

**Minutes of the Special Board Meeting held (via Microsoft Teams) on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021 at 8.30am**

Governors in Attendance:	Jeremy Cartwright, Chair Denise Brown, Principal/CEO David Boughey Rob Fisher (until 9am) Dave Hopley (from 8.40am) Andy McKay Julie Obada (from 8.50am) David Rogers Steve Sawbridge Steph Talbot		
In Attendance:	Maxine Bagshaw, Clerk to the Corporation Antoinette Lythgoe, CFO Nova Abela, HR Director		
<b>Min. No.</b>		<b>Action By Whom</b>	<b>Action By When</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>DECLARATION OF INTERESTS</b>		
	The Chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on Agenda items to be discussed. No specific interests were made and standing declarations were noted.		
<b>2</b>	<b>WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS &amp; APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</b>		
	Apologies for absence were received from Shannan Mansfield, Aimee Lessels, Pritpal Singh Nagi, Jo Mountney, Sue Blake and Donna Hazledine.		
<b>3</b>	<b>STRATEGIC PLAN</b>		
	The CEO introduced this item and confirmed that her report includes three aspects, these are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 Pillar Plan</li> <li>• Updated Strategic Plan, and</li> <li>• Presentation, covering the key points for Governors to note</li> </ul>		

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She summarised the changes since the last Board discussions, these are:

- The title – ‘Strength to Strength’ – was to give the sense that the College has moved a considerable distance since the last version of the Strategic Plan.
- Infographics have been added, although the style was currently not consistent throughout. These will be fine-tuned in the final edit; she believes that the graphics build on the simple bullet points that the College wants people to remember.
- Change of the Strategic Objective: ‘innovate, create and adapt’ to: ‘create an innovative, creative and adaptable staff team’. Reasoning: there wasn’t sufficient emphasis on people as key investors in the success of the Organisation. Board talked about needing to innovate processes and people rather than things, and that changing the wording of this Strategic Objective achieves this.
- Change the Strategic Objective: ‘build brand Stoke on Trent College’ to: ‘celebrate brand Stoke on Trent College’: this is more upbeat and more certain about the College’s position.
- Change the Strategic Objective: ‘build strategic alliances’ to: ‘strengthen strategic alliances’; this is to recognise that much groundwork has been done.

She advised the text has pretty much been rewritten since the last version, which was apologetic in tone. This version is more upbeat and owns the place in the landscape, as there is more to shout about now.

In terms of the 5 Pillar Plan:

- It needs editing; taken from the slides at the last Board Meeting;
- Financial ‘stability’ has been changed to financial ‘agility’;
- Performance measures are cleaner, streamlined and more challenging. Governors were invited to consider these;
- Clear line of sight from Strategic Plan to annual actions.

Strategic refresh summary:

What we need to finalise today is:

- (a) Strategic Plan (i.e strategic refresh – our Agenda plus FEC);
- (b) 5 Pillar Plan (annual plan to advance our strategic objectives);
- (c) Pay Strategy to approve (this is one element of the People Strategy).

<p>What we have already discussed and approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Strategy and 3 year replacement plan;</li> <li>• Estates Strategy, underpinned by strategic refresh.</li> </ul> <p>Yet to be discussed/approved are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Strategy;</li> <li>• Business Development Strategy;</li> <li>• Marketing Strategy.</li> </ul> <p>To be updated by the end of July are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum Strategy;</li> <li>• QI Strategy;</li> <li>• Learner and Learning Support Strategies.</li> </ul> <p>Board reviewed the Strategic Plan and a number of observations and comments were made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The infographics do have some inconsistencies, in terms of numbers and text.</li> <li>• Overall, Governors agreed that they liked the use of infographics as this makes certain aspects 'jump out' although they challenged not to have too many. Key message: any that are included have to add something to the document.</li> <li>• Title is representative of a step forward and is aspirational.</li> <li>• Whole document needs to be proofread.</li> <li>• Some elements of the text still sound overly apologetic.</li> <li>• Some repetition in the text.</li> <li>• As an overview, it aligns with the direction and shape discussed.</li> </ul> <p>A question from the Board was to consider whether it reflects previous strategic conversations and also to consider who it is aimed at: i.e. internal versus external. Board very much agreed that externally it would work to draw people in and would be a positive. A challenge from the Committee was to edit the language to ensure consistency.</p> <p>CEO confirmed that this was very much intended to be an external document for the website and strategic partners. It sets out the direction of travel for staff but does not provide the detail which will underpin it.</p> <p>A challenge from the Board was to carefully consider what the College will do with the document: i.e. they want it to be positive and adventurous rather than passive. They asked that the College consider this to be an active document and, in some way, celebrate it with a launch. One member of the Board</p>	CEO	March
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	<p>suggested a targeted personal approach with key stakeholders rather than a webinar type event, which can come across as quite cold. CEO was asked to devise a communications plan to support its dissemination/circulation.</p> <p>One member of the Board asked whether it was possible to be more ambitious in terms of the College reinforcing its presence in the community e.g. via radio, the Sentinel etc. They suggested this could be coupled with a wider news item e.g. the College's adult training offer.</p> <p>Board asked whether the College has PR support. CEO confirmed that it does and that she is just finalising the contractual arrangements. Board indicated that they would wish to see PR support advise on appropriate strategies. CEO expressed the view that it would be helpful to undertake a warmup with a coalition of support before going out to wider audiences. All agreed that this was an opportunity to showcase the College from within when providing briefings.</p> <p>One member of the Board indicated that there were a lot of straplines utilised in the Government's recent Budget announcement, that the College could link with in terms of its strategic ambitions. What they would like to see is a webinar coming out of the heart of the College.</p> <p>CEO reminded that the 5 Pillar Plan is Year One of the Strategic Plan. One member of the Board expressed the view that there was scope to present to staff teams as this was as much to do with internal as well as external stakeholders. A challenge from the Board was to consider how to share with MPs as this was something they could really shout about and be loud and proud in relation to. All agreed that it was important to ensure that key allies were on board and that this includes the LEP.</p> <p>One member of the Board asked whether there should be some consultation on the Strategy before it is launched. Board felt that this should be more of a preview than an ask, but that external stakeholder contribution would be useful. They felt it was an opportunity/excuse for an interchange with stakeholders.</p> <p>A challenge from one member of the Board was whether or not there is enough in the document about accountability, particularly in terms of building the brand, as this is all about reputation and credibility.</p> <p>Board saw that there were a number of straplines used within the document, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Project Ofsted'</li> <li>• 'J20'</li> </ul>		2021
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- 'Above and beyond'

They suggested there needs to be clarity around what the straplines mean.

Board, in discussion, agreed that the document was factual and true but they questioned if it was ambitious enough. In terms of the word 'Plan' they felt that it was potentially a bit bland and could be changed to something like 'Year One Ambitions'.

Board discussed the reference to financial agility and all agreed that there needed to be something to drive this forward, particularly in terms of resource generation. They felt there needed to be a change of thinking and not just a change of words for this aspect. CFO indicated that the vast majority of income comes from allocations and therefore agility needs to be wider than just the finances. A challenge from the Board was that the College needs to be better at capturing opportunities in advance and to think about them ahead of time rather than just being reactive.

CEO indicated there were a number of internal documents which complement the Strategic Plan and that the 5 Pillar Plan is how the first year will be implemented. A challenge from the Board was that the 5 Pillar Plan needs to have some prioritisation and a sense of proportionality. All agreed that the 5 Pillar Plan and the Strategic Plan need to completely align and have clear golden threads running throughout.

CEO advised that the strategic objective references are read across to the Strategic Plan. Performance indicators are internal measures which are to be used with the staff teams. Alongside this there are also a number of underlying plans that underpin e.g. Quality Improvement Plan, Teaching and Learning Plan etc.

In terms of the 5 Pillar Plan, a question and challenge from the Board was whether there was too much branding for an internal document. CEO explained that she has utilised the same design format for consistency but acknowledged that it may be too 'glossy' for an internal document. All agreed that what was important was the impact. This was described as the confirmatory document which sits alongside the detail for those who want to see it. They described it as a document which enables the College to see what it is aiming to achieve.

In terms of presentational style, one member of the Board commented that whilst called a 5 'Pillar' Plan, everything is presented in circles (rather than pillars) which can be confusing. He felt that each pillar could have a strapline which explains what will be different once the Plan is achieved.

The Board all agreed that, in broad terms, they were happy to

	<p>approve the document on the basis of the refinements agreed at the meeting. Overall, they were content that it represents the direction and consistency of Board decisions. In terms of developments, these are formatting, consideration of the audience and the launch planned.</p> <p><u>AGREED:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) To note the content of the update provided;</li> <li>b) Approve the Strategic Plan (strategic refresh);</li> <li>c) Approve the 5 Pillar Plan (the Annual Plan to advance strategic objectives).</li> </ul>		
<b>4</b>	<b>PAY STRATEGY</b>		
	<p>The HR Director introduced this item and presented a draft strategy which is underpinned by a policy. She indicated that there are two key elements to this, which are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job evaluation exercise: this will inform the implementation plan and costings, and</li> <li>• Design of rewards</li> </ul> <p>She confirmed that the strategy has been developed upon the agreed pay principles and has been reviewed and approved by the Executive Team. She indicated that there may be minor tweaks as implementation progresses, but that the major themes are in principle agreed internally.</p> <p>She confirmed that it allows for controlled pay progression and the intention is to use support to study as a key benefit. She confirmed that job evaluation was ongoing and was a significant exercise, however it is likely to be completed by the end of April 2021. College would then be able to measure the cost and timescales for implementation.</p> <p>Board's attention was drawn to some current blanks within the document that will be finalised and incorporated once the evaluation exercise is concluded e.g. proposals regarding the pay spines etc.</p> <p>A question and challenge from one member of the Board was: if the College had the right staff, with the right capability, on the right salary, what would the impact on the pay bill be? HR Director indicated that this is not currently known and that the job evaluation exercise is key to understanding this. This will influence the proposed structure and allow the Team to complete projections. She confirmed that the intention is to use the wider benefits offer to control pay costs.</p> <p>Within the strategy she confirmed that no aspects are automatic and therefore decisions on implementation are all within the</p>		

	<p>College's control. This is part of a wider range of reviews and business planning.</p> <p>In discussion, Board all agreed that it was a comprehensive and well-thought through document, but stated that the College needs to carefully consider the flexible versus the equitable. They felt that there were some aspects that needed to be implemented very carefully to ensure equity.</p> <p>One member of the Board asked whether the strategy was fundamentally achievable. He indicated that it is important not to set the College up to fail and therefore it would have to be financially achievable. CFO indicated that it was not achievable all at the same time, but that it does set out the College's ambition and gives a direction of travel.</p> <p>Board asked the likely timescale to realise the strategy in terms of years. CFO indicated that, best guess is 5 years.</p> <p>One member of the Board asked how the pay spines sit with market rates and expressed the view that the College needed to be careful in terms of the feeling of equity. A challenge from the Board was to make sure that parts of the document do not compete.</p> <p>Board asked whether there is anything within the strategy that makes the College stand out, or is it just a matter of 'catching up'. HR Director indicated that there is certainly an element of pay catch up and that the College is looking to get to a fair even level and is not looking to pay more than other Colleges. Board were reminded that the College was able to afford a cost of living increase in 18/19 and a small amount was paid in 19/20. These were not considered to be enough, but the College does have to remember where it has come from and the CFO reminded that the College is still in recovery and intervention.</p> <p>Board agreed to look at the document as a framework and were happy that it shows the College's aspirations, however felt that it was important not to raise false expectations. It was confirmed that implementation will be within the context of an annual budget. This is a framework which will give clarity in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A single pay spine,</li> <li>• Market supplements,</li> <li>• Recovery pay scales and to get the College closer to the market.</li> </ul> <p>One member of the Board asked whether market supplements were usual. HR Director confirmed that they were standard practice in FE and other sectors.</p>		
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	<p>In considering the strategy, Board agreed it was important to be clear in terms of where this is heading; what the College is aiming to achieve and what is the ultimate position. Sitting alongside this then is: what will it cost?</p> <p>A challenge from the Chair was to look right to left and not always left to right. He expressed the view that it was important to have an eye on the end game, rather than always focusing on the current structure and people. He asked for further clarity in terms of what the College of the future looks like in pay terms.</p> <p>A challenge from one member of the Board was to think more intrinsically and in relation to the non-financial aspects. HR Director advised that benefits are presented in a separate booklet. That being the case, the challenge from the Board was to be clear in terms of prioritisation.</p> <p><u>AGREED:</u></p> <p>a) To note the content of the update provided; b) Approve the Pay Strategy as presented.</p>		
<b>5</b>	<b>AOB</b>		
	There were no matters of additional business.		
<b>6</b>	<b>DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING</b>		
	<p>The Clerk confirmed that this was 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021.</p> <p>Meeting closed at 9.40am.</p>		

Signed : \_\_\_\_\_ Chair  
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Date: