

**Approved Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Corporation
held on Tuesday 19 December 2023 at 6:00pm
in the Board Room at City Campus
and via Teams Conferencing**

Present:

Louise Bradford, Vice Chair -South
Ian Brown
Pamela Dawson
Louise Doyle (via Teams) (except for item 41)
Julia Fox
Jeff Hope (via Teams)
Sue Houston
Chris Jones
Michael Laing, FE Student Governor
Lyndsey O’Leary (via Teams)
Alison Shaw, Vice Chair –North (via Teams)
James Stuart, Chair
Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive

In Attendance:

David Howells, Chief Financial Officer
Gary Potts, Principal Northumberland College
Toni Rhodes, Deputy Chief Executive
Judith Quinn, Vice Principal Curriculum, Enhancement, and Innovation
Kendra Kirby, Vice Principal, Curriculum
Lee Lister, Vice Principal Northumberland College and SEND
Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Services and Community Engagement
Iain Nixon, Vice Principal Partnerships and Commercial
Naomi Robson, Vice Principal Resources
Jo Cooper, Associate Principal, Teaching, Learning and Quality
Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy
Donna Swan, Governance Officer

Bd/23-24/35 Apologies and consent for absence and declarations of interest

There were apologies for absence from Abi Grievson, HE Student Governor, and Susan Pollard, Staff Governor, for which consent was granted. The Attendance Report was received and noted. There were no declarations of interest.

Bd/23-24/36 Minutes of previous meeting held on 3 October 2023 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the minutes presented as an accurate record of the meeting held on 3 October 2023, subject to an amendment, the text of which is to be agreed between the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (HCGP) and the Vice Principal, Student Services and Community Engagement (VPSSCE).

The remaining portion of this item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

The Board Action Log was received and noted.

Bd/23-24/37 Minutes of Special Meeting held on 10 November 2023 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the minutes presented as an accurate record of the meeting held on 10 November 2023.

The remaining portion of this item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/23-24/38 Audited Annual Report and Financial Statements

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/23-24/39 EPNE Self-Assessment Review (SAR)

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/23-24/40 Staff Pay Award

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Governor Doyle left the meeting.

Bd/23-24/41 Strategy 2025

The Chief Executive (CE) set the scene by referring to the current Vision and Strategic Plan before confirming the process and timeline for the development of the new Strategic Plan (suggested to be 2025-2030) leading to Board approval in October – December 2024 and launched in January/February 2025.

The CE stressed that the Group would take time to engage with key stakeholders, including students and their parents and employers, and would be aiming to reimagine and strengthen our Values and Purpose. Governor Laing, on behalf of the Bede Student Collective, offered support to the process, noting the students' values are aligned with the Colleges' and looked forward to being involved.

The Board, recognising that strategic planning is exciting and even joyous, advised there is a need to take stock periodically to ensure that the work is on track. Referring to student engagement, the Board asked how the College would be engaging with its alumni to get their views. The CE acknowledged the importance of having the views of the alumni and confirmed that she would give this some thought and come up with a plan.

The Board agreed the work plan was extremely well thought out, whilst also speaking to some of the issues, particularly in relation to research and the development of values, which are not easy. The CE agreed the organisation used for stakeholder research would require careful thought and stated that the College was also looking at the values of organisations in other sectors noting the College already engages regularly with key stakeholders.

The Board noted there was a lot of assurance to be taken from the fact that the College would be essentially “tweaking” its existing Vision and Values and was not looking for a radical transformation. The Chair stated that overall transformation would be achieved but the Group was not intending to start again. The CE shared that she, the Chair and the HCGP have been discussing the development of Board levels competencies and values. It was agreed by the Board that there was an appetite to explore its own expectations and behaviours.

AGREED: to approve the process and timeframe for the development of the Strategic Plan 2025.

Governor Doyle re-joined the meeting.

Bd/23-24/42 Committee Recommendations

The HCGP advised that there had been no requests for any of the items to be withdrawn for further discussion by the Board.

The Board APPROVED the following on the recommendation of the named committees:

Finance Resources and Projects Committee

Item 42a – Finance Resources and Projects Committee Terms of Reference

Item 42b – Award of Subcontract High Value Contract for the delivery of bootcamps with Unipres

Curriculum, Quality and Student Experience Committee

Item 42c – Curriculum Quality and Student Experience Committee Terms of Reference

Bd/23-24/43 Liquidity Update

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/23-24/44 Accountability Agreement Mid-Year Report

The CE updated Governors with respect to the achievement of the targets as reflected in the Accountability Agreement noting all were on track:

- Construction Industries - Housing Innovation Construction Skills Academy (HICSA) – the development of the site has commenced, and the partnership with ETC has been launched. A spoke of HICSA at Northumberland College (Ashington) is also planned.
- Engineering, Manufacturing, Chemical, Automotive and Logistics - launch of Skills Academy in partnership with Nissan.
- Green Skills – going green and being sustainable in all we do.
- Supporting most vulnerable and disadvantaged - partnership with the Foundation of Light.
- Embedding Technical Reform - T levels successfully rolled out across the Group and have partnered with the University of Hull to deliver new HE pathways.

AGREED: to note the update and assurance that can be taken on progress.

Bd/23-24/45 Risk Register Biannual Review

The CFO presented the Risk Register report and the HCGP read the following statement from Governor O’Leary, Chair of the Audit Committee, who, whilst present via Teams, was having technical issues:

“Just a reminder to Governors that the papers produced for Board are underpinned by detailed risk discussions that take place at Executive Management Team. The papers have evolved over the last couple of years and are designed to highlight the issues that Governors should be aware of but all risks to EPNE, including those currently well managed, are given sufficient airtime as part of the risk management process that operates within the College Group.”

The Board raised a concern about Cyber Security (ref 4.6) which, despite mitigating controls, is rated overall as being high risk. The CE explained some of the background, referring to the work undertaken by JISC two years ago, which led to a Cyber Project Plan which has been implemented and provides strong assurance.

The HCGP opined that cyber security was an area where the likelihood of an attack will never be reduced to the extent of the risk being anything but high. The CE shared the preventative security measures in place, such as patching, catch a lot of phishing and other forms of cyber-attack and offered for a report to be shared on the data set around prevention. The Board agreed that vulnerability testing which establishes the direction of risk is useful.

The Vice Principal, Resources (VPR) expressed her confidence that the infrastructure was robust in this area and that IT Security had been on a phenomenal journey over the last two years. She shared a reporting dashboard is under development. The Board asked how the Governors would be able to know that the data controls are robust.

The CE reiterated the features of the regime in terms of policies, procedures, training, restrictions on the IT systems and so on. The HCGP undertook to signpost Governors to the available resources on the Governor Training Site, determine whether a Lunch and Learn session would be useful and otherwise discuss with the VPR as to future reporting of Cyber Security to the Board.

ACTION: the HCGP and VPR to discuss future reporting of Cyber Security to the Board.

AGREED: to receive the Risk Register, note content and approve changes.

Bd/23-24/46 Chair’s Report

The Chair imparted the following information:

- The lease of Washington Campus has been finalised and the school is now in occupation,
- It is expected that the College will be the subject of Ofsted inspection any time between now and the end of 2024, and
- The College has received a visit from the FE Commissioner who identified the following areas of best practice which she would like to share with other colleges:
 - The culture improvement work, and
 - English and maths scrutiny and improvement model.

AGREED: to note the report.

Bd/23-24/47 Lead Governors’ Updates

The following Lead Governors delivered their reports:

Governor Houston – Lead Governor (Economy and Place: Hartlepool)

Governor Houston reported that a further event is being arranged to bring members of the Tees Valley Business Club to Hartlepool Sixth Form on 24 March 2024. There is also a Connect Event in the pipeline to raise the profile of the Sixth Form.

The remainder of this item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Governor Bradford – Lead Governor (Economy and Place: Sunderland)

Governor Bradford referred to the following:

- The evolving Sunderland City Plan, noting that the CE sits on the City Board, which will transform the city and give rise to opportunities.

The remainder of this item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Governor Hope – Lead Governor (Economy and Place: Northumberland)

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Governor Dawson – Lead Governor (Quality of Education)

Governor Dawson reported on her areas of activity as follows:

- She has recently met with the new Director of HE and explored with her the huge HE agenda, including the Director of HE's responsibilities around managing the new partnership with the University of Hull.
- She has agreed to "buddy" Abi Grievson, the HE Student Governor.
- From January 2024, she will be involved again in the HE Self Evaluation process.
- In conjunction, with the CE and Vice Chair – North she will be driving developments in pedagogy.

The Vice Chair – North commented upon the exciting challenge and opportunity presented by Governance in Pedagogy and noted that the initial session was already in Governors' schedules for early in the New Year. The CE spoke of the pedagogy journey as a Board-led endeavour which would enable the College to move forward with a new strategy. The Vice Chair – North agreed that it was critically important that the initiative was Governor-led as well as Executive-led. The Chair noted that this work would be supported by a shift in resources from one part of the College to another.

Governor Stuart – Lead Governor: Safeguarding and Prevent

The Chair highlighted some of the concerns from the Safeguarding and Prevent Annual Report 2022/23 (Bd/23-24/16) including:

- Increased number of safeguarding concerns, particularly relating to relationships and friendships.
- Concerns about mental health, particularly an increase in concerns relating to suicidal thoughts/attempts.

He provided assurance as to the robust response to the data from the College, notwithstanding that numbers are low, including:

- Participation in Suicide Prevention Groups.
- Whole College approach to trauma informed practice.
- Increased partnership working linked to knife crime.
- Participation in SSS Roadshows linked to risk management.
- Hate crime awareness training which is then cascaded down to students. The Chair confirmed that recent events in Gaza have not been a driver for hate crime.

The Vice Principal, Student Services and Community Engagement added that a recent Roadshow on knife crime had been well received and the team are also working with the police on producing resource for schools in Area 6.

AGREED: to note the reports.

Bd/23-24/48 Draft Minutes of the following Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/23-24/49 Papers from Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/23-24/50 Any Other Business

The Chair congratulated everyone on the staggering amount of work that had been delivered during the year and thanked them for the brilliant outcomes that had been achieved. He wished them a relaxing holiday where they might reflect on their achievements and return in the New Year refreshed and ready for the next stage of the journey.

The CE indicated that there was one item of confidential business which required separate minuting.

There was no further business.

Bd/23-24/51 Date, time, and venue of the next meeting

The Board noted the arrangements for the next meeting as follows:

- Tuesday 19 March 2024 at 6:00pm in the Theatre at Hartlepool Sixth Form College, Hartlepool.

Bd/23-24/52 Meeting Wrap-up

The Chair asked members to reflect on the meeting and provide any feedback to him and/or the Head of Corporate Governance and Policy.

The meeting closed at 8.27pm.

These minutes were approved by the Board of the Corporation at its meeting on 19 March 2024 pursuant to minute Bd/23-24/62.