

St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held at Stockbridge Lane, Knowsley

Thursday 17 March 2022 at 4.00pm

Present:	Bill Nixon (Chair)	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Phil Han	External Governor
	Jim Pinsent	External Governor
	Debbie Calderbank	External Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Julie Heap	Staff Governor
	John Heritage	External Governor
	Benjamin Bennett-Stanley	Staff Governor
In attendance:	Rav Garcha	Chief Financial Officer
	Mark Doyle	Deputy Principal - Curriculum and Quality
	Julia Callaghan	Managing Director of Waterside Training Ltd
	Gillian Hayhurst	Governance Director (minutes)
	Stephen Jones	Education and Skills Funding Agency

The meeting opened at 4.03pm.

5 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Alun Owen, Liz Duncan, Sophie Littlewood, Nick Shore, David Balsamo and Zulakha Desai.

6 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

7 Minutes of the previous meetings

The minutes of the meetings held on 9 December 2021 and 27 January 2022 were approved as an accurate record subject to non-material typographical amends to the minutes of 9 December 2021.

Benjamin Bennett-Stanley joined the meeting.

8 **Matters arising and action tracker**

The actions have been presented in a new format including a due date. The Governance Director, Chair and Principal have reviewed all actions since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted updates to the action tracker including those that have been completed.**

9 **Chair's update**

The Chair provided an update on their engagement with College activity since the last update. This included weekly visits to the College to meet with the Principal and Governance Director, attendance at the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) case conference and participation in the Further Education Commissioner (FEC) and ESFA Annual Strategic conversation.

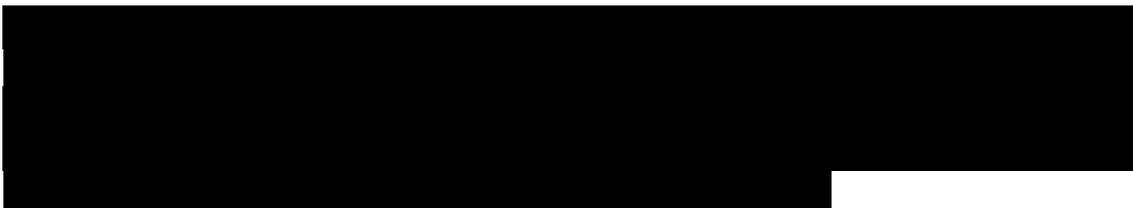
RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the Chair's update.**

10 **Chief Executive Officer update**

The Chief Executive Officer/Principal provided an update on the Strategic Plan 2022-25, intervention, national policy changes, local authority engagement, partnerships, the College's financial position, estates, qualitative curriculum planning, improving areas, key challenges and risks and mitigations.

A letter had been received from the ESFA advising that the College could transition from Intervention to Post-Intervention Monitoring and Support (PIMS) subject to the agreement of a PIMS plan. PIMS is a new concept introduced by the ESFA following an update to the College Oversight Guidance in 2021. The PIMS plan will agree metrics for monitoring the College over an agreed timescale.

John Heritage joined the meeting.



Following the Annual Strategic Conversation with the ESFA and FEC, the Governing Board received a copy of the outcome letter, which summarised the discussion.

The Governing Board considered the policy update and how these may impact on the College. Specific reference was made to the Levelling Up White Paper and the implications around the potential for developing A-level provision in the Knowsley area. [REDACTED]

The Governing Board noted the number of consultation documents that the College is responding to. These have resource implications, particularly for those relating to Higher Education given the size of the College's staffing team. Consideration is being given to how the College may delivery a proportionate response to these consultations while ensuring ongoing engagement.

[REDACTED]

The Cabinet meeting with the Chair and Principal has been postponed. Senior leaders feel that the College is continuing to develop strong relationships in both Knowsley and St Helens.

The Governing Board was given an update on partnership working. Youth workers from Vibe are delivering sessional activity at lunchtime at Stockbridge Lane. There is collaborative project with other FE colleges underway under the Further Education Professional Development Grants pilot to upskill staff. Funds have also been received from the Strategic Development Fund to engage with employers regarding skills need. The College is also working with a national organisation to develop bitesize training for individuals working in the voluntary and community sector.

Consideration was given to the improvements to curriculum planning at Knowsley. Internal progression rates are lower than benchmarking data and members of the Senior Leadership Team are working on plans to retain more students.

The Governing Board discussed the key challenges facing the College and what is being done to address these. There is evidence that targeted activity to improve attendance is having a positive effect. Retention rates are below the same point last year, but above year end. It was noted that Senior Leaders are working to understand the issues in curriculum areas with lower performance to ensure consistently high quality across all schools. The College is also working on building capacity with local employers to ensure there are sufficient industry placement vacancies to meet demand.

Consideration was given to the College's key risks. Work is underway to improve 16-18 recruitment and retention to ensure that the 2021/22 figures were not the

beginning of a downwards trend. It was noted that there are staff recruitment and retention challenges across the sector.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the Chief Executive Officer update.

11 Operational plan 2022/23

This report presented a near final draft of the College's Operational Plan for 2022/23 for information. The final draft of the College' Strategic Plan 2022-25 was presented for consideration.

The Governing Board was informed that the Operational Plan has been shared with the wider leadership team. A further review of the plan will be undertaken to consider whether some actions could be merged into fewer, broader objectives.

The board queried whether the College has the resource in place to deliver on the number of actions within the timescales set out in the plan. Further resource may be required as further scoping of actions is completed. Some of the actions are already underway, particularly those relating to the people element.

In response to a query on future reporting, the Governing Board was advised that the Chair, Principal and Governance Director are working on a simple dashboard that will provide a high-level overview and detail of key achievements. Exception reports will be presented where there are issues to bring to the governors' attention.

The Governors asked which actions have the highest priority. The College is focusing on those relating to people, particularly staff engagement, growth and the student experience. Other actions, like those relating to the anchor institution strategic aim, will be ongoing.

With regard to the Strategic Plan, the Governing Board was advised that the foreword had been added since the previous iteration. Governors raised a few minor typographical amendments. The Governing Board noted that there will be some final changes to the layout of the final document but that these would be presentational in nature and not impact on the content that it was being asked to approve.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the draft Operational Plan 2022/23

The Governing Board approved the final version of the College's Strategic Plan 2022-25 subject to amending the typographical errors and noting further changes to the presentation.

12 Estates update

The report presented an update on estates matters and progress made in the implementation of the College's Estates Masterplan. The report also presented for consideration ,an opportunity to apply for a T level capital funding .

The Governing Board considered the recommendation from the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee to support the bid for T Level funding. If successful, the funds would accelerate the timeframe to deliver the Estates Masterplan. The board acknowledged the short time frame to submit the initial funding bid and the resource and collaborative working that had been required. The local authority provided a letter of support for the project, which has been included within the application. It was noted that although the bid had already been submitted due to the timeframe set by the Department for Education, the College could withdraw the bid should the Governing Board not support the application.

The board considered the risks and challenges to ensure that it had sufficient capital in place to honour the request for match funding. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The board was content to support the request for match funding subject to the approval of the grant application and ensuring that sufficient funds were available without putting the College under undue financial pressure. [REDACTED]

If the College is awarded the grant funding, the resulting build must be completed by September 2023. Given the tight timescale to deliver the project, senior leaders will need to work with consultants to move to the Royal Institute of British Architects plan of work stage 3 while the grant application is being considered by the Department for Education. The board discussed the risks of continuing to invest in the project not knowing the outcome of the grant application. In a worst-case scenario, the College may need to write off a portion of the £160,000 spend, however the concept designs and site investigations have been deliberately arranged so that the work can be

transferred to a new project. Requests for further expenditure will be managed in line with the governance framework.

Alison Cannon left the meeting for a short period.

The board sought assurance that the project had been designed so each phase will complement the existing build. The architects have taken this into consideration within the concept designs and the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee have requested that an Estates Working Party meeting is held for the consultants to present the plans.

The board queried the likelihood that the College will be successful in its grant application. It is too early to predict the outcome and anecdotal evidence suggests that the available funds will be oversubscribed. Following the Skills and Inward Investment Strategy meeting with St Helens Council, the College has been advised that funding is available through the local authority. The College has been invited to share its estates plan to see if financial support can be made available.

The board discussed the governing arrangements in place to ensure that timely decisions could be taken. The board requested that the Estates Working Group be involved in ongoing scrutiny of the project. A review of the governance arrangements, include the terms of reference for the working group and Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee would be undertaken to ensure that the board and Executive Leadership Team has clarity over delegation arrangements and assurance.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the progress made in the implementation of the Estate's Masterplan.

The Governing Board approved an application to the Department for Education for £4m of funding via the T level capital fund.

The Governing Board approved in principle the £4m of capital investment to match the T level capital fund application subject to approval of the Department for Education grant bid and the availability of sufficient capital funding when required.



The Governing Board noted work being done with respect to Kirkby and the potential opening of a new teaching and learning site for September 2022.

13 Governance framework review

The report presented an overview of actions underway as part of the internal review of the College's governance framework for comment and to identify any potential gaps. Formal recommendations will be presented to the board at its meeting in July 2022. The Governing Board was asked to consider conducting an external review of the College's governance arrangements during Summer 2022.

The Governing Board showed their support for an external governance review to be undertaken during the summer. Governors are keen that this review adds value and requested that another committee, other than the Audit Committee, is observed as part of the project.

RESOLVED: The board noted the actions being undertaken as part of the internal review of the College's governance framework and provide feedback.

The board resolved to conduct an external independent review of the College's governing arrangements and agree the high-level scope of the review.

14 Corporate risk register

The report presented the board with an update on the corporate risk register.

A discussion was held at the Audit Committee regarding the introduction of target risks (the level of risk the board would be comfortable to accept after all mitigations were in place). Further work is being done to develop these.

In order to demonstrate board ownership of the risk register, future reports will be presented for approval following Audit Committee scrutiny.

RESOLVED: The board noted that generally risk is determined to have reduced since the last meeting.

The board noted that R1 is reduced and risk no longer prevalent in relation to R2 and R17.

The Governing Board approved the updated corporate risk register.

15 QIP and College v EIF Good – March 2022

The Governing Board was provided with an update to the QIP since the previous meeting in December 2021.

The board noted the progress made against the plan since the previous iteration and following scrutiny at the Curriculum and Quality Committee.

It was noted that there has been an increase in the number of staff receiving a non-effective judgement following lesson observations. The College is using Personal Improvement Plans (PIPs) to effectively support the lecturers and improve the quality of teaching.

Senior leaders are focusing its attention on curriculum areas where quality is not consistent with other schools. There had been recent changes to the leadership of the School of Business and Professional post and the Head of Quality Improvement has been seconded to the role of head of school while the College recruits for a permanent replacement.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the updates to the Quality Improvement Plan.

The Governing Board noted the updates to the College versus Education Inspection Framework ‘Good’.

16 Management accounts for the period ending 31 January 2022

The report presented the St Helens College Group management accounts for the six months ending 31 January 2022 for information.

The board noted that financial performance is ahead of budget. The College is taking advantage of early settlement discounts while it is in a positive cash flow position.

In response to a query on the budgeted surplus, the board was advised that the positive variance is lower than anticipated as adult enrolment is below expectations, which has impacted on subcontractor costs.

Regarding the cash flow forecast, the board was informed that the variances are to be expected and have been adequately provided for.

RESOLVED: **The board noted the management accounts for the six months ending 31 January 2022.**

17 Waterside Training Ltd update

The Governing Board was provided with a mid-year update on Waterside Training Limited, including the January 2022 management accounts.

Waterside has received 500 applications for 40 apprenticeship vacancies.

The Governing Board noted the growth ambitions, including technical training opportunities.

RESOLVED: **The board noted this update on current operations for Waterside Training Ltd.**

18 Higher Education safeguarding and Prevent update

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted that there have not been any safeguarding or Prevent cases in Higher Education to report.**

19 Minutes of committees, verbal update from committee chairs and matters for escalation from committees

The Chair of the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee provided feedback on the 2022/23 high level financial modelling, noting that the forecast suggests an ESFA health-score rating of 'Good'.

RESOLVED: **The board noted the committee minutes and verbal updates from the chairs.**

Debbie Calderbank left the meeting.

20 Verbal report of safeguarding and health and safety governors

The Safeguarding Lead requested that all governors ensure that they undertake any outstanding mandatory training as a matter of urgency.

RESOLVED: The board noted the verbal updates from the Safeguarding and Health and Safety lead governors.

21 Any other business

The Governing Board queried what support was in place for individuals impacted by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The College has offered support to all staff and students, including the small number of students from Ukraine and Russia. The College is providing links to established organisations for individuals who wish to provide donations. The Continual Professional Development all-staff event on 1 April 2022 includes a coffee morning with proceeds going to support those effected.

The College has not seen a direct impact on its supply chain as a result of the conflict. The gas contract has been fixed for a three-year period, however the variable electricity contract has increased significantly.

Date and time of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held on Thursday 19 May 2022 at 4.00pm in the boardroom at the Town Centre Campus, St Helens.

Everyone left the meeting except for external governors, the Principal and Governance Director.

22 In camera session: external governors

An in camera session was held with external governors. A private and confidential minute is available from the Governance Director on request.

The meeting closed at 6.50pm.