

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Corporation held on  
Tuesday, 4 February 2020 at 6:00pm in the Banqueting Room, Kirkley Hall Campus**

Present: John Barnett  
George Blyth  
Tom Crompton  
Louise Doyle  
Louise Farthing  
Louise Kennedy  
Rob Lawson (Chair)  
Paul McEldon  
Zainab Nadeem, President, Students' Union  
Susan Pollard  
Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive

In Attendance: Nigel Harrett, Principal Northumberland College  
David Howells, Chief Operating Officer  
Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Registry  
Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial  
Judith Quinn, Interim Deputy Principal, Curriculum  
Paul Graham, Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum  
Mark Hughes, Head, Hartlepool Sixth Form  
Sally Dixon, Associate Principal Adult and Academic

Clerk: Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy

**Bd/19-20/45 Apologies and consent or absence and declarations of interest**

Apologies were accepted from Ralph Saelzer and Louise Kennedy.

There were no declarations of interest made.

**Bd/19-20/46 Minutes of the previous meeting held 3 December 2019 and Matters Arising**

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting with one amendment to item Bd/19-20-27: Annual Reports. The surplus of £15 noted needs to designate it was a surplus of £15m.

There was one matter arising. The Chair noted that through the authority given to him at the last meeting under Bd/19-20/33 he has approved vendors for the following:

- Work Packages 2&3, up to and including the second floor internal area refurbishment works for £1,415,403.60;
- Work Packages 2 & 3, third floor internal area refurbishment works for £454,687.49;
- Work Package 6, SEND Facility for £2,297,827.20;
- Work Package 7, Equine Centre for £1,245,601.20.

The Board agreed to ratify the actions of the Chair.

#### **Bd/19-20/47 CEO Report**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately. The Staff Governor and SU President were asked to leave the meeting for this item. Governor McEldon entered the meeting during this item.

*[The Staff Governor and SU President re-entered the meeting]*

#### **Bd/19-20/48 Management Accounts**

The Chief Financial Officer (COO) delivered this report highlighting:

- Operating income EBITDA is at 6%
- Recruitment of 16-18 learners at the time of ILR is at 4716 learners which will result in no reduction in funding this year, but will result in an income reduction of approximately £1.9m next year
- It is still early in the year, though Adult Skills numbers are where the Group was last year at this time
- Subcontracting provision will be used at Northumberland College (NC) to increase adult provision
- Capital grant income is being utilised at NC
- Pay costs have gone down over the last twelve months
- A deeper explanation on cash flow is provided as requested by the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee
- Cash continues to be tight and a £500K overdraft is now forecasted for March
- Financial health is due to meet forecasted target
- Bank covenants were tested in December and the Group passed both

The Board asked the COO on when the impact of the pension scheme deficit will require the Group to start making larger contributions. The COO stated that staff members have been advised that there will be no impact to the Group and that for this year, the local authority has not increased contribution requirements from the Group. The Board challenged the COO noting that a large gap in the pension scheme looks badly on balance sheets, and asked when the Board should start to worry. The COO provided assurance by stating that the pension scheme is excluded from the ESFA return and bank covenants tests. He stated that the Group has seen large deficits like this in the past and they fluctuate year on year. Staff members have spoken with the auditors about this and this is not an issue for them.

The Board agreed that regular reviews of the pension schemes is a good idea with Governor Farthing stating that the local authority did a triennial review last year.

The Board questioned the red rated areas on tables 4 and 5 in the accounts. The COO stated it was a result of the reduction in the enrolment numbers for 16-18 year olds, reminding the Board that the

financial impact will be felt next year. The Board discussed the gap with HE provision and what steps need to be taken to remove that gap.

The Board asked if the Group is intending to take part in the ESFA consultation on subcontracting. The VP Partnerships and Commercial stated he would lead on it and will be submitting a response.

The Chair of the Northumberland Local Governing Board stated that the local board was saddened in the reduction of the enrolment numbers but were happy to see that staff members are making in-year adjustments. The Local Chair asked whether the land sales will make a difference to the balance sheet. The COO stated that the sale of the Hylton site will have no impact on income and the potential sale at Hartlepool needs to be discussed with the bank but that it would not have significant impact on the accounts.

The Chair of Audit Committee asked whether catering is on the audit plan. The COO stated that it is and the report will come to Audit Committee.

AGREED: to note and discuss the contents of the report

### **Bd/19-20/49 Equality and Diversity Annual Report**

The Vice Principal Student Services and Registry (VP SS&R) presented the report stating that the report for 2018-19 has a similar format to past reports though the Foreward this year was provided by a student who sits on the EDI Committee. The VP SS&R went through the various sections of the report, noting that they tract the public sector equality duty and highlighting:

- Data on staff and student profiles
- The gender pay section is from the report from 2018; the gender pay gap for 2019 will be coming out shortly
- Under advancing opportunities, activities included are cultural days and festivals and the student conference
- Performance data between those with protected characteristics showed progression on some
- Areas for improvement
- Group EDI priorities

The Board commented that it was great to see so much positivity, though the decline in positive progressions sticks out. The Board questioned whether the make-up of the Board and its committees should be included in the report.

The Board asked whether the report was produced internally. The VP SS&R stated that staff members from the EDI Committee and the Marketing team produced the report. The Chair opined that the report was well done. The CE thanked the VP SS&R who is the Chair of the EDI Committee for their work to pull the report together.

The Board asked if there needs to be an external Governor sitting on the EDI Committee noting that the SU President is a member. **(ACTION VP SS&R and HoCG&P to discuss how to best link the Board)**

AGREED: to approve the report for publication on the EPNE website

### **Bd/19-20/50 Stonewall Employer's Index – Action Plan**

The VP SS&R delivered this report highlighting:

- The Group joined Stonewall’s Diversity Champions in January 2019
- The first submission to be considered in the Workplace Equality Index was submitted in September
- Stonewall has 850 diversity champions of which 503 took part in the workplace equality index
- 54 organisations from the education sector submitted and they are mostly HE
- We were the only college from the NE to submit
- NE organisations did well

The VP SS&R provided some of the scores the Group received noting those that were positive and those that showed areas for improvement.

The Board asked whether staff members will be speaking with Gentoo to learn from their good practice. The VP SS&R stated that she is speaking with their lead on areas where we can align things such as good procurement practices.

Governor Farthing pointed out that Sunderland Council was named the best performing new entrant and noted the work the council has done around inclusivity.

The Board challenged senior leaders around doing activities for quick wins rather than doing the right things to make the Group more inclusive. The VP SS&R stated that the Group is doing the right things, and that the Stonewall liaison pointed out that we need to be better at evidencing that work.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report and action plan

#### **Bd/19-20/51 Committee Recommendations**

The Head of Corporate Governance and Policy delivered this item stating that the identified committees fully reviewed, discussed and debated the items the Board is asked to approve on the committee’s recommendation.

From the Governance Committee, the Board was asked to approve the Governor Attendance Protocol. From the local Curriculum and Quality committees, the Board was asked to approve the HE Admissions Policy and the HE Admissions Appeals Policy. From the Northumberland Local Governing Board, appointment of Jeff Hope as Chair and Alison Shaw as Vice Chair. The Chair of the Northumberland Local Governing Board stated that the timing of the handover has not been agreed.

AGREED to approve the following:

- Governor Attendance Protocol
- HE Admissions Policy
- HE Admissions Appeals Policy
- Northumberland Local Governing Board: Appointment of Jeff Hope as Chair and Alison Shaw as Vice Chair

#### **Bd/19-20/52 16-18 Performance Tables**

The Interim Deputy Principal Curriculum delivered this report stating that the data presented is for the 16-18 performance data for 2018-19 and highlighting the following:

- Data is presented for EPNE, not individual colleges
- There were small improvements in progression and progress in all categories except Apprenticeships

- Small improvement in A Levels and applied generals and a slight improvement in English and maths
- Data is being broken down and will be presented to local boards for a deep dive and a comparator to all colleges across the country

The Board asked if the league tables compare the Group to all provision, even sixth form colleges. The Interim Deputy Principal stated that it does as where you are learning does not matter for high aspirations.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

### **Bd/19-20/53 HE Quality Monitoring**

The Associate Principal Adult and Academic (AP AA) delivered this report providing the history of the Office for Student (OfS) registration and reminding the Board that post-merger we are registered as one institution. The OfS has imposed a condition of registration and the two local curriculum and quality committees monitor HE performance.

The AP AA described the QAA review undertaken before Christmas break and announced that the Group was told we will not receive a report due to an internal backlog of reports to the OfS. The experience provided staff members with insight on where improvements need to be made and members of staff are taking those forward.

The Board asked what impact the delay of the report will have on the Group. The AP AA stated that the Group pays for the review and we can be fined for not meeting certain requirements. She assured the Board that senior leaders have taken steps to work on the items that were identified in the self-assessment as needing improvement. She also stated that she is going to be on a focus group for the OfS to give feedback on the review process.

The Board asked whether we have external, critical friends to provide an assessment during self-assessment. The AP AA stated that the self-assessment process is under review. The CE stated that during this year, staff members from each college were used but next year there will be external reviewers.

The Board discussed if HE should be monitored at the group level and agreed that Governance Committee should review where monitoring best sits within the governance structure.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report and next steps around governance

### **Bd/19-20/54 Maths and English Update**

The Vice Principal Quality and Curriculum (VP Q&C) delivered the report stating that English and maths is a national issue. He stated that as a group we require improvement for English and maths with faculties performing at different levels.

The VP Q&C identified engineering and construction as a low achieving area with a high number of students stating that this area can improve, it will have a big impact on the Group. Functional skills were identified as an area showing improvement, but still having work needed to be done.

The VP Q&C stated that attendance is another area needing improvement noting that there is an approximately 10% difference between English and maths attendance and main programmes. He identified that at NC, attendance in maths and English is less than 70%.

The Board asked what plans are being put in place to improve attendance. The VP Q&C stated that there are a number of ongoing projects. The SU President stated that timetabling is a big issue with students as a student can have scheduled only maths or English on a day when they have no other classes or at the end of a day when they are tired. The VP Q&C acknowledged that timetabling needs some improvement in some areas. The VP SS&R stated that during curriculum planning staff members are looking at timetable to provide the best student experience.

The Board challenged senior leaders on whether all problems with maths and English have been identified. The Interim Deputy Principal stated that there are a wide variety of issues and each student is different.

The Board expressed its concern with the poor performance of City Campus programmes, especially in engineering and construction. The Interim Deputy Principal stated that it is not all about high grades, but also progress students make. The Group has made improvements on progress but there is still more work to be done. The VP SS&R stated that for engineering, the maths grades will have already been achieved prior to coming to college.

The Board questioned how the Group is engaging with students on the importance of maths and English asking if it is discussed at recruitment events. The VP SS&R stated that it is discussed during recruitment events and it is clearly stated that they need to get the required English and maths grade to continue to study at the college.

The CE discussed the various high level work being done regarding senior leadership in maths and English, noting that the VP Q&C is focusing on maths, there is a new head and a new curriculum manager for maths and there is a planned review of the qualifications of teaching staff.

The Board considered the delivery of T Levels and that some colleges will not be taking students onto T Level courses who have not achieved high grades in maths and English and how that reconciles with work to impact the widening participation agenda.

The Board asked whether senior leadership are looking to other colleges for best practice. The VP Q&C spoke of the visit he had to a high achieving college last week and described how that college supports maths improvement.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

#### **Bd/19-20/55 Teaching, Learning and Assessment - Organisational Report**

The VP Q&C delivered the report stating that the observation window closes at the end of February and 55% of observations are completed with plans in place to be at 100% at the end of the month. The VP Q&C stated that trends are emerging for key strengths and areas of improvements. He noted the maths provision internal review process and discussed best practice.

The VPQ&C stated that the Group is reviewing the self-assessment review (SAR) process and how that can be improved stating that Governor Doyle has given him a demonstration on an online SAR process that reduces process time for staff.

The Board agreed that the impact of the observations rather than the number of completed observations is what is important and that future reports should include information on support and intervention.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

## **Bd/19-20/56 Student Council - Feedback from Lunches**

The Chair delivered an oral report providing the Board with feedback received during the lunches held in December between Governors and Students.

From the lunch held at Washington Campus, the Chair reported that feedback was largely positive. He noted that the students from Hartlepool Sixth Form fed back that the concerns with the road and crossing into the entrance to the college were not resolved, that they felt there was no follow up to personal development and that the music equipment was below standards. He stated that a few spoke about the counselling service and how students are utilising that provision.

The Chair reported that the students from Bede and Ashington noted that laptops are slow and need to be cleaned/wiped on a regular basis.

The Chair invited the SU President to comment on the lunch as she was in attendance. The SU President stated that she felt the lunches were too formal and attendance was lower than she would have liked. She stated that she thought it could be better if there was one event at each campus and made it compulsory for class representatives to attend and to have tea and coffee rather than a lunch.

Governor Pollard stated that she attended the lunch held at Ashington where feedback was generally positive noting that students had lots of positive things to say about teachers. One area of concern raised was kit available to those on the plastering course. The Principal NC stated that that was being looked into.

The Board agreed that the SU President would report back to the next meeting on what has been accomplished.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

## **Bd/19-20/57 Students' Union Report**

The Students' Union President delivered the report highlighting:

- There has been another meeting with students regarding the request for contactless payments at the refectories; students have been told about using their ID cards to load funds and pay with them
- The Christmas Market at Hartlepool Sixth Form went well, though students would request that if they are putting on an event, the college not bring in an external company to run a similar event
- There was hope to establish a Film Society though licencing issues are coming up
- The MacMillan event went well with many students showing support by dying their hair green or wearing green nail varnish
- The students are very excited by the end of the year trip, likely to be at Alton Towers; over a thousand students across all campuses are interested
- The Marketing team have provided the Union £2k to design a logo for the Students' Union

The Board asked how students who are on apprenticeships are engaged by the Students' Union. The SU President stated that they are able to participate in all activities and the VP SS&R stated that they are made aware of the Union through their onboarding packs.

The Board challenged why students are not allowed to use contactless payment for purchases at the refectories. The VP SS&R stated that the Group is charged for transactions and when it was introduced at Washington Campus, sales did not increase.

AGREED: to note the contents of the report

**Bd/19-20/58 Safeguarding Lead Governor Update**

Governor Barnett delivered this update stating he met with the VP SS&R, the Director of Student Services for Northumberland College and the Director of People and Development. The group discussed progress of the single-entry recording process and staff training. The group agreed to the next meeting being a campus-based visit in March of 3-4 hours long involving student governors to talk about spotting safeguarding issues.

AGREED: to note the contents of the update

**Bd/19-20/59 Post-merger Residential Accommodation Report**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

**Bd/19-20/60 Apprenticeship Performance Summary (Subcontracted and College Provision)**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

**Bd/19-20/61 Confidential minutes of the previous meeting held 3 December 2019 and Matters Arising**

This item was determined to be confidential with minutes maintained separately.

**Bd/19-20/62 Informational Papers from Committees**

- Estates Updates (Local Boards)
  - o Northumberland College
  - o Sunderland College and Hartlepool Sixth Form
- Capital and Transaction Unit Spend Report (F,R &P)
- Capital Development Programme Update (F,R &P)
- Merger Investment Group Update (F,R &P)
- Group Resources Report (F,R &P)
- SEND Reports (Local C&Qs)
  - o Northumberland College
  - o Sunderland College
- Termly Report on Governor Training (Governance)

AGREED: to note receipt of the documents

**Bd/19-20/63 Draft Minutes of the following committee meetings:**

- 13 January 2020 Governance Committee
- 13 January 2020 Sunderland Curriculum & Quality Committee
- 14 January 2020 Northumberland Curriculum & Quality Committee
- 21 January 2020 Finance, Resources & Projects Committee

AGREED: to note receipt of the draft minutes



**Bd/19-20/64 Informational Papers not reviewed by a Committee:**

- EPNE Annual Operating Report Note receipt of the EPNE Annual Operating Report

AGREED: to note receipt of the paper

**Bd/19-20/65 Any Other Business**

There were five items under Any Other Business.

Coronavirus: The CE notified the Board that a Staff Bulletin went to all staff regarding coronavirus with guidance on how to stay healthy.

Governing Training: The Chair stated that during one to ones he asked governors for training needs and reminded the Board to feedback any training needs to the HOCG&P.

National Leader in Governance: The Chair was pleased to announce his appointment as a National Leader in Governance and stated that his first assignment will be in the very near future.

Governor/SLT dinner: The Chair reminded the Board and staff of the dinner planned for the 6 February.

Venues for meetings: The Chair acknowledged the difficulties governors face when travelling to campuses outside their home cities and asked the Board whether it was a good idea to find a venue in between the various campuses. The Board discussed the merits of hosting the evening meetings at the Group's campuses and agreed to review a suitable venue to host the March meeting.

**Bd/19-20/66 Date, time and venue of next meeting: Tuesday 17 March 2020, 6:00pm, Conference Room, City Campus**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 20:33