a deadline of 16/15th April and an action plan to get this completed. DH notes that he is confident in this deadline. DH highlights the impact of the delay on the bids for the chiropractor course.

RA asks if there will be a 'lessons learned' workshop from the 21/22 22/23 audits? DH confirms that this will happen but a large amount of this was due to the historic accounting however the finance team are continuously reviewing and improving practices.

06.03 Finance update.

The Corporation Board **REVIEW AND NOTE** the finance update.

ZM gives the detail of the February accounts noting that these are ahead of the December reforecast and SECG is still in the 'requires improvement' category. ZM details the work that Executive Board are doing on non-pay to reduce the expenditure. ZM notes the strong improvement noting that SECG is at 170 points and 180 points will get SECG to financially good. DH adds that to do this SECG needs to deal with the debt.

The Board ask about the Averley site and its future.

ZM reflects on the budget build noting that SLT and Operational Budget Holders have received training on the template. ZM details that this has already begun and there are detailed assumptions against every cost with a termly review. ZM gives a detailed report in the accountability around the budget build from a number of levels.

RA asks about the business partner model and asks if College Principals will need to take more accountability for their budgets? ZM confirms that this will be the case with a golden thread cross the Colleges with risk, finance and curriculum planning.

RO asks about the capital projects for moving music? DH responses that this is on schedule.

ZM notes that there will be capital plan for IT and estates with a three year schedule which will move into the three year financial plan.

SL notes that risks around enrolment targets, asking about lessons learned from last year? AF responds that internal learners are being progressed post Easter, enrolment is beginning earlier to keep learners commitment especially for oversubscribed programmes. DB adds that GCSE results day enrolment will begin as early as possible. AM notes the Entry Level and Level 1 learners will be early (as these don't have the E&M requirements). AM confirms the £50 payment has been removed along with all barriers or messaging of 'full' courses.

DH gives an update of the Financial Handbook and the actions from this. ZM notes that the Financial Regulations will be updated over the summer.

RO, on behalf of the board, thanked ZM and DH for their hard work in turning around the Finance reporting and ZM's work in enabling 2022, 2023 audits to be signed off.

07.00 Employer Engagement and Innovation.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the Employer Engagement and Innovation Report.

JS notes that SECG will meet the AEB target detailing the plan for this. JS details that SECG should double its apprenticeship achievement this year and the PEDS have reduced substantially. JS comments that the subcontracting does not need an audit due to the positive audit.

JS details that the HTQs have under recruited for the Community Coaching (not meeting it's 80% target of enrolments) and the HTQs are being monitored weekly due to potential claw back. JS notes all Colleges are struggling to recruit to the HTQs.

JS noted that SECG got 100k AEB allocation for innovative projects and this will be spent.

AT asked that acronyms are explained and are reduced in papers.

ITEMS TO RECEIVE- COMMITTEES REPORT

08.00 Curriculum, Quality and Learner Experience.

RO gave a brief update from the CQC meeting including the new safeguarding process and the small rise in serious incidents. RO comments that Level 1 E&M continues to be an issue for SECG.

08.01 Minutes of the meeting 19 March 2024.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

AF gives the Corporation Board an overview of the SECG use of AI to aid with the administrative burden on teaching staff detailing the positive feedback on staff from the use of this. JB adds to the positive feedback and notes that the use of AI does need to be checked but reduces the burden.

GB notes that critical thinking is an important element of AI- could this be addressed by the tutorial programme? GB asks about the learners use of AI? AF notes that JCQ are worried about this matter but this needs to be flipped and the assessment needs to reviewed that tests the knowledge that the AI is building- AI will always be three steps ahead. JB adds that there is a lot of accessed reflection on the work placements which cannot be cheated or AI generated.

08.02 Current Learner Performance- including attendance, achievement, retention and milestones.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the Current Learner Performance paper.

DB details that this is a fantastic piece of work and automates risk, giving SMART data to undertake SMART interventions- this will be worst case scenario data.

08.03 QIP Monitoring.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the QIP monitoring report.

08.04 SEND action plan.

DB notes that there is a new Executive Director for SEND Diane Shockness.

08.05 Accountability statement- *will be reviewed and approved at the Board Development Day 11 June 2024.*

AF details that there are changes to the Accountability Statement and there will be invitation to review the Local Needs Review. AF notes the deadline for submission is 20th June 2024.

It was **RESOLVED** that the governors to read and review the Local Skills Needs Review (LSNR) Document.

ACTION: CB to organise a meeting with the governors and HP for a deep dive into the LSNR after the Easter break.

09.00 Policy and Resources Committee.

LF gives headlines noting the changes to the EBITDA and the importance of increasing learners numbers.

AM notes that SECG has had an increase in allocation. AM adds that there has been an ASF allocation that has seen an increase. AM continues that SECG has also got a £3m contract for Community Learning.

09.01 Minutes of the meeting 19 February 2024.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 19 February 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

09.02 HR Report.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the HR Report.

PG asks if there is any bench marking available for this report? DB responses that SECG is slightly ahead of the national benchmarking however this lagged. DB continues that sickness absence levels are too high at SECG. DH adds that this is a long term process and the sickness absence policy has been amended to address this.

09.03 Annual Pay Award update.

Discussed in item 04.00.

09.04 Student Numbers Recruitment.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the Student Numbers report.

10.00 Audit and Risk Committee.

PG gives an overview of the Committee highlights including the review of internal audits which he detailed the assurances for each of these noting the complimentary report from Scrutton Bland around the engagement from SECG staff on these audits. PG notes that the Whistleblowing Report was received and there were no reports of Whistleblowing which was challenged by the Committee.

10.01 Minutes of the meeting 12 March 2024.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

10.02 Risk register, assurance mapping and dartboard.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the risk register, assurance mapping and dartboard.

10.03 Terms of Reference for Audit and Risk Committee.

The Corporation Board **APPROVED** the Terms of Reference for Audit and Risk Committee subject to aligning with the new Financial Handbook.

AT asks if the Vice Chair role is needed for the Committees? DB reflects that Committees do not need Vice Chairs and reflects on the role of Vice Chairs for the Corporation Board.

SL notes that there needs to be some thought of succession planning and how this will be implemented moving forward. **ACTION:** Governance and Remuneration Committee to discuss this further with all Governors being invited to join the meeting for this discussion.

11.00 Governance and Remuneration Committee.

SL gives an overview of the meeting noting the need for new governors especially a SEND specialist and enhancing the female voice on the Board.

11.01 Minutes of the meeting 6 February 2024.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

11.02 Succession Planning Policy and Recruitment Procedure- *recommendation to the Board.*

The Corporation Board **APPROVED** the Succession Planning Policy and Recruitment Procedure.

11.03 Lee Freeman Term of Office Extension to 9 July 2024- *recommendation to the Board.*

The Corporation Board **APPROVED** the extension of Lee Freeman's Term of Office to 9 July 2024.

11.04 Student Governor Recruitment.

The Corporation Board **APPROVED** the development of the Student Governor strategy.

SL notes that the Student Governor has resigned.

DB proposed that a budget is given for the Student Governor within the budget build.

AT asks if there would be an HE and FE Student Governor? DB notes that this would be a conversation around the I&A but felt that these should remain. SL noted that incentives are a large part of this strategy moving forward.

11.05 Skills Audit Template.

The Corporation Board **APPROVED** the revised Skills Audit Template.

11.06 Continuing Professional Development of the Executive Director for Governance.

The Corporation Board **APPROVED** the proposal for the continuing professional development of the Executive Director for Governance.

12.00 Governance matters.

12.01 EDI workshop and strategy.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the EDI workshop report and **APPROVED** LJ developing a Corporate EDI strategy.

The Board reflected positively on the report.

DB notes that the EDI Strategy will also need to go to Executive Board to review and approve.

JB notes reflects on the live in my shoes model and using benchmarks for this.

12.02 Board behaviours and attitudes- AoC conference update.

LJ reflected on the Board Behaviours and Attitudes and the speaker Dr. Anna James and looking to bring this forward in the Governors Development Strategy.

12.03 EBR Report.

The Corporation Board **REVIEWED AND NOTED** the EBR report.

13.00 Any other business.

Allergy Policy.

SL raised if SECG has an allergy policy? DB notes that SECG have a wide ranging policy to cover allergies but does not have a specific allergy policy but this will be reviewed to ensure that the current policies adequately cover SECG from potential risk.

ACTION: Allergy Policy to be reviewed.

14.00 Dates of future meetings.

16 April 2024 - Chairs Forum

11 June 2024 - Board Development Day, 7E.03 Southend College

9 July 2024 - Corporation Board, 7E.03 Southend College

There being no further business the meeting ended at 20:05 hrs

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

Item	Actions	Deadline	Lead	Status
Actions from 26 March 2024				
05.00	LJ and DB to discuss the impact of the new Governance structure on the Executive Director for Governance and Policy and Clerking Officer roles.	June 24	LJ/DB	
08.05	CB to organise a meeting with the governors and HP for a deep dive into the Local Skills Needs Review after the Easter break.	Apr 24	LJ/CB/HP	
10.03	Governance and Remuneration Committee to discuss Succession Planning further with all Governors being invited to join the meeting for this discussion.			
13:00	SECG current allergic policies to be reviewed to ensure that they cover all risk potential.	June 24	DH	Completed.