

**Minutes of the
Corporation meeting held in person on
Thursday 6th July 2023, 15:30 – 18:30
At White Horse South Hill**

Present: Cathy Barr Raj Randhawa
Dennis Buckley Allan Schofield (Chair)
Richard Dimbleby Sheila Selwood (Vice Chair)
Luke Ferebee Alasdair Simmons
Joe Gallacher Cliff Wragg
Ian Pryce CBE, (CEO)

In attendance: Barrie Baldwin (Head of Health & Safety Corporate Compliance)
Pat Jones (Deputy CEO Finance)
Em Lowe (Deputy CEO Education)
Rachel Nicol (Group Director of Governance)
Natasha Stringer (Minutes)

C/27/23 Apologies for absence and Declarations of interest

Apologies for absence were received from Faheem Mir, Vinod Tailor, Amanda Wagstaff, Angelique Wright, and Luisa Vecchio.

There were no declarations of interest relevant to the matters on the agenda.

C/28/23 Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda

The Board noted that it was Vinod Tailor and Amanda Wagstaff's last meeting and acknowledged and thanked them both for their contributions, effort and time.

There were no further matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

C/29/23 Dashboard and progress against strategic aims

The CEO presented the report, including national and local trends and an overview of the year. The report summarised progress against the strategic plan.

Key themes and highlights from the report included:

- Successful merger with Central Bedfordshire College (CBC), a positive reputation for merging and remaining financially outstanding.
- Ofsted monitoring report on CBC documented good progress since the merger.
- Staff recruitment, a need to focus on staff retention and satisfaction. Staff survey results were positive.
- Recruitment and succession planning for the new CEO.

- Student destination survey demonstrated strong outcomes for students, 94% of TBCG students achieving positive destinations, above the strategic plan target.
- A new partnership has been formed with University College (UCL) to conduct a two-year trial of a computer app designed for students to declare their feelings, access materials, and aid the College in collecting data that measures resilience and anxiety levels. This app will be trialed at Sixth form, Corby, and in apprenticeships for two years to provide students with the help they need.

The Chair referenced the statement in the report relating to the recruitment process for the new CEO and confirmed to the Board that a meeting is being arranged between the Chair of the Corporation, the Group Director of Governance, the CEO and the Executive Director of HR, to review.

The Board noted the report.

C/30/23 Accountability Statement

The Board was provided with the final version of the Accountability Statement (the draft having been previously shared on the portal for comments), which outlines targets for the coming year that align with the aims and objectives in the strategic plan. The Board were made aware that it is part of the new requirement with the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs).

The Board agreed and approved the statement to be uploaded to the DfE document exchange service.

C/31/23 Strategic Initiatives and Opportunities

The CEO outlined progress on the strategic initiatives and opportunities, which included:

- Leighton Buzzard has a fast-growing population and under-utilised premises. Establishing links with local secondary schools.
- Wellingborough has a significant capacity to expand.
- Corby Sixth Form, planned growth over the next five years.
- Introduction of Learning Centres in the CBC locations.
- Opportunity to work with the University of Northampton to develop facilities on the land adjacent to Silverstone.
- Karen Campbell (Principal Bedford) will take over as UTC's new Chair, possible partnership opportunities.
- Rationalisation of estates and leases.
- Lack of year 10 places in Bedford and conversations with the local authority.

The Board asked about areas with high financial growth potential within the plans. Geographical opportunities include Corby Sixth form, Wellingborough, and Leighton Buzzard.

The Board observed that Wellingborough had not reached full capacity after three years and inquired as to why this could be. Discussion centred around the spread of curriculum across multiple Tresham campuses, potentially limiting provision at Wellingborough, and the feasibility for students and staff to travel. The Board also discussed the potential to ensure a fuller teaching staff on site. The Board acknowledged that there is still more work to be done.

The Board noted the paper.

C/32/23 Merger implementation

The CEO provided an update on the merger implementation to the Board, which included:

- Ofsted monitoring visit
- Most areas harmonised and aligned to the Group model
- The annual staff conference was held on 30th June, which saw positive engagement and interaction between staff from different locations and some CBC staff won awards.
- CBC staff survey was positive.

The Board inquired about the areas that had been harmonised, and it was confirmed that HR had been, but centralising English and Maths was not feasible for September.

The Board requested an update regarding the HE subcontractor matter referenced in the CBC financial paper and on due diligence. The Deputy CEO Education informed the Board that they are still waiting for a final update from the awarding body.

The Board sought and was given assurance on the plans in place for securing a permanent Principal for CBC, including the involvement of the new CEO in the process.

The update was noted

C/33/23 Subsidiary annual reports

The Board was provided with the annual reports for the two wholly owned subsidiaries, Bedford College Professional Services (BCPS) and Bedford College Services (BCS)

BCS.

The Group Director of Governance summarised the report to the Board, prepared by the Chair and Managing Director of BCS. The report highlighted how COVID-19 had impacted BCS and their ability to turn things around. Additionally, discussions on the structure of the pool at Trinity Arts and Leisure and required works had been raised through the Resource Committee. The Deputy CEO Finance will explore the options available to resolve the issue. However, a strategic discussion may be needed regarding the cost of the pool in terms of reputation and community needs in due course as it is a college asset. Overall, assurances were given regarding the ongoing work being done to address the issue and there are currently no immediate safety concerns.

The Board discussed the ONS reclassification and funding in relation to the pool structure and the need to seek clarification. The Deputy CEO Education also reassured the Board that the Health and Safety Committee is aware and working with all parties.

The Board asked for clarification on the deficit stated in year 21/22. Report back to the BCS board and check for clarification.

BCPS

The Group Director of Governance summarised the report for the Board which had been prepared by the Chair of BCPS.

The CEO raised for the Board's consideration that since the CBC merger, BCPS is one of the largest employers in Bedford and is run wholly in-house with no infrastructure of its own. Although there is a high-level agreement in place the potential need for more operational guidelines on actions to take should there be a dispute between the College and BCPS was raised.

The Board was already aware that a past governor and chair of BCPS had passed away in March. The Chair of the Board echoed the current Chair of BCPS in their acknowledgement of Linda Hockey's immense contributions to BCPS and the wider group.

The Board noted the reports for BCS and BCPS

C/34/23 Resources Committee RAG rated reports 17.05.23 and 14.06.22

The Chair of the Resources Committee presented the RAG report to the Board which included:

- HE KPI dashboard highlighted a higher level of sickness at CBC due to a

system error.

- Summary of the presentation the Executive Director of Digital Transformation provided on the current infrastructure, security, connectivity and direction of planned improvements. The Chair of Recourses commented on the excellent work achieved and planned.
- Staff survey was a verbal update.
- Pay award: The Resources Committee questioned whether the College can continue with a uniform pay strategy. A review of the pay strategy may be needed. ***A paper is being prepared for the Autumn Resources meeting.***

The Board approved, on recommendation from the Resource Committee the financial regulations.

C/35/23 College Information Report (May)

The Deputy CEO Finance provided and summarised the latest College information report for the Board, outlining the College's financial performance against the strategic plan and identifying any risks or opportunities. The report identifies key variances against the budget and actions required.

The key points highlighted in the report were:

- Surplus after merger acquisition is subject to change based on the outcome of the audit in relation to CBC.
- A number of accounting changes are due to be implemented, including building revaluation for CBC, asset disposal, useful life of buildings and the convergence of depreciation rates, which will account for some of the movement.
- Reduction of HE numbers.

The Board questioned the extent of the potential changes. The Deputy CEO Finance assured the Board that although there would be movement, work would be done to ensure the surplus would remain.

A Board member sought clarification on the legal fees and if they were unusual. The Deputy CEO Finance explained that it was unusually high due to many factors, including property work.

The Board commented on the saving on the pay budget in relation to vacancies and asked if all posts are filled for September. Recruitment challenges across areas were also addressed, with a focus on the importance of having teachers in classes. Concerns were discussed regarding the Sixth Form once the Government agreed on pay rises for schools.

The Board noted the report

C/36/23 MTFS 2023 -2024 to 2027-2028

The Board was provided with the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which included a number of budgetary models for the Board to consider and agree the budget plan for 2023/24.

The Chair of the Resource Committee provided an update on the draft MTFS process that went through the Resources Committee in May and June. In June, it was concluded that the draft MTFS was not achievable, and it was not appropriate to embed that amount of challenge into departments.

A number of scenarios had been modelled and considered by both the Executive and the Resources Committee. Models included exploring a variety of amounts of deficit, looking at how far a deficit could be modelled before losing financial outstanding status. The Chair of the Resources Committee explained that the challenges foreseen would be tracked and monitored through the Resources Committee at department levels across the year.

The Board discussed the importance of growth, in particular how it can be explored and leveraged within the Higher and Adult Education areas.

The Board discussed the College's commitment to its core values, priorities and how the modelling fits with the best interest of the students as well as managing pressures on staff. The Deputy CEO Finance provided assurance that the aim is to have a teacher in every class by September, but there are still risks associated with the growth agenda. The College is working on increasing class sizes and ensuring that the budget is based on achievable goals.

The Board asked for clarification on the relationship between the Capital Programme and the MTFS. The Capital Programme is funded by the generation of a surplus, impacted by grants and reserves movement. One option to manage the cash reserves where no surplus is generated is to fall back on the capital, potentially impacting the programme.

The Board had a robust discussion on the proposed MTFS model and agreed to approve the MTFS model, Annex Bii, for one year (2023 -2024).

The Board noted the need for close scrutiny at board and committee level of the plans for recovery to be able to budget for surpluses in the future.

C/37/23 Capital Programme 2023-2028

The Deputy CEO Finance provided the Board with a brief summary of the progress

of the 23/24 Capital Programme.

An update was provided on

- The asset on Triumph Way being sold subject to contract.
- T Level Science and Computing at Bedford won a grant for science upgrades.
- A structural engineer had indicated significant repairs within the next 12-18 months of the swimming pool at Trinity Arts and Leisure. ***An investment appraisal will be prepared and discussed in the autumn term at the Resources Committee.***
- Brunel Road, lease update.

The Resources Committee has considered the updates to the indicative Capital Programme through the spring and summer term meetings.

The Board confirmed approval of the Capital Programme (just being consistent) as recommended by the Resources Committee.

C/38/23 Partnership and Subcontracting arrangements

The Deputy CEO Finance presented the report and outlined the current position regarding partnership and subcontracting arrangements and the requirements for approval and reporting.

The Board approved the proposed use of subcontractors and partners listed in paragraph 9 of the report.

C/39/23 QSA Committee RAG rated report 13.06.23

The Chair of the QSA Committee presented the RAG report to the Board which included:

- The presentation briefing on Sixth form provision, including value-added, targets, monitoring and actions.
- Qualification landscape and reforms.
- Academic risk, including retention, HE applications and the use of artificial intelligence (“AI”).
- The HE strategy will go to the executive team in the autumn term.
- Conversion data, stakeholder feedback and student destination report summaries
- The quality dashboard KPIs show improvement but are still not at target despite significant effort. Progress has been made, but attendance, retention and achievement issues persist.

The Board asked about retention rates and reasons behind the rate at the Sixth

form. The Deputy CEO Education explained that A-levels were sometimes dropped due to course nature, resulting in decreased numbers between year one and year two.

The key facts paper for Governors to support inspection preparations has been updated and was included in the pack for the Governors.

The Board noted the report

C/40/23 Student experience and support update

The Deputy CEO Education provided a Quality of Education report, which focused on learning, teaching and assessment, student achievement, student progression and student voice, providing a high level of overview of the quality of education for the Board.

The Deputy CEO Education updated the Board on the planned focus for the next academic year which will include improving standards and values, creating a caring environment and creating an exciting learning experience, particularly given the difference between in-person and remote learning due to COVID-19. An extended induction period is planned for September 2023 including the involvement of parents to create a more enriching experience from the start to aid students transition from school to college.

The Board asked about the expected student behaviour for the upcoming academic year. The Deputy CEO Education assured the Board that with the models of change implemented for personal achievement tutors (“PATs”, broader pastoral support and the support teachers receiving training, behaviour is expected to be better than in previous years. The Deputy CEO Finance also highlighted the importance of inclusivity, with student ambassadors playing a key role in welcoming and engaging with new students.

The Board noted the report.

C/41/23 Safeguarding annual report and policy for approval

The Deputy CEO Education summarised for the Board the annual safeguarding report, which provided assurances that the safeguarding procedures are being followed and provided an update on safeguarding activity for 2022-2023.

The report included an increase in referrals to the designated safeguarding team, which correlates with information received from Local Authorities regarding reporting increases following the pandemic. Compared to previous years, an increase in cases being formally referred to external agencies, was considered to reflect the complexity

of cases being dealt with.

The Board questioned the increase in referrals to external parties and the Deputy CEO Education assured the Board it is not necessarily a bad thing and shows students are more comfortable in speaking up and is testament to the good relationships in place with external agencies. Strengthened support through continued CPD arranged for the Safeguarding Team and PATs has allowed the College to give additional support and guidance.

The link Governor for Safeguarding echoed and emphasised the work done and the proactive approach to safeguarding.

The Board requested additional information regarding links between cases, social media, and cyberbullying. In the upcoming autumn term, focus groups and a student questionnaire will be conducted to ensure student support and information is provided at the right level.

A Board member raised a question about the low number of young carers mentioned in the report. The Deputy CEO Education explained that the figures are based on self-declaration, and many learners who are young carers may not identify themselves as such. Efforts are being made to collaborate with Bedford Borough Council to encourage young carers to self-declare and receive the necessary support.

Subject to a couple of changes in references to job titles and the update anticipated in September to guidance on keeping children safe, the Board approved the policy.

C/42/23 EDI update

The Deputy CEO Education provided the Board with an update on the progress in EDI across The Bedford College Group. Progress included:

- Events on all campuses focused on diversity, culture and “proud to be me” days, which have been well received by students and staff.
- Two staff members have completed the first Diversity in Leadership Programme, and four candidates for 23/24 will represent each college.
- Positive feedback from students.
- The Head of EDI is on leave and there are no plans for an interim replacement as their hard work has left EDI in a good place, including external awards and improved staff and student confidence. Work is being covered by the current teams.

The Board raised the opportunities for awards and frameworks available and

inquired as to whether there were any plans to pursue these. The Deputy CEO Education assured the Board that there was a keen interest in pursuing awards and frameworks but progress will be deferred for a year.

The Board noted the update

C/43/23 Audit Committee RAG rated report 19.06.2023

The Chair of the Audit Committee summarised the RAG report for the Board which included:

- Letter from the OfS to the Accounting Officer regarding the 2021- 2022 ILR reconciliation exercise for CBC and potential risks due to the perceived open nature of obligations.
- ESFA funding review. Concern over the number of repeated recommendations from the previous years.
- Data Protection Office recruitment update
- CBC Audit Committee annual report and financial statements.
- Update on tender for financial statements auditor.

The internal audit plan had been omitted from the board pack in error and will be circulated with approval sought by written resolution.

The Chair of the Audit Committee gave a detailed summary to the Board on the post Audit report for CBC, and the financial statements for the seven months to 28 February 2022. The Group Director of Governance confirmed the highlighted sections of the report are due to work being done to correlate the minutes of past CBC meetings and the data within the report to provide a more accurate report.

The Group Director of Governance asked the Board to approve the Anti Bribery and Corruption policy as a holding position, with the potential to look at a much wider holistic fraud strategy, to bring in academic fraud and consider cyber security.

The Board agreed and approved the Anti bribery & Corruption Policy.

- **The Board approved the CBC Annual Report and Financial Statements, which were signed by the Chair of the Corporation and the CEO as Accounting Officer.**
- **The Board noted the CBC Audit Committee report and authorised the same to be signed.**
- **The Management letter, subject to the amendments, was agreed and approved by the Board.**
- **The Board noted the Regularity self-assessment annexe 17g and the regularity and fraud questionnaire and authorised the Chair of the**

Corporation and the Accounting Officer to sign them.

- The Board, on the recommendation of the Audit Committee, approved the appointment of Buzzacott as the financial Statement auditors for 2023/2024.
- The Board agreed and approved the Raising Concerns Procedure

C/44/23 CBC comparison between expected position at merger and actual position

A report was provided to the Board to note the reasons for the movement between the plan and the actual outturn for CBC now reported. The Deputy CEO Finance briefly introduced the paper and summarised it for the Board.

The Board discussed the figures in detail and felt it would be beneficial to see campuses/college contribution data at the Autumn Resources Committee meeting.

The report was noted

C/45/23 Risk and Opportunities Register

The Deputy CEO Finance provided a report for the Board to note the key risk and opportunities register. Attention was drawn to key risks and movement.

A board member inquired about the direction of travel and progress made in respect of digital technology development and integration. Assurances were provided that plans are moving in the right direction, especially after the digital update shared by the Executive Director of Digital Transformation during the June Resources Committee meeting, providing assurance that proper planning is in place to ensure a successful implementation of the technology.

The Board noted the risk and opportunities register

C/46/23 Health & Safety Annual Report and Statement

The Head of Health & Safety Corporate Compliance summarised the Health and Safety annual report that provided assurances to the Board that the Bedford College Group effectively manages health and safety.

Key elements from the report included:

- The overall Health and Safety compliance performance demonstrated continued improvements.
- RIDDOR notifications
- Health and Safety performance review for 2022-2023.
- Proposals of Objectives for 2023 -2024.

The Board asked the Head of Health & Safety Corporate Compliance to expand on priorities for the coming year and a discussion on the planned lockdown system and the work being done to develop followed, which included taking good practices from CBC and collaborating with external providers.

A Board member asked for clarification on the staff's training in Health and Safety, to which the Head of Health and safety Corporate Compliance explained all staff are inducted with a base level of training and refresher on average every three years.

Assurances were given from the CEO and Deputy CEO Education that Health and safety is a strong area with the Group and a good culture has been developed.

The Board approved the Health and Safety policy statement for 2023 – 2024, and authorised the Chair to sign on their behalf.

C/47/23 Fee Policy

The Deputy CEO Finance provided the Board with a summary of the Fee policy. The report included an update of the OfS compliance regulation's latest changes and updated structures and titles.

The Board agreed and approved the Fees policy

C/48/23 Governance follow-up from Corporation meeting on 20th June 2023

The Group Director of Governance asked the Board to note the two written resolutions passed on the 31st of March regarding the appointment of the new CEO and the outline of the terms and conditions.

The Board noted the two written resolutions

The Group Director of Governance provided the Board with an update on an upcoming meeting with the Chair of the Governance Committee to take forward some of the governor recruitment documentation, structure and terms of reference, and following this, approval will be sought to the final terms of reference by written resolution.

C/49/23 Minutes of meeting held on 23rd March 2023

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting held on the 23rd March 2023

The meeting ended at 18:28