

Minutes of the Stourbridge College Corporation Meeting held on Thursday 31st March 2011 at 4:30pm Board Room, Hagley Road Centre

Present:

Amanda Bache
Fred Bentley
Lynette Cutting (Principal)
Rishma Dattani
Steve Davies
Michael Doolin
Julia Fitzsimmons
Tim Heaney
Dennis Hodson
Henrietta Kubwimana (Student Governor)
David Nolan (Chair)
Jenni Ord
Tracey Pearce (Staff Governor)
Tony Seaton
Tom Skidmore (Student Governor)
Tim Sunter (Vice Chair)

In attendance:

David Beasley (Interim Clerk)
Louise Jones (Vice Principal)
Steve Cutler (Assistant Principal)
Kim Babb (Director Business Skills)

Preliminary Item – Governors’ Training: Health & Safety

Prior to the formal start of the meeting’s proceedings, Gill Hill, the College’s designated Health & Safety Officer, gave a presentation to the members, covering key aspects of relevance to Governors. She updated Governors on the Health & Safety responsibilities of the Board, the typical risks associated with educational establishments, the controls & procedures in place at the College, how Health & Safety matters are reported to the Board and the role of the nominated governor for Health & Safety (Steve Davies). She concluded by describing the case of the first company to be prosecuted under the Corporate Manslaughter Act. Governors were provided with a copy of the presentation, the College’s Health & Safety Policy and the paper on Effective Health & Safety Leadership issued by the Government’s Health & Safety Executive. The Chair thanked Gill Hill for the presentation and the information provided. She noted that additional awareness sessions could be arranged.

1 Apologies for Absence

- 1.1 Apologies for absence had been received from John Coyne, David Darlaston, Ian Hart and Brett O’Reilly.

2a Declaration of Interests

The Interim Clerk and Fred Bentley declared an interest in the appointment topics under Agenda Item 2. They both left the meeting at this point.

2b Appointment of Clerk to the Corporation

[Chair's minute] The Chairman advised that following the advertising of the post nationally and the subsequent interview and selection process, David Beasley, who had been occupying the post of Interim Clerk since September 2010, had been recommended by the selection panel drawn from the Governance and Search Committee to be appointed.

The Corporation resolved:

To approve the appointment of David Beasley as Clerk to the Corporation.

2c Appointment of Fred Bentley as Governor for Additional Year

[Chair's minute] The Chairman advised that, in the context of there being a significant number of recently-appointed governors, in the interests of retaining key knowledge and experience the Governance and Search Committee had recommended that Governors who were approaching the end of their second term of office be asked if they would agree to serve on the Board for an additional year, as provided for under the Committee's Terms of Reference. Fred Bentley was due to complete his second term of office in July 2011 and had agreed to serve for an additional year if requested.

The Corporation resolved:

To approve the appointment of Fred Bentley as a Governor of Stourbridge College for an additional year, from 14th July 2011 to 13th July 2012.

[David Beasley and Fred Bentley re-joined the meeting at this point.]

3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

3a Approval

The minutes of the Corporation meeting held on 9th December 2010 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

3b Matters Arising

3b.1&2 Confidential Item, minuted separately

3b.3 Para 9c.2 Presentation of Finance Information to Governors

The Chair said that it was important to review the presentation of financial information to the Board, particularly on how to deal with contingencies in the current climate. Steve Cutler said that he was proposing the Chair and some members of the Finance, Resources & Property Committee, plus the Vice Chair of Governors, for a working group to look at options. He had looked at what other colleges did and had his own suggestions, but the important aspect was to ensure that it met the governors' requirements. The Chair suggested including a non-accountant representative from the governors; the Vice Chair of the Students, Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee said she was happy to participate. Steve Cutler said that he wanted to start the next academic year with a revised format for the papers so intended to progress the topic in April/May.

4 Chair's Report and Principal's Report

4a Opportunities & Options

- 4a.1 The Chair noted that with the changes in funding arrangements in the Sector and the associated need to identify additional income sources would come additional risks for the College and the need for more decision-making by the Board. In this environment, it was important to maintain the boundary between the roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body and the Executive.
- 4a.2 The Principal said that she wanted to look at the best way of communicating new opportunities to Governors, where the timing didn't always align with the scheduled Board meetings. The Governors agreed that they needed a good understanding of the funding opportunities for the College in order to be able to evaluate the associated risks.

4b Annual Objectives for 2011/2012

- 4b.1 The Chair reminded the Board that the College's Strategic Priorities had been approved by the Corporation in December following the Governors' Away Day, and that the associated Annual Objectives for the next academic year were the responsibility of the Executive. He said that the Board needed to focus more on strategic issues so he would be addressing this topic at the April meeting.

The Corporation resolved:

To note the Annual Objectives for 2011/2012.

4c Capital Building Programme

- 4c.1 The Principal said that now that the new build at Brierley Hill was progressing, the Hagley Road site was looking a bit tired so £340K of matched funding from the Skills Funding Agency had been budgeted for improvements. Governors were aware of the new fitness suite and the College wanted to develop a new open zone at the College entrance that would provide more facilities for students, better ambience for parents and visitors, a more modern reception area and a freshening-up of the décor and furnishings. Governors asked if there was an opportunity to use students in the work, suggesting that the firms involved could be asked to use apprentices. The Principal agreed, noting that the tender timescale was very tight.

4d Confidential Item, minuted separately

5 Reports from the Finance, Resources & Property Committee

5a Report from the meeting held on 17th March 2011

- 5a.1 The Committee Chair summarised the meeting:
 - (a) It had been a long meeting, with a lot of technical information to review.
 - (b) Two reports had been recommended to the Corporation for approval, and nine reports had been tabled for information.
 - (c) The Committee had concluded that its proceedings had in the main lived up to the College values.
- 5a.2 He noted the following key items:
 - (a) The Brierley Hill new build Project Manager, on behalf of the College, had secured a positive result regarding the delays caused by the severe winter weather. The work was going well – the next meeting would review progress against a number of key milestones for the next quarter.
 - (b) The Executive had a tight handle on College costs; revenue was the uncertain factor and was creating a very challenging environment for the management team.

5b Fees Policy 2011/2012

- 5b.1 Steve Cutler summarised the key changes that had been reflected in the update to the Fees Policy for 2011/2012. Governors questioned the rationale for the fee increases set out in the report in the context of the current budget position, the economic climate and the perception of learners, noting the importance of the College not putting itself at a disadvantage. The Principal noted that the impact of fee changes was uncertain for all colleges and the Chair said that the College had to take into account the government focus on increasing educational fees to compensate for the reduction in central funding. Louise Jones advised that the College was seeing big rises in the costs of consumables and this factor had to be taken into account.

[Steve Davies gave his apologies and left the meeting at this point.]

The Corporation resolved:

That the Fees Policy 2011/2012 be approved.

5c Confidential Item, minuted separately

6 Items Requiring Governors' Urgent Attention

6a Safeguarding

Dennis Hodson reminded Governors of the importance of completing the on-line Safeguarding training module and asked members to do it by the end of April. The Clerk was requested to re-circulate the instructions.

6b Equality & Diversity

Jenni Ord said that there was an increasing sense of urgency on compliance with the Equality & Diversity (E&D) legislation arising from the Equality Act 2010 and the associated focus from an inspection stand-point, however this was also inherent in the College values. At the recent College's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Group meeting it had been reported that an experienced person had recently been appointed as E&D Officer and the priority of the Group was putting in place an E&D Strategy and Action Plan. The College had been doing a lot of work on this topic but wanted to make it more visible so a dossier was being created. Jenni Ord said that the meeting of the E&D Group had been very positive.

6c Health & Safety

Louise Jones said that Gill Hill in her presentation had mentioned Legionnaire's disease. The instance in the College had been found as part of the regular testing regime; very low levels had been discovered and corrective measures had been implemented.

7 The Student Voice

- 7.1 The Student Governors reported that the Student Council was working well. Lots of questions were being raised regarding the new build such as the branding of the different sites and the future of Longlands. The Principal reported that the Head of Tutorials and Learner Voice was doing great work on student engagement – a very important aspect for the College. The College had commissioned art work for the New Build that had recently been judged by the Council Chief Executive, the local MP, the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors and a student. A follow-up piece of art work had also been commissioned from a runner-up who was an ex-student. The Chair said he was very keen that students should be given opportunities to get involved in design decisions, being the customers of the new campus. The withdrawal by the government of the Education Maintenance Allowance was raised as a concern for students; the Student Governors said that the response to the withdrawal had been mixed depending on individuals' circumstances, particularly their travel situations.

8 Risk & Performance Progress Report

- 8.1 Louise Jones referred to the key points highlighted in the Report and reported that all teams had progressed satisfactorily since the previous report. The Principal had carried out an independent review of the area earlier in the year which had resulted in the identification of some areas for improvement related to focusing on targets, but which had confirmed that there was a good level of control and understanding across all the team action plans. The follow-up would feature in the Development Plan that would be brought to the Board later in the year. Governors asked concerning the number of Grade 4 staff mentioned in the report; Louise Jones confirmed that there were currently four, all of whom were receiving the appropriate level of support.

9 Reports from Students, Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee

9a Report from Committee Meeting held on 16th March 2011

- 9a.1 The Committee Vice Chair reported that the Committee had also had a long agenda that had included an excellent presentation by the Head of Tutorials and Learner Voice on the tutorial framework. A major challenge for the College was how to respond to the significant reduction in funding for this area, given its importance. Several reports had been tabled for information, and there had been some reflection on the ordering of papers on the agenda given their coverage. Useful new reports providing information on two of the curriculum areas had been tabled; the individual reports would be consolidated into an Annual Report for the Board at the end of the year. [Confidential sub-para removed, minuted separately.]

- 9a.2 There had been an interesting discussion on the Learner Voice, with the Student Governor present bringing out several helpful points. The Progress Report on the Quality Improvement Plan contained lots of detail, but it had been noted that there was a degree of overlap with some of the other reports so a review of this aspect would be undertaken by the Executive. Regarding the Values, the Committee had felt that more emphasis in future could be given to employers.

10 Reports from Audit Committee

10a Report from Committee Meeting held on 10th March 2011

- 10a.1 The Committee Vice Chair reported that the meeting of the Audit Committee had commenced with a discussion between Governors and the Internal Auditor without the Executive present. Feedback from the Auditor had been positive, particularly related to the changes to the Executive team at the beginning of the year and the smoothness of the transition. He said that the Committee had reviewed its work against its Terms of Reference and had approved effectiveness measures for both the Internal and External Auditors. A number of Audit Reports had been reviewed at the meeting, and it had been noted that the College had made good progress on implementing previous recommendations. On the subject of taking into account the Values, the Committee felt that this was not a primary consideration given its very specific role and responsibility to the Board.

11 Reports from Governance & Search Committee

11a Report from Committee Meeting held on 20th January 2011

- 11a.1 The Chair reported that the Committee had:
- (1) reviewed the amended Link Governor Scheme Guidelines and Membership;
 - (2) assigned mentors for the Governors appointed this year;
 - (3) reviewed the membership of the Committees and the Board in the light of vacancies that would be arising as Governors completed their allowed terms of office.

11a.2 The Committee had also discussed various governance topics that been reviewed by the Chair, Vice Chair and Principal with a consultant from the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. A number of actions were being pursued:

- (1) the development of a 'storyboard' of the College's journey as an aid to Governors;
- (2) a consolidated self-assessment programme, including a health check based on the Common Inspection Framework, one-to-one reviews with the Chair, and a review of the Skills Assessment process;
- (3) a review of the scope and format of reports for Governors.

11a.3 The Principal added that consultants would be attending the April Board meeting to help Governors understand their role during an Inspection and to help focus on their key responsibilities.

11b Determination of the Governing Body

11b.1 The Clerk explained that the Corporation was required to review its makeup on a regular basis in order to ensure that it was best suited to fulfil its responsibilities. The determination had previously been assessed in 2010 as part of the Board's review of the governance structure and the introduction of the Finance, Resources and Property Committee and the Students, Curriculum and Quality Assurance Committee. The report showed the current Board membership in terms of the different categories of governors, with the total number of twenty equalling the maximum allowed by the Instrument of Government. There was a discussion on whether there had been any thought of having a parent governor; the Chair said that he had never come across one at a Further Education College and the Clerk noted that it was the only optional category. The Principal said that this shouldn't be done for its own sake, but added that the Board did need a more representative ethnic membership.

The Corporation resolved:

That the Determination of the Governing Body as set out in the report be approved.

12 Any Other Business

12a Meetings Calendar 2011/12

12a.1 The Clerk tabled a draft meetings calendar for 2011/2012 and said that it had been introduced earlier this year to assist governors' planning; the intention was to confirm the dates at the next meeting.

12b Equality & Diversity Seminar

12b.1 The Clerk advised that it had not been possible after all to secure the services of the E&D Consultant for the proposed seminar on 15th May, so the event would be re-scheduled.

12c On-line Self-Assessment

12c.1 The Clerk advised that Governors would shortly be receiving an email from the Druines consultancy firm providing details of how to complete their on-line governance health-check which would be a key component of this year's Governors' Self-Assessment.

12d IT Support to Governors

12d.1 The Clerk asked Governors to contact him if they needed any assistance with the recently advertised method of using the Adobe Reader software to annotate meeting reports.

13 Dates of Future Meetings

- 13.1 Thursday 28th April 2011 at 16:30 *[at Business Skills, Kidderminster]*
- Thursday 26th May 2011 at 16:30
- Thursday 7th July 2011 at 16:30

The meeting closed at 18:45.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Chair