

Minutes of the meeting of the Transformation, Finance & Resources Committee held (via Microsoft Teams) on Friday, 27 November 2020 at 10am

Present:	David Boughey, Chair Denise Brown, Principal & CEO Jason Carrigan Jeremey Cartwright Stephanie Talbot Andy McKay		
In Attendance:	Maxine Bagshaw, Clerk to the Corporation Antoinette Lythgoe, CFO Nova Abela, Chief HR Officer (from 10.30 to 11.15am) Rob Lawson, external observer		
Min. No.		Action by Whom	Action by When
1	WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE		
	There were no apologies for absence with all members of the Committee present. Rob Lawson was welcomed to the meeting.		
2	DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS		
	The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on matters to be discussed. No declarations were specifically made and standing declarations were noted.		
3	MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2020 AND ANY MATTERS ARISING		
	The minutes were reviewed and it was agreed that they were an accurate record of discussions. AGREED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25th September 2020. There were no matters arising.		
4	ACTION PROGRESS REPORT		

Signed : _____ Chair
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	<p>regarding the sessions. Principal indicated that, as expected in a large organisation, responses have been variable with any negative responses influenced by morale in certain areas. This was as expected, which is why the session groups were mixed to avoid 'group thinking'. By and large, i.e. 80% plus, of recipients have found it a positive initiative.</p> <p>The Committee considered the update provided and agreed that it was a really useful summary and ties in well with what Governors already know. They felt that there was maybe more to do this year to align with the KPIs so that they give the same message. Principal indicated that, in terms of the KPIs, she undertook a very factual review i.e. was the KPI met or not. She explained that there was no contextualisation for COVID nor was there any assessment as to whether the targets set were right and/or achievable. Governors acknowledged this and expressed the view that it was important to make sure that the language used is consistent.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.</p> <p>1) <u>KPIs – 2019/20 Outturn</u></p> <p>The Principal provided a summary of the outturn position for 2019/20 and she confirmed that most of the greens relate to finance, audit, regulation etc. The red RAG rated areas are mainly where information was not available e.g. student surveys, NAR reports etc. She reiterated that the outturn position is a literal assessment i.e. was the target met or not.</p> <p>Committee indicated that, for 2020/21 there may be a need to review what is realistic given that staff and students will be in and out of self-isolation throughout the year. This will inevitably impact on engagement, retention and progress etc. Principal expressed the view that there was still likely to be a negative impact because of COVID in 2021. Governors indicated that they were interested in the rate of progress and not just achievement of the target measure.</p> <p>A challenge from the Committee was to look at what the sector is doing i.e. national trends. Principal indicated that, whilst information is being shared informally, there is no formal data upon which to benchmark. Committee were advised that two organisations will be involved in the SAR validation process next week and this will give an opportunity to test their own approaches in terms of 2021 KPIs. These are Burton and South Staffs College and the Luminare Group. She indicated that she</p>		
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	<p>will have a more accurate view on their approach next week. Governors all agreed that it would be helpful to have some comparison points.</p> <p>In terms of the 20/21 KPIs proposed it was agreed that the Principal would do a little more work to refine and align to the 5 Pillar Plan and would, as part of this review, look at what is likely to be achievable. Committee indicated that it is important for them to know which targets really are at risk and where the pressure points are. Principal confirmed that she would provide an update to the Board at the next meeting on 11 December 2020.</p> <p>The Principal confirmed that the 5 Pillar Plan going forward will identify priorities for 2020/21 and these will be pulled in to one action plan following the strategic discussions taking place next week.</p> <p>AGREED:</p> <p>a) To note the content of the report provided in relation to 2019/20 yearend performance measures</p> <p>b) Defer approval of 2020/21 performance measure targets to the Board meeting on 11th December 2020.</p> <p>c) To note the content on the update given in relation to the 5 Pillar Plan</p>	Principal	11.12.20
8	MARKETING STRATEGY UPDATE		
	<p>The Principal introduced this item and drew Governors attention to the minutes of the working group meeting held in September 2020. She advised that she was still working to create the strategy but, to support this, the College has recently changed its PR service provider to Strategi Solutions. She indicated that they are very well connected locally and will therefore help to better communicate and get the College a step further forward in terms of its ambitions. It was noted that Rob Fisher, an independent Governor, is an employee and Managing Director of this company and therefore it is important that this be recorded in terms of any potential conflicts of interest. She confirmed that the team were now working on a PR 'front foot' approach in the locality. Committee indicated that it was important for communications, risk register and student recruitment strategies to all be wrapped up together.</p> <p>Principal advised that the College has some real success stories but is not capitalising on them, an example given was that in relation to adult training SOTC provides over 50% for the whole</p>		

	<p>of Staffordshire but that this is something that is not commonly known.</p> <p>A question and challenge from the Committee was in terms of the timescales for finalising the strategy, Principal advised that this would be before the Christmas break 2020. Principal indicated that regular feedback is provided via digital media however this is not the same for annual campaigns and that it can be very difficult to specifically identify cause and effect. Governors expressed the anticipation of the College coming out of intervention in the spring and therefore there is a need for PR and marketing to build up to this. Principal expressed the view that the College's strength in adult provision really stands it in good stead given the shift in government policy.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.</p>		
9	STUDENT NUMBERS		
	<p>The CFO introduced this item and gave an update in a number of areas.</p> <p>1) <u>Study programmes</u> – key matters noted were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College currently has 1594 funded study programme learners against a full allocation of 1612 and are demonstrating +£146k against the funding allocation. All agreed that despite actual student numbers being lower than anticipated the financial position in relation to them is positive. • College continues to recruit throughout the year and, if it follows prior year trends, College should outturn above allocation. • Generally there is over recruitment in the sector • There will be a positive impact on the 20/21 allocation on the basis of lagged funding, with the expectation being circa £400k up on current year. <p>2) <u>Adult education budget</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College is currently demonstrating 49% of the £5.222 million allocation with further planned delivery indicating an outturn of 100%. • Achievement of this target is subject to slightly more risk than originally envisaged as it relies on Jobcentre Plus referrals and Princes Trust activity. • In relation to 19-24 traineeships the College's initial allocation was increased by £25k to £54k at the end of October 2020. 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College has received an extra £55k for sector based training • Additional £87k received for COVID skills offer <p>3) <u>Apprenticeships</u></p> <p>The CFO indicated that the team have taken a prudent approach in the budget and explained that, if the College over delivers then there will be a positive impact against budget. There are a number of concerns at the minute, specifically in relation to an increasing number of breaks in learning and also data locks with circa £350k locked which is more than ever before. It was explained that the DAS service has had a significant step change in the volume of apprenticeship employers needing to utilise it because of the new recruitment incentive which is causing system challenges.</p> <p>Committee asked whether the data locks are an issue across the sector. CFO expressed the view that this is likely to be the case.</p> <p>Principal advised that in the recent Ofsted visit they were very interested in apprenticeship numbers as SOTC seems to be bucking the national trend regarding recruitment. Ofsted were interested to know what the College is doing which may explain this. Governors asked whether the College knows what it is doing which is different to others. Principal indicated that there were a number of reasons that may have contributed to this, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the College continued to interact with employers during lockdown • College took the decision not to furlough the business development team and it is believed that this has had a positive impact • Risk rating for employers was completed during lockdown so that site visits could continue. This has been part of relationship maintenance whilst adhering closely to health and safety considerations. • Locally there is a lot of ground works taking place which requires a lot of apprentices e.g. District Heat Network, with one company employing over 50 apprentices. <p>A challenge from the Committee was that there is a piece of work to do to commit action and impact to organisational memory. Principal confirmed that this could be built into the SAR, risk register and business continuity plans.</p>		
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	<p>Committee indicated that it was important to know whether the College is ahead of the demographic profile or keeping pace. Principal indicated that it would be possible to analyse this as soon as vector data is available.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.</p>		
10	MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS – OCTOBER 2020		
	<p>The CFO introduced this item and drew a number of aspects to the Committees attention</p> <p>1) Income</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page 2 shows that tuition fees and education contracts are the area of most risk but also most opportunity. The College has had its loan facility increased because of current performance. • There have been delays in the start of the work with BT. Managing Director Commercial has confirmed that, whilst it is a later start than envisaged, it is expected that there will be a higher volume. • School links contract is down because of COVID • Position in relation to HE is believed to be a profiling issue • Positive position in relation to gas and fabrication • Positive position as a result of job retention scheme (+£48k) <p>2) Expenditure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay costs are under control although slightly higher than the 19/20 position • Expectation is that pension costs will increase • College will go over the staff costs budget but this is offset by additional income. These are costs associated with higher student numbers. College may need to outsource some of the support services required for students. • There are a number of additional costs now included, examples given were the Mayvin leadership work and additional estates staff required for cleaning and health and safety. <p>CFO confirmed that the cash position was strong, however explained that this does not align directly with the bank covenants as the covenants are based upon cash generation and this therefore means that cash is quite tight for this year.</p>		

	<p>CFO then provided an update on her discussions with the PMO and indicated that, it is unlikely that they will move their position on the model to be used i.e. their version of the lockdown model. She indicated that she has been exploring with them the possibility of having more flexibility regarding restrictions e.g. annual capital spend if the College accepts their lockdown model. Principal indicated that there is a real sense that PMO will not move from their stance and, if the College does not accept the position, then there will be a protracted dispute. CFO confirmed that the likelihood of the College having to pay 'all in April' is very small given the clause regarding payment 'only if it would not lead to breaches in bank covenants' and that, whilst this liability will remain on the balance sheet, it is not expected that the College will have to pay significant amounts over the six year period.</p> <p>(Nova Abela joined the meeting at 10.25am)</p> <p>CFO advised that the model was put in place for financial years 20/21 and 19/20 and then beyond this there is a different model to be submitted and, as a consequence, it may be that the maximum liability is £1 million on the balance sheet. It was acknowledged that the onus is on the College to manage spend appropriately and CFO confirmed that there was clear documentary evidence in place regarding spend needed in College e.g. capital. Taking the position as a whole, the Committee confirmed their support for the CFO to enter in to negotiations regarding increased flexibilities. A challenge from the Committee was to reach resolution as they would not wish to keep coming back to this time and again. They asked the CFO to try to 'draw a line under this'. The College is minded to accept what the ESFA describes as the original lockdown model.</p> <p>In concluding the presentation of the management accounts the CFO confirmed that the KPIs are on track and specifically drew Governors attention to the capital expenditure position. She explained that this is how the College intends to spend £400k and should be cross referenced with the estates paper later on the agenda.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the October 2020 Management Accounts as presented.</p>		
11	HR ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019/20		

	<p>The Chief HR Officer presented her annual report and explained that it summarises the range of HR activity undertaken in the year. She described it as a very busy year and confirmed that the team have tried to carry on with the range of activities identified in the People Plan plus deal with the COVID pandemic.</p> <p>Key areas that she brought to the Committees attention were</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructuring: Despite COVID -19 the College did not have to make substantial redundancies, the restructure programme for 2019/20 was limited to the loss of 7.1 ftes. The reductions were achieved through voluntary severance • HR case work covers disciplinaries, sickness management, capability management, ET claims, pay review requests, probation management and requests from staff around conditions of service. Sickness management accounted for most of the case work followed by pay review requests, the pay review requests are largely as a result of staff perceptions about College finances being more stable. • The HR team undertake a great deal of activity in employee well-being and support, much of this work is as a result of sickness absence. Occupational Health reports are a corner stone of sickness absence management; this is a contracted-out service. The College also has a confidential online/telephone counselling service supplied by Zurich. Whilst these services are good, the College would like to implement an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to improve employee well-being and reduce sickness further, affordability of this service is delaying the College moving forward with this. • HR fronted the brunt of staff queries, concerns, information and support for COVID-19. Staff received a compassionate and caring response from the College HR team contributing significantly to staff perceptions about feeling well supported during Lockdown 1. • The College has a flexible workforce with 51% being full time and 49% part time. The volume of Academic Proportional staff is modest, suggesting that College flexibility in academic staffing is modest. Over the course of the year there was a 20% vacancy factor in academic 		
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	<p>staffing, which is quite high but down by 8 staff on the previous year. Business Support staff reduced by 33 in 2019/20 on the previous year, which is reflective of the restructure carried out in 2018/29.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The workforce at Stoke on Trent College is predominantly female and over 40 years old, which accounts for the balance of generation X and Y. The workforce is also predominantly white and most staff self-declare as without a religion or unknown. Only 2% of College staff declare a disability. The majority of staff, 69%, declare as heterosexual. This demographic data needs to be reviewed as part of our HR strategies around recruitment of staff, a closer alignment with the local population would be expected. • Staff absence and lost time rates reduced in 2019/20, largely due to COVID-19 and the flexible arrangements the College put in place during Lockdown1. • Staff turnover rates in 2019/20 reduced across the board however, turnover amongst assessors and management remain high. Management turnover was largely as a result of performance management. <p>In general discussion she confirmed that there had been lots of absence management this year and indicated that it was not the actual numbers but more the focus. A lot of time and support was provided to managers to raise their confidence and competence. This sits alongside the College aim to drive down absence over a 3 year period. In addition to this, there was a lot of support provided to staff during lockdown.</p> <p>Committee considered the workforce data and all agreed that there needs to be a closer review of the profile when again considering the recruitment strategy. Committee were advised that it doesn't seem to be the processes but more to do with the ability to attract applicants. Committee noted the observation made that 'the staff profile does not represent the student profile' and they questioned whether this was actually an issue of attraction or instead an issue of availability. Chief HR Officer expressed the view that locally there are not the skills available to fill the full range of the Colleges offer and therefore the College may need to look further afield. Profile in terms of gender is very similar to the rest of the FE sector.</p> <p>In terms of ethnic diversity there is a feeling that the College is</p>		
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	<p>probably quite low and it was explained that this may be an issue of attracting individuals to work in Stoke on Trent instead of Birmingham, Manchester etc. It was confirmed that the College would have to put specific measures in place to attract outside the area. If this was the case then it is highly likely that higher rates of pay would need to be offered to attract. A challenge from one member of the Committee was whether or not the College is at a detriment as a result of low diversity or whether the College is just not hitting its target in this area. Principal indicated that the current position means that it is a challenge to make change. Having a broader staff base would bring a different and/or new perspective and would ensure a refreshed and new talent pool. She would like to see a workforce that can relate to the student body and feels that more diversity would assist with this.</p> <p>A challenge from the Committee was in terms of what now is done with the data and the impact that this will have on the College's strategy. They asked how the information provided can be aligned to the vision and the strategy. A challenge from the Committee was to better understand the client perspective. Principal indicated that it is important to offer learners role models who can raise ambitions and expressed the view that a diverse workforce will help with this.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the 20% vacancy statistic and asked whether this was putting pressure on College delivery. Chief HR Office confirmed that in some areas it was, for example Construction and Engineering. She described these as difficult to recruit posts with the most significant issue being pay. There are quite competitive approaches regarding salary within what is in reality a small recruitment pool.</p> <p>The Committee asked whether the College can be creative and link development opportunities with businesses e.g. use of a part time offer so that individuals can experience teaching as part of their own development. Chief HR Officer confirmed that this was a possibility and indicated that, in addition, the College may want to further review the armed forces programme and also graduate schemes.</p> <p>A challenge from the Committee was to think about establishing a Stoke on Trent pipeline, whereby the College creates its own staff recruitment pool through training and upskilling which is a priority now. This could be considered alongside a volunteer teacher programme. They felt that now was an opportune time to allow individuals to gain teaching experience so that they</p>		
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	<p>learn to love it and it becomes a vocation. All felt that the blended approach was likely to be attractive.</p> <p>Committee then considered pages 23, 24 and 25 of the document and the absence statistics. Whilst acknowledging that the College would never be able to get to a zero position they asked what was being done to plan to manage the spikes that are seen, particularly those in January and February. Chief HR Officer confirmed that there is wellbeing support in place and that part of this is discussion regarding workload issues. She confirmed that the College is encouraging down time to recuperate. Principal indicated that the Luminare group is building in a couple of four day weeks where they can, where the College is closed on a Friday and a Monday and, in addition, they are having a two week shutdown at Christmas. All felt that there was an opportunity to operate differently around the winter peak so as to avoid short term absence. One member of the Committee suggested the use of 'fear of missing out' i.e. plan the really interesting initiatives in the winter months so that staff remain engaged even in the most challenging months.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.</p> <p>(Nova Abela left the meeting at 11.15am)</p>		
12	ESTATES STRATEGY UPDATE		
	<p>The CFO introduced this item and confirmed that it provides an update on a number of aspects which have been considered in detail by the Capital Projects Committee. She confirmed that there were some restrictions on what the College can do, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual spend limits imposed by the PMO • Significant investment required in some areas • College is over spaced <p>She confirmed that campus master plans are being created to allow better visuals, this will enable a better understanding of reconfiguration options. Mounsey surveyors are reviewing the whole site and will comment upon values, options etc. alongside Matthew Hirst who is undertaking the strategy review.</p> <p>Committee then discussed the FE capital allowance received of £804k and the CFO confirmed really helpful support from Mark Palmer who has joined the Capital Project Committee as a co-optee. She confirmed that he is supporting the College to identify an interim project manager. The College is utilising the</p>		

	<p>local authority framework and there are four local firms on this with the College interviewing them next week when an appointment will be made.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.</p>		
13	LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME UPDATE		
	<p>The CFO introduced this detailed report and confirmed that it relates to the LGPS scheme only and not TPS. This sits alongside assumptions included in the financial statements. Auditors have confirmed that the assumptions are reasonable.</p> <p>It was noted that there may be an AOC commissioned piece of work to look specifically at assumptions in FE and the CFO confirmed that she was monitoring developments in this area.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.</p>		
14	HEALTH AND SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019/20		
	<p>The CFO presented this item and confirmed that this is given to Governors annually. She indicated that this report is presented with a fresh perspective given that the Health and Safety Manager was new to the College in 2020. Key aspects noted were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of incidents is significantly reduced. This may be because of COVID or a decline in reporting and this is being reviewed. • Additional capacity is required in the team and it is hoped to recruit with the benefit of the kickstart programme • Health and Safety Committee continues to meet regularly and it was noted that Andy McKay is the link Governor on this • Good progress has been made in terms of training and emergency planning • Risk management is generally felt to be good <p>A challenge from the Committee was that for the next annual report they would like to better understand the statistic distinctions between staff and students so that they can see the trends in either category.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the report provided.</p>		
15	RISK REPORT		

	<p>The CFO introduced this item and confirmed that risks specifically relating to TF&R items have been extracted and an update given in relation to each. Governors reviewed the notes in the report and were advised that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to risks 2, 3 and 4, at the time the report was prepared, there was a higher risk in relation to PMO cash sweep. As this has now been resolved and a confirmed position agreed the risk will reduce. • Risk 9 – there is now potential for greater flexibility • Risk 10 – a separate COVID risk register is in place. It is in a much simplified format and is more operational. • Risk 11 – this has reduced given the investment in the network core, laptops and planned investment in WiFi. • Risk 13 – College does not believe that there are any particular prevent or safeguarding concerns • Risk 14 & 22 remained unchanged in the register • Risk 16 has reduced given the work being done on the marketing strategy • Risk 20 remains unchanged <p>Governors all agreed that this was a really helpful summary and format.</p> <p>AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.</p>		
16	AOB		
	There were no items of additional business.		
17	DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING		
	<p>The Clerk confirmed that this was 29 January 2021 at 8.30am.</p> <p>Meeting closed at 11.45am</p>		