

HARLOW COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

CORPORATION MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 May 2023 - 9.30am

Membership:	*Liz Laycock (Chair)	*Alex Hanson	*Brian Spencer
	Jon Bouffler	Mike Hardware	*Karen Spencer
	*Rod Bristow	*Stephen Isherwood	*Paul Taylor
	*Hannah Cheesman	*Ray Levy	*Michael Travers
	Julia Fillary	*Lily Lin	*Dawn Tuner
	*John Godley	Rachel Miller	*Ed Whittle

* denotes present

In attendance: Will Allanson, Deputy Principal
Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal
Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance
Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance

Annual Safeguarding Training

Before the meeting commenced at 9.30am, Sallyann Abdelmoula delivered the annual safeguarding training to Governors from 9am – 9.30am.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Jon Bouffler, Julia Fillary and Mike Hardware due to personal circumstances and Rachel Miller due to work commitments.

2 Declaration of Interests

There were no new additional declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2023 were approved by the Corporation as a true and accurate record of the meeting and were signed by the Chair.

4 Matters Arising

4.1 Governor Training Session – Curriculum Reform (minute 3 refers)

Karen Spencer reported that it was agreed as a College that pathways would be looked at to see which would and would not be available if the proposed qualification reforms are implemented. The College is having ongoing meetings and discussions with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education around aviation and aerospace qualifications and with a DfE Director around Public Services and Sports large qualifications. There has been some

discussion around the possibility of a fuller review of T-Levels and further flexibilities with T-Levels industry placements were announced on 17 May 2023.

4.2 Item 2 – Treasury Management Report (minute 9.1.2 refers)

Deanne Morgan reported that the College is looking for providers for a bank account with payment card facilities and the Natwest bank account has yet to be closed however this will be completed by the end of the academic year.

4.3 Register of Membership of Harlow College Further Education Corporation (minute 11.3 refers)

The Corporation ratified Ray Levy's appointment to the Health and Safety Committee, as Health and Safety Link Governor, and Dawn Turner's appointed to the Safeguarding Committee, as an additional Safeguarding and SEND Link Governor.

5 Principal's Update – Strategic Plan Update and Annual Accountability Statement

The Corporation received and considered the Principal's Report – Strategic Plan Update and Annual Accountability Statement, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

Strategic Plan:

Governors were reminded that the Strategic Plan covers a 4-5 year period and is due for a full review in 2024. Every year the Strategy, operational goals and associated key performance indicators are reviewed and Governors were informed that the Annual Accountability Statement is a sub-set of the Strategic Plan. The Annual Accountability Statement is a new requirement and it is mandatory to be published on the College's website and submit it to the ESFA by 31 May 2023.

Karen Spencer gave an overview of the three areas of the Strategic Plan – Career-Led Curriculum, Quality of Education and Resources.

There is positive work being undertaken by the Health and Science teams collaboratively with NHS employers and more strategic partnerships are being explored, creating good opportunities for students.

The College led on the successful Strategic Development Fund project across Greater Essex and has been asked to lead on the Local Skills Improvement Fund application for across Greater Essex.

Governors noted that Essex is looking to be Tier 3 as part of the mayoral reforms.

Karen Spencer reported that there are ongoing challenges with English and Maths and Functional Skills, although incremental improvements are being made. The College is taking part of a national review of Functional Skills qualifications.

There has also been a big focus on Apprenticeships, with improvements being made. It is expected that the College will meet its target by the end of the year.

Carbon reduction and investing in the College's buildings is a key area of focus.

Karen Spencer reported that resources are tight, with an increasing cost base and a decreasing resource base. Funding uplift for next year is 0.2% across all provision and awarding organisations are increasing their fees by the rate of inflation.

It is financially very challenging across the sector. It is predicted that the majority of colleges will have “requires improvement” as their financial health rating by the end of next academic year.

Karen Spencer reported that there is work to be undertaken to look at and understand the full implications of the ONS reclassification and to ensure that it is fair and equitable. The rules are still unclear and it is challenging to plan for the next two years without knowing how the sector will be monitored and the accountability requirements.

There are ongoing challenges with recruiting staff in STEM-based areas. There is the demand to grow the College’s provision in some of these areas however this is not possible without recruiting staff. The College is working with Hays Recruitment to focus on international recruitment and sponsorship of individuals.

Annual Accountability Statement:

The Corporation received and considered the Annual Accountability Statement.

Governors were reminded that the Statement has been considered twice by the Search and Governance Committee and by the Corporation at its meeting held on 20 March 2023.

Governors were informed that the content is based on the Essex Local Skills Improvement Priorities and these areas were highlighted.

The Corporation:

- Noted the Principal’s Report – Strategic Plan Update and Annual Accountability Statement;
- Approved the Annual Accountability Statement for publication on the College’s website and for submission to the ESFA;
- Approved Harlow College to act as the lead partner for Essex for the Local Skills Improvement Fund.

6 Governor Visits and Update from Student Governors

Paul Taylor reported on his apprenticeships visit. He reported that he visited carpentry, HAMEC and electrical and it was fascinating to see what the apprentices were doing. A common reported issue is finding employment and it was disappointing to hear that HTS cannot offer apprenticeships in Harlow. Will Allanson reported that a number of apprenticeships are being explored with HTS, with a maintenance operations pathway being currently explored in more detail. Paul Taylor reported that the apprentices say that technology really helps them to record evidence and the quality seen was outstanding. There are challenges in terms of recruitment of staff for electrical. Paul Taylor reported that he was surprised at the length of some of the programmes and this could be an issue with retention as the apprentices could be offered a permanent job and not complete their apprenticeship. Will Allanson reported that the preferred option is to do a two-year full-time course followed by a two-year apprenticeship,

however if a T-Level is studied, it will take a further four years after completing the T-Level to complete the apprenticeship. Paul Taylor highlighted the issue of needing to keep up-to-date with each apprentice every four weeks and asked if apprentices are having to go into College over the summer to achieve this requirement. Paul Whitehead reported that this has always been the case however the rules have now changed and evidence of learning within a calendar month has now been introduced. Paul Whitehead reported that a review of Level 1 Building Services qualifications is being undertaken and moving towards a more multi-skilled qualification which will help with progression and free up staff with higher-level skills. Paul Taylor reported that he was able to triangulate what is being reported in the Corporation meetings with what he saw during his visit.

Stephen Isherwood reported on his visit to Student Services. He reported that his background is in higher education and working with employers and it struck him just under-resourced further education is. He reported on the amount of school outreach work being undertaken and that the College is doing work that schools should be doing. Karen Spencer highlighted the Careers and Enterprise Company and that there is limited engagement in the local area. Higher education has more funding routes and there is a political lack of understanding of further education. Paul Whitehead reported that with difficulties in recruiting teaching staff in further education, the balance needs to be redressed however the long-term vision is not there. Stephen reported that there is a different infrastructure between higher and further education and it always comes back to funding. Stephen offered to present what is happening in the labour market as part of the College's strategic planning processes next academic year.

Liz Laycock reported on her visit to Childcare and Supported Learning and that what is being reported in Corporation and Committee meetings is what is being seen in the College. All of the Childcare students spoken with indicated they wanted to go on to the next stage of study and that the use of digital technology in Supported Learning was very impressive. Students knew how to raise ideas and where to go to get help. A visit to ESOL and Choices is scheduled for 24 May 2023.

Hannah Cheesman and Alex Hanson provided the Corporation with an update on Student Governor and Student Ambassador activities.

Hannah reported that they have been involved in lots of College events, such as open evenings, well-being fairs, jobs fairs and other external College events. These events provided an opportunity for networking, gaining experience and building confidence.

Alex reported that they were helping to serve refreshments at some of the events which was a good experience, promoting team work and was similar to a work environment.

Karen Spencer reported that at the careers event at Saffron Walden County High the Ambassadors were doing a fabulous job talking to students about the College and directing students to the right members of staff to promote the College.

Alex reported that he presented at Digifest, a national event, which was great for his confidence and helped to promote the College.

Hannah reported on activities undertaken at College to help support students, which include more targeted tutorials and the food bank.

A Governor asked if students are ready to engage in community events and Hannah reported that they are and many are inspired to undertake individual challenges and projects to help support the local community and charities.

Alex raised the issue of communications and how sometimes students feel that communications could happen in a more timely manner or handled better, in relation to in particular the use of common rooms. Will Allanson reported that the closure of the common rooms is a temporary issue due to exams and building work currently taking place on site. It was reported that better ways of communication are being explored. Alex reported there are ongoing issues with buses being raised however this is an overarching issue with changes in services outside of the College's control. The College is however raising the issues directly with the bus companies. The availability of healthy food particularly at STAC has also been raised as an issue. Karen Spencer reported that healthy food was being provided however it was not getting eaten. Will Allanson reported that conversations are being held with the Catering Team linked to carbon reduction, such as vegetarian options and food miles etc.

The Corporation thanked everyone for their updates.

7 Search and Governance Committee Reports

7.1 Minutes of the Search and Governance Committee Meeting – 02 May 2023

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 02 May 2023.

7.1.1 External Governance Review

The Corporation received and considered the report on the External Governance Review, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

Ruth Lucas outlined the requirement and process for undertaking the External Governance Review and that the Search and Governance Committee are recommending the appointment of Pauline Odulinski as the College's External Reviewer at a cost of £5,000.

Ruth Lucas highlighted the benchmarking exercise undertaken and reported that a meeting was held with Pauline, the Chair of Governors and herself to find out more about the proposed process and whether all parties felt they would be able to work well together. Liz Laycock reported that the meeting was very positive.

A Governor asked what outcome the Corporation will get from the External Governance Review and what would happen if the outcome of the Review conflicts with what Ofsted report. Karen Spencer reported that the Review and Ofsted are looking at fundamentally different things and Ruth Lucas reported that a report and action plan will be produced as a result of the External Governance Review.

A Governor asked if the College gets this service as part of internal audit. Paul Whitehead confirmed that the College does to a certain

extent and that the internal audit days will be reduced to reflect the need to undertake the Review. It was noted that internal auditors should not undertake the Review.

A Governor asked what happens after the Review and it was reported that the report needs to be published in some form on the College's website.

The Corporation unanimously agreed to appoint Pauline Odulinski as the External Reviewer for the External Governance Review and agreed the timescales as outlined in the report.

7.1.2 FE Commissioner Termly Newsletter – Spring Term

The Corporation received and noted the FE Commissioner Termly Newsletter for the Spring Term, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

8 Standards and Curriculum Committee Meeting – 14 March 2023

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Standards and Curriculum Committee meeting held on 14 March 2023.

Paul Whitehead provided the Corporation with a verbal update on Apprenticeships and English and Maths.

The quality of apprenticeship provision and the underlying processes have improved. The College is predicting a 62% achievement rate at year-end, which is an improvement of 14% compared to last academic year.

Significant progress has been made with outcomes for apprentices with more top and good grades being achieved at end point assessment. 12 week reviews with learners have been impacted by staff levels in Electrical however Trimester 3 reviews are on track.

Apprenticeship achievement rates are being monitored closely and there has been a significant improvement in the number of learners achieving and a reduction in the number of learners leaving without completing.

Attendance is good at 91.4%, there is good tracking of off the job hours and the use of OneFile is making a significant difference to monitoring and tracking.

Governors were informed that the GCSE Maths paper 1 exam is taking place on 19 May 2023 and the Award in Number and Measure exam has already taken place. Attendance was good for the Award in Number and Measure exam. The College is closed tomorrow morning for the GCSE Maths exam as all rooms and staff are needing to be deployed for the exam. 550 students are sitting the exam, with 120 having individual access arrangements.

Mock results were not as favourable as the College had hoped for and the current prediction for grade 4 and above in the summer exams is 22% for Maths and 19% for English which is in line with previous years.

A lot of work is being undertaken by the English and Maths Team to support students with extra sessions and past papers being provided.

Karen Spencer reported that time for teaching and learning has been eroded as from Easter onwards it is mainly exams and assessments. Paul Whitehead reported that every day from now onwards the College has between 20 and 30 rooms in use for exams and it is a difficult operation to manage.

Governors were informed that there had been an issue with an awarding organisation with the papers for an exam not arriving, causing unnecessary stress and tension for students and staff. The Corporation agreed that this is not acceptable and it should be taken further.

Governors were informed that awarding organisations are requiring a senior member of staff to be on duty over the summer to respond to any queries they may have. Will Allanson will undertake this role however conversations will need to be held with all managers before they go on leave over the summer. Karen Spencer reported that this requirement is believed to be a result of the issue with an awarding organisation last year and they are looking to avoid any surprises on results day.

A Governor reported that it is important to recognise the positive progress the College has made with Apprenticeships and English and Maths.

The Corporation noted the verbal update on Apprenticeships and English and Maths.

9 Resources Committee Reports

9.1 Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting – 9 May 2023

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Resources Committee meeting held on 9 May 2023.

Governors were informed that the College's application to the Post-16 Capacity Fund was unsuccessful. Feedback received was that it was a strong application and the impact on capacity to use the funding scored highly however demand in the preceding four years scored lower. More detailed feedback has been requested. The College will now refocus the additional capital allocations received and will move forward with the planned external cladding of J building.

9.1.1 ESFA Financial Health Rating Letter and Governing Body Financial Dashboard

The Corporation received and considered the ESFA financial health rating letter and the Governing Body financial dashboard, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

Karen Spencer reported that this is a standard letter which colleges receive annually based on the financial statements' submission to the ESFA and confirms what the College already knows.

The Corporation noted the ESFA Financial Health Rating Letter and Governing Body Financial Dashboard.

9.1.2 Management Accounts

The Corporation received and considered the management accounts for the period 1 August 2022 – 31 March 2023, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Governors were informed that the management accounts had been discussed in detail at the Resources Committee meeting held on 9 May 2023.

Governors noted that the year-end deficit forecast is £800k which is higher than originally budgeted due to no exceptional in-year growth, some funding clawback and some apprenticeship legacy issues.

Staff costs are under budget, as the College is holding some vacancies and increasing class sizes back to pre-COVID levels.

Governors noted that the cost to service the LGPS pension could be between £300k and £2m however this is not yet known. A small provision has been included in the accounts and it was noted that this is a non-cash item.

Non-pay costs continue to be challenging, with increasing costs and difficulties in sourcing materials.

The market has changed with regards to utilities and it is therefore not necessary to be looking at a new electricity contract so far in advance of the fixed-term ending.

The College is forecast to be solvent, there is cash in the bank, cash days are good, borrowing is low and the bank covenants are forecast to be met in July 2023.

Cash flow is now being monitored up until 2024 and Governors were reminded that there is bank covenant waiver in place until April 2024.

Governors were informed that no fixed-term deposits have been entered into as the interest of the current account is still higher than interest rates being offered by fixed-term deposits.

The College's financial health is predicted to be requires improvement however this alone will not trigger any financial intervention from the ESFA.

The Corporation noted the management accounts for the period 1 August 2022 – 31 March 2023 and the forecast position in terms of financial health and bank covenants.

10 Any Other Business

Will Allanson reported that the College is undertaking the College-wide climate survey again to see distance travelled over the last 12 months. Ruth Lucas will circulate the survey for Governors to complete.

The Corporation thanked Brian Spencer for his 16 years as a Governor at Harlow College and for this commitment and dedication to the College over the years.

11 Dates of Future Meetings

Summer Term 2023	Thursday 06 July 2023	9.30am
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