

FIRCROFT COLLEGE OF ADULT EDUCATION

Minutes of the Governing Body Meeting held on Wednesday 11 December 2024

PRESENT: Geoff Layer (Chair), Carole Parkes (Vice-Chair) (part), Ben Shore, Parminder Singh Garcha (part), Harpreet Samra, Lorna Phillip, Katharine Clough, John Holford (via Teams), Paul O'Toole and Mel Lenehan (Principal).

Page | 1

IN ATTENDANCE: Head of Finance and Regulatory Compliance, and Clerk.

| REF | ACTION |
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| 1 | <u>OPENING REMARKS BY CHAIR</u> The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. |
| 2 | <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u> There were no declarations of interest. |
| 3 | <u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u> Apologies were submitted on behalf of Chris Kenny, Saiqa Andleeb, Eluned Jones and Elliott Moody. |
| 4 | <u>DEVELOPMENT SESSION – SAR and QIP</u> The Vice- Principal, Michael Conway-Jones (MC-J) said that the development session would allow governors more time to consider the SAR and QIP before approving it. MC-J briefly outlined the framework of intent (3-year strategy, updated annually), implementation (delivery) and impact (first report available against the College's own Impact Statement, linking back to intent). He added that the feedback from J2 Research was that 82% of students knew their destinations and their goals. He said that the SAR and QIP were linked with the strategic objectives of the College. The Chair queried the analysis on maths. MC-J said that the teaching staff would undertake CPD with a maths specialist. They would encourage students to practice and progress to the next level courses. MC-J reported |

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| | <p>that the maths courses were oversubscribed and the College had run additional courses notwithstanding the lack of support on this from the WMCA.</p> <p>Paul O'Toole (PO'T), Student Governor, said that he found the Maths Level 2 course to be really good. He said that sometimes students found it easier to opt for creative activities. MC-J explained that the teaching staff sought out naturally occurring opportunities to integrate maths within other subjects e.g. in a business course pricing would be relevant.</p> <p>The Vice-Chair considered the SAR and QIP to be useful documents and they brought many things together.</p> <p>MC-J reminded governors about the Ofsted judgements. He said that the work on careers needed further progress. In addition, the work on strengthening the contribution made by the College to local and regional skills would continue. External stakeholders were required to influence the curriculum, including its delivery.</p> <p>The Chair asked how working with employers had progressed since the Ofsted report. MC-J said that feedback needed to be more consistently obtained. He said that the College did now have stronger links with the NHS and higher education institutions.</p> <p>The Chair asked about WMCA's curriculum needs. MC-J said that they stated their support for wellbeing courses but did not always fund these. WMCA did provide support for community learning. Andy Gazey (AG) added that the ESOL courses were oversubscribed but not paid for by WMCA. MC-J said that WMCA needed to see students on courses going into employment or further education.</p> <p>A governor asked whether the College was working with third sector employers e.g. housing associations, Mencap etc. MC-J said that the College had previously run courses for Mencap but not now. The governor asked whether the College was working with schools and academies as the government was investing in early ears. MC-J said that it was not. The governor asked about the new Mayor of West Midlands' priorities. MC-J said that the Mayor's focus was on younger people up to the age of 30. However, the College was able to continue with its own priorities.</p> <p>MC-J pointed out that the document used language from the Ofsted report and it stated that governance was expert and effective.</p> | |
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| | <p>MC-J said that the Education Committee would be looking at objectives for the next 3 years.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body approve the SAR and QIP.</p> | |
| 5 | <p><u>CHAIR'S UPDATE</u></p> <p>The Chair had attended several events/presentations and the focus at these was on young people, 16-19-year olds rather than on adults. This had been the case for some years. During AoC presentations adult education was often not mentioned and the Chair raised it. The Principal commented that the budget for 16-19-year olds was with the DfE and was not devolved. The budget for adult education and community learning was devolved to the WMCA. She said that the government may argue that Skills England would bring together the national strategy on skills. However, it was important to remember that skills were not just about qualifications but about other life skills as well.</p> <p>The Clerk reported that Paul O'Toole had completed his forms to enable him to be appointed as a Student Governor and registered with the Charity Commission and Companies House. The Governing Body had previously been happy with his nomination.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appoint Paul O'Toole to the membership of the Governing Body 2. Note the Chair's Update. | |
| 6 | <p><u>PRINCIPAL'S REPORT AND UPDATE</u></p> <p>The Principal briefly outlined key aspects of her report.</p> <p>BVT had helpfully shifted their position and had agreed to earlier discussions about the College lease.</p> <p>Staff had pulled together to resource and support admissions.</p> <p>The Chair commented on the notable content about the College in the Forum Journal. A governor said that he had managed to get 2 articles, a poem and some photographs into Forum Journal promoting the College.</p> <p>A governor suggested that relevant politicians should be invited to the</p> | |

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| | <p>College. He asked whether the change of government had resulted in a change of tone towards adult/further education colleges. The Principal said that so far changes to NI contributions, BTECs etc had not been supportive to the sector. A governor commented that it could be said that the stance/policies of the previous government were continuing.</p> <p>The Vice-Chair updated the Governing Body about the Green Gown Awards. She said that more colleges needed to participate in these. There was one winner and no highly commended. The rationale for this was that if an institution was highly commended it could not apply again for the same category the following year. The Vice-Chair informed the Governing Body that feedback was that Fircroft had come a close second, there was goodwill for the College. Some judges were looking for numbers, statistics and accreditations although it was acknowledged that this emphasis was not conducive for colleges.</p> <p>The Chair asked about demand for places. The Principal explained that the ratio of applications converted to students was looked at. The College received about 3 applications for each place so this affected the statistics.</p> <p>The Principal said that the College had lots of new students and that the College enrolled throughout the year. A governor asked whether social media was used to recruit students. The Principal replied that a lot of students came via referral partners e.g. refuges. She added that waiting lists and difficulty in attracting funding meant that social media was not currently used.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body note the Principal's Report and Update.</p> | |
| 7 | <p><u>MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS AND CASHFLOW STATEMENTS</u></p> <p>Stephen Hayden (SH) briefly outlined the headlines from the Management Accounts.</p> <p>The government was likely to contribute towards the increase in NI contributions but there was some uncertainty around this.</p> <p>The Management Accounts included 24-month cashflow projections and this would help inform governors regarding the "going concern" statement they are required to make in the Financial Statements and Accounts. They would be essentially stating that the College would remain financially viable at least for 12 months.</p> | |

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| | <p>A governor noted that all seemed positive apart from staffing costs.</p> <p>A governor asked whether switching to Free Courses for Jobs for Access courses had been beneficial. SH confirmed this to be the case especially as the rate of bursaries had been lowered.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body note the Management Accounts.</p> | |
| 8 | <p><u>ASSOCIATED AND SUPPORTING REPORTS TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS</u></p> <p>The Chair of Audit Committee briefly outlined the purpose of the documents presented to the Governing Body. These fed into the work of External Audit and gave assurance to the Governing Body. The Draft Letter of Audit Representation was a standard letter. The Post-Audit Management Report had nothing of concern on gradings or the statement of going concern. The Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion was positive, the actions following the audit on MIS were progressing. The Risk Management framework was good and the Risk Register and risks were reviewed by committees as appropriate. The Annual Report of the Audit Committee and the reports of the auditors and questionnaires provided assurance to the Governing Body. Audit Committee recommended the reappointment of External and Internal Audit. The retendering of External Audit was progressing again.</p> <p>SH agreed that the documents supported the Financial Statements and showed internal control and regularity checks and compliance.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approve the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire, draft Letter of Audit Representation and reappointment of Internal and External Auditors 2. Note the Fraud Questionnaire, ISA 315 IT Controls Preparatory Questionnaire, Post-Audit Management Report, Annual Internal Audit Report and Opinion, Annual Risk Management Report and Updated Risk Register and Annual Report of the Audit Committee. | |
| 9 | <p><u>REPORTS AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS – YEAR ENDED 31 JULY 2024</u></p> <p>SH explained that governors were being presented with accounts covering a 16-month period which was the time since incorporation. Merger</p> | |

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| | <p>accounting had been used.</p> <p>The new aspects covered in the notes this year included risks, External Review of Governance and Audit Committee's statement on effective internal controls.</p> <p>There was nothing of concern in the documents.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body approve the Reports and Financial Statements.</p> | |
| 10 | <p><u>ECO CLASSROOM</u></p> <p>The Chair explained that given the strategic importance and time critical aspect of the project he had taken Chair's Action to approve progression of the orders for building works etc even though planning permission had not yet been received. The grant funding had to be spent by the end of March 2025 and the building completed. Governors were supportive of the Chair's Action.</p> <p>AG added that the risk may be carried for three and a half months. A decision on planning permission may be received by December 2024. The planning issue was minor i.e. how the living roof would be monitored for bio-diversity and this aspect could be covered off by a planning condition if necessary and dealt with later.</p> <p>AG added that excavation work would start next week, and that orders for windows, doors, chassis etc had been placed.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body note the reporting of the Chair's Action and progress made on the Eco Classroom.</p> | |
| 11 | <p><u>INVESTMENTS – NUMBER 2 ACCOUNTS CLOSURE</u></p> <p>SH explained that this account was part of the College's investment portfolio but that it was held in a cash/near cash current account. Holding some funds in this way helped the College's financial health score.</p> <p>It was now being recommended that the account be closed as the College's Investment Managers no longer wanted to run this aspect of their services. Currently the account held £167k. The money would be transferred to the College's existing high yield account. Any funds</p> | |

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| | <p>considered to be surplus in the high yield account would be transferred to main investment portfolio.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body approve the closure of the Number 2 Account.</p> | |
| 12 | <p><u>ANNUAL REPORT OF LEAD GOVERNOR – SAFEGUARDING</u></p> <p>The Lead Governor – Safeguarding (LG-S) presented her report to the Governing Body. She had held two meetings with the Designated Lead for Safeguarding who was currently absent from work. She had learnt about the safeguarding processes and how cases were dealt with. She had also enquired about the work to be done following the Summer riots. Governors were aware of the positive and proactive work done by the College following the riots.</p> <p>LG-S felt that safeguarding was in safe hands within the College.</p> <p>A governor asked about the casework LG-S had touched upon. LG-S reported that student welfare was prominent and a nurturing approach was taken. This was impactful in terms of safeguarding.</p> <p>The Chair asked if there was anything of note to report on Prevent. LG-S said that there wasn't at this point, there was nothing of relevance on this aspect in the casework she had discussed.</p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body note the Annual Report of the Lead Governor – Safeguarding.</p> | |
| 13 | <p><u>MINUTES OF COMMITTEES</u></p> <p>RESOLVED: Governing Body note the following minutes of committees:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Governance Committee 15.5.2024 2. Education Committee 22.5.2024 3. Operations Committee 12.6.2024 4. Audit Committee 26.6.2024. | |
| 14 | <p><u>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</u></p> <p>There were no other items of business.</p> | |

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| 15 | <u>DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING</u> 19 March 2025 5pm. | |
| CONFIDENTIAL SESSION | | |
| 16 | <u>STAFF PAY AND REMUNERATION</u> RESOLVED: Governing Body approve: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employees (where eligible) incrementally progress on their pay scale this year 2. The Living Wage rate be increased to £12.60 per hour for staff whose current rate of pay fell below this level 3. Staff (not on the Living Wage rate) receive a 2.5% increase in pay 4. The above decisions come into effect on 1 January 2025. | |
| 17 | <u>FUTURE STAFFING</u> RESOLVED: Governing Body note the Vice-Principal's retirement at Easter 2025 and the Principal's proposals to create two Assistant Principal posts and restructure relevant services. | |

Signed..... **Date**.....

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