

Present: Matthew Adams, Paul Cumming, Phil Douce, Gill Slater, Ed Senior, Abi Stephenson and Cherry Yau.

In Attendance: Ruth Scotson (Deputy Principal), Sallyanne Griffiths (Trust Finance Director), Andrew Leyland (College/MAT Accountant) and Jo Payne (PA to the Principal/Clerk)

1. Appointment of Chair: Matthew Adams was unanimously appointed as Chair of the Committee for the academic year.

2. Apologies: Sam Lifford.

3. Standing Items

- (i) Gill Slater declared that she attends the MAT Trust Board meetings as an observer.
- (ii) No items were identified as confidential to the Committee.
- (iii) No urgent items were declared.

4. Minutes

(i) Minutes of the Finances & Resources Committee: 20th May 2020

The minutes of the meeting were **confirmed** as a correct record and will be signed by the Chair in due course. It was noted that some of the actions identified as completed at the last meeting had not been marked as such. The Clerk would amend this. An update was received on the action points. The Principal advised that the Cafeteria Manager had a small quantity of reusable cups and would reflect on purchasing more based on demand. There was no plan for monetary incentive to encourage use of the cups given that prices were already significantly discounted. The water bottles sold in the Cafeteria were made of recycled materials.

The Committee **noted** the information provided.

(ii) Recommendations of the Student Exclusion Appeal Panel: 12th August 2020

The Clerk presented the recommendations of the Student Exclusion Appeal Panel and each of these were discussed in turn.

In relation to the suggestion that students who were sent home should be advised at the time of the reason, the timescale and the next step, the Principal explained that often, the decision to send a student home was made as the student was not acting in a way that made a reasonable discussion possible. Once the situation had been dealt with, it was then possible to contact parents and provide clarity. The Principal explained that the Curriculum and Quality Committee had approved changes to the Student Conduct Policy in relation to compliance with COVID security measures. The changes meant that blatant and/or persistent non-compliance of COVID protocols would result in the student being sent home and being given a period of grace and opportunity to offer assurances about their ability to behave appropriately. If they were not able to provide these assurances, it would then be dealt with as a disciplinary matter.

The reminder that the decision maker prepare a timeline of events to the Appeal Panel was noted.

The Committee **noted** the information provided and **agreed** to make the following **recommendations** to the Local Governing Body:

- Wherever possible, when a student was sent home they would be advised at the time of the reason, timescale and next step. Where this was not possible this should be clarified as soon as practicable;
- Where statements from staff are sought, these should be taken by the investigating officer with a note-taker present.

5. Finance

(i) Financial Update

The Trust's Finance Director presented the Heart of Mercia MAT finance reports for September. It was noted that:

- The August report presented to the September meeting of the Local Governing Body was before audit and pension adjustments. No adjustments had subsequently been required;
- The Heart of Mercia performance as at 30th September forecast a deficit of £4,000 prior to deduction of MAT charges with an EBITDA of £351,000 against budgeted score of £304,000;
- Improved performance was largely to do with the additional pay and pensions funding which had continued beyond what was initially anticipated;
- Given that it was a report on the first month of the financial year, the year end process was still to be completed with prepayments and accruals to be adjusted;
- There had been unexpected expenditure in response to COVID. The ESFA had just confirmed grant funding of £42,000 for the College. Whilst the submission was for £75,000, in the first instance they had reimbursed for the costs that fully met the terms and conditions. Further consideration would be given to the £33,000 spent on IT expenditure;
- Student recruitment was excellent with 1480 on roll against the forecast of 1400;
- The current position was a surplus of £134,000 before the MAT charge against the budget of £16,000. This was largely to do with the front loading of bursary funding.

The Committee **noted** the information provided.

(ii) Student Union Accounts

The Finance Director presented the statement of accounts for the College's Student Union. It was noted that they had generated income to the amount of £3,000 and spend £2,000. The Union would carry forward a healthy budget. The Union had been unable to run as many fundraising activities as would be typical given the national lockdown and subsequent College closure.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- The Student Union had raised money for charities such as St Richard's Hospice and Children in Need;
- The Local Governing Body were not required to approve the accounts as this was an internal working document.

The Committee **noted** the information provided.

(iii) Audit Reports

The Finance Director presented the audit findings report in relation to ICT, Learner Numbers, Key Financial Controls and also the MAT Internal Audit Annual Report. The following points were highlighted:

- On joining the MAT the College reintroduced a more traditional risk based audit approach;
- The ICT report was positive particularly given the difficulties experienced in this area and the finding indicated reasonable assurance;
- Appointments to the central MAT IT team would offer more robustness;
- Many of the actions identified in relation to the ICT findings had already been completed or were being actioned which was pleasing;
- The Learner Numbers report was positive and the new MIS team was benefitting from the resilience of working with a larger MAT team;
- Reasonable assurances were given in relation to Key Financial Controls. This was positive in light of a vacancy in the team which impacted on operations. The team had also adapted to a new accounting system;
- The appointment of Andrew Leyland as College/MAT Accountant would ensure that the Principal and senior team would be provided with the information needed to better inform decision-making. All actions recommended had either been actioned or were being worked on currently.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- In relation to the recommendation about the need for regular restores due to staff and students deleting data, the Principal would confirm that this related to backing up individual's work rather than deliberate or malicious deletion.

The Committee **noted** the contents of the numerous audit reports.

(Sallyanne Griffiths left the meeting at 5.58pm).

6. **Management and Strategic**

(i) Principal's Update

The Principal presented his report highlighting the following:

- In total, to date, there had been 12 confirmed student cases. In the week before the circuit break there had been 5 student cases and 1 staff member. The member of staff with a confirmed case subsequently resulted in 11 other staff having to isolate including the majority of the IT Support team. The Principal felt that this compromised the College's ability to operate effectively and safely given the reliance on IT Support oversight of the card readers to access the building etc;
- The circuit break provided an opportunity to review protocols and to check with teaching and support areas that measures were appropriate and being adhered to. It also provided an opportunity to test plans for remote learning and to review the timetable. It was also thought to be important to maintain the confidence of staff and parents. The response of parents to the circuit break was overwhelmingly positive;

- The ESFA subsequently made clear that any period of closure should not take place unless this was the documented advice given by them or the local health protection team;
- The emergency timetable had been a success. Whilst not ideal for teaching and learning given the longer lessons, there were significantly fewer students in College and none of the communal areas had been near capacity. Students were either in class or 2 metres apart in communal spaces which means that they can be traced;
- A confirmed case on Monday resulted in 21 students being identified via seating plans as being proximity contacts. However, the NHS app subsequently notified almost 50 students that they had been in contact with this confirmed case. It appears that they were identified if they were taught in an adjacent classroom or in the classroom at a different time in the day. The health protection team commented that other educational establishments had reported similar issues and their advice was to turn off contact tracing;
- Conversations and feedback with the local health protection team continued to be positive about the measures in place and action taken in response to confirmed cases.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- Staff had undertaken a lot of training on the use of Teams and the newly appointed Digital Learning Co-ordinator had been instrumental in supporting staff with this. All students, new and returning, were training in using Teams and there was a degree of confidence that learning would be supported remotely to an even better degree than in March. Student feedback suggested that they did not always prefer for lessons to be delivered entirely live with many preferring some input for their teachers, followed by an activity or a presentation with voiceover.

The Committee **noted** the information provided and thanked the Principal and all his colleagues for their efforts over the first half-term.

(ii) COVID Recovery

The Clerk explained that the draft documents which were considered by the Local Governing Body would continue to be reviewed by governors over the course of the year. It seemed sensible for this Committee to lead on the recovery document given the focus on finance, premises and health and safety and for the Curriculum and Quality Committee to have oversight of the document relating to teaching, learning and assessment.

The recovery document had been updated to reflect that concerns about recruitment being adversely impacted by COVID in that applicants would return to their 11-18 high schools were unfounded. The Clerk noted that governors could continue to monitor and challenge aspects of recovery through link visits e.g. remote meetings with specific staff, remote attendance at an online lesson etc.

The Committee **noted** the updates and commented that measures appeared acceptable and appropriate.

(iii) Strategic Development Plan

The Principal explained that the MAT's Executive Principal requested that the College adopt a strategic planning document similar to that used by Hereford Sixth Form College to ensure a consistent approach. The plan incorporated the College's Mission Statement

and Strategic Aims to which changes were proposed. The plan also included information that would enable governors to challenge and support senior leaders and inform governors in terms of the assumptions used when planning.

The Committee welcomed the approach although questioned how governors would know what had been achieved without detailed updates. The Principal explained that the Strategic Development Plan was the executive document which would be reviewed annually. The Quality and Development Plan was the document that governors would review termly and provided the level of detail referred to.

The Committee **agreed to recommend** for approval the Strategic Development Plan to the Local Governing Body. The Committee requested that consideration be given to ensuring that the headings in the Quality and Development Plan clearly aligned to those in the executive plan.

(iv) Personnel Update

The Principal presented the personnel update and the following points were highlighted:

- The reduction in the part-time teaching staff FTE and increase in full-time FTE was deliberate. The historic reduction in staff numbers was noted. The increase in student numbers last year enabled senior leaders to consider measures intended to improve outcomes and mitigate staff workload through reducing caseloads. The Principal explained that providing full-time teachers with ½ block for enrichment or support brought the College more in line with the workload of full-time staff at Hereford Sixth Form College. This cost approximately £200,000. If students numbers remained positive, this was something that could be continued in the medium term;
- In increasing the proportion of full-time staff, this ensured that staff were in College to offer support to students. There had previously been some difficulties if a subject area was staffed solely by part-time staff;
- New support staff appointments had been really positive and included the MIS Manager and College/MAT Accountant;
- Absence figure were skewed by the absence of several staff who were absent for the whole or majority of last academic year;
- No absence was reported during the lockdown period with the suggestion that staff were less likely to report an absence if they could do what was required of them at home.

In response to questions it was noted that:

- A potential increase of 110 students compared with this year's funded number would result in almost £500,000 more funding next academic year;
- Governors would not see the same increase in staffing costs next year as the increase was predominantly to do with the ½ block non-academic teaching for full-time teaching staff;
- Staff appointments were made to manage anticipated growth, although there was capacity to support this growth into next year;
- Pay rise amounts had not been confirmed although were budgeted at 2.5% for support staff and 3.1% for teaching staff based on agreed pay rises for secondary schools. This was more than had been paid in recent years.

The Committee **noted** the information provided.

7. Governance

(i) Clerk's Update Report

The Clerk presented her report and noted that:

- The SFCA was delivering a programme of training webinars available to governors. The Clerk would join all sessions and feedback on any pertinent points and would be pleased to register any governors interested in joining particular sessions;
- Governors who had yet to return annual declarations were reminded to do so. The importance of signing these even when returned electronically was emphasised;
- The format for conducting annual appraisals worked well, although a revised format for this year might be needed if the conference could not proceed in person as a consequence of COVID restrictions;
- The format that the conference would take would need to be determined if this was not held in College. This might involve shorter sessions rather in place of a whole day event or potential postponement until meeting in person were possible.

The Committee **noted** the information provided.

(Phil Douce left the meeting at 6.30pm)

8. Annual Reports

(i) Equality Annual Report 2019-20 and Equality Policy

The Committee received the annual report and **noted** the information provided. Proposed changes to the Equality Policy were **approved**.

It was noted that the College had secured the services of a Chaplain who was due to begin weekly visits imminently.

9. Property

The Principal presented the updated Property Strategy and noted the following:

- The work on Student Services had been completed;
- The short term priorities would be further updated to reflect that the College would not be applying for CIF funding for roof repairs given that as the building's overall condition was good, it would not be eligible. The Premises Manager intended to complete a patch repair of the roofing at a cost of several thousand pounds;
- The priority was providing additional capacity for outdoor social space.

The Committee **noted** the information provided.

10. Health & Safety

(i) Health & Safety Update and Accident Report

The Clerk presented the health and safety update report and the following points were noted:

- The Premises Manager had prepared the report further to his appointment as Health and Safety Officer;

- The management comments on audit recommendations had been updated;
- There were no identifiable trends in the accidents reported so far this year. Two sporting incidents needed to be reported to the HSE under the RIDDOR guidance as they resulted in fractures to parts of the body other than fingers, thumbs and toes. The two incidents were unrelated;
- It remained the College's understanding that the ESFA requirement was that fire drills were undertaken at least termly. In light of COVID restrictions and the need for students to maintain physical distancing, advice was being sought from the SFCA on this matter.

In response to questions, the Clerk advised that any audit recommendations that had been satisfactorily responded to, e.g. compliance with gas servicing, should not appear in the next audit report. Given the limited assurance finding, a health and safety audit be undertaken annually.

(ii) Educational Visits Co-ordinator Report

The Committee received the report on educational visits and the contents were **noted**. No trips or visits had taken place so far this academic year in light of COVID restrictions.

11. Closing Standing Items

(i) Risk Management:

The Principal presented the updated Risk Register which was unchanged to the version considered by the Local Governing Body in September.

The Committee **noted** the information provided and no additional risk management issues were identified.

(ii) Impact: The committee noted that its scrutiny of COVID safety measures was to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and students. Challenge of staffing costs and deployment and consideration of the strategic development plan were aimed at ensuring that assumptions were accurate in light of the financial implications.

(iii) Any Urgent Business: No additional urgent business was identified.

(iv). Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, 10th February 2021

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the Principal and other staff for all their efforts in relation to COVID safety measures and responding to confirmed cases.

The meeting finished at 6.41pm

Signed:.....
Matthew Adams (Chair)

Date:.....

FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE: ACTION POINTS ARISING FROM MEETING ON 11TH NOVEMBER 2020

Report Reference	Action Point	Person Responsible	Completion	Check
FRC/11.11.20/5(ii)	Confirm that need for regular restores not the result of deliberate or malicious deletion of data.	EYS	10.02.21	
FRC/11.11.20/6(iii)	Align headings of the Quality and Development Plan to ensure consistency with the Strategic Development Plan.	EYS/JJP	10.02.21	

ACTION POINTS CARRIED FORWARD

Report Reference	Action Point	Person Responsible	Completion	Check
FRC/20.05.20/3	Discuss the arrangements for equality monitoring of shortlisted applicants with the Personnel Officer.	GS	12.11.20	

ACTION POINTS COMPLETED

Report Reference	Action Point	Person Responsible	Completion	Check
FRC/20.05.20/5(ii)	Circulate plans for reopening and risk assessment with governors on the Curriculum & Quality Committee with feedback to be requested by the end of the week.	JJP	ASAP	✓
FRC/20.05.20/6(i)	Populate the Governors Shared area of Teams.	JJP	June 2020	✓
FRC/12.02.20/7(iv)	Ask the Cafeteria Manager to investigate the possibility of introducing reusable water bottles and Costa cups.	EYS	20.05.20	✓

* Denotes changes.