

HARLOW COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held virtually on Zoom at 9.30am on Tuesday 2 May 2023

Membership *Ray Levy (Chair)
 *Lily Lin
 Brian Spencer
 *Karen Spencer

*denotes present

In attendance Paul Whitehead, Vice-Principal
 Julien Sample, E-Learning and Projects Manager
 Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance
 Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Brian Spencer due to personal reasons.

2 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 9 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes (not mentioned elsewhere on the agenda)

There were no matters arising.

5 Membership of Harlow College Further Education Corporation

There were no new recommendations for appointment for the Search and Governance Committee to consider.

6 Register of Membership

The Search and Governance Committee received and considered the Register of Membership, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

Ruth Lucas informed Governors that the Chief Executive from Rainbow Services had expressed an interest in becoming a Governor. Ruth Lucas is following this up with her. Karen Spencer reported that the College had previously worked with Sharon when she was working for Harlow Council and reported that she would be a good replacement for Brian Spencer.

The Search and Governance Committee noted the Register of Membership.

7 Annual Accountability Statement

The Search and Governance Committee received and considered the report on the Annual Accountability Statement, presented by Julien Sample, E-Learning Manager and Projects Manager.

Julien Sample reported that the DfE Annual Accountability Statement guidance has been updated since the Committee last met. The guidance has been updated with content headings for the Statement and national skills priorities which focus on six different sectors which are of economic importance to the country and are difficult to recruit to.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Essex has also released their skills priorities which are very similar to the national skills priorities and include some non-sector specific priorities, such as leadership and management and soft skills.

Harlow College's draft Annual Accountability Statement has been updated based on the updated guidance and the LSIP priorities. Governors were informed that any duplicated content from other key documents, such as the Strategic Plan, has been removed and the hyperlinks to these documents have been provided instead. As a result of this, the Statement is now a much more succinct document.

Governors were asked for feedback on the contents of the Statement.

Karen Spencer reported that the targets and priorities should provide more detail on how the College is developing its curriculum and pathways and not be as specific with courses. It was agreed that the higher education priorities need to link into the Institute of Technology targets.

The Committee thanked Ray Levy for his feedback on the Statement submitted prior to the meeting.

Ray Levy reported that the Statement reads very well and asked if STEM should be defined.

Ruth Lucas reported that the next steps is for the Corporation to approve the Annual Accountability Statement, the Statement be published on the College's website and submitted to the ESFA by 31 May 2023.

The Search and Governance Committee approved Annual Accountability Statement, subject to the amendments outlined above, and agreed to recommend its approval to the Corporation at its meeting on 18 May 2023.

8 External Governance Review

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

Ruth Lucas provided the Committee with an update on the requirement to conduct an external governance review by the end of the 2023-2024 academic year.

Governors' attention was brought to the scoping exercise and scoring matrix which has been undertaken, comparing the AoC, the ETF and a private consultant, Pauline

Odulinski. Governors noted that Pauline Odulinski had scored the highest.

Ruth Lucas reported that she and the Chair of the Corporation have had an informal meeting with Pauline Odulinski. Pauline was part of the pilot reviews undertaken by the AoC last year however is now offering her services directly to colleges. She would take an “adding value” approach to the review and start from the basis that governance is good, whilst looking at ways of moving from good to great. The review would take ten days and this would be conducted remotely, via attending meetings, discussions with Governors, the Principal and the Head of Governance and reviewing documents and minutes. The cost is £5k with no VAT. If the Corporation wanted Pauline to present the report to a Corporation meeting, this would be an additional charge. Pauline has the capacity to undertake the review in Spring 2024. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that all parties believe they would work well together.

The Search and Governance Committee unanimously agreed to recommend to the Corporation at its meeting on 18 May 2023 the appointment of Pauline Odulinski as the Corporation’s reviewer for the External Governance Review.

9 ONS Reclassification

The Search and Governance Committee received a verbal update on the ONS reclassification, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

Karen Spencer reported that colleges and the DfE are working through the processes associated with the ONS reclassification, with the biggest issue being how to deal with loans.

Paul Whitehead reported that in terms of finances, a number of behaviours are being seen. It appears that Treasury want more control of the public purse and funding in the sector. Colleges have been given capital funding, payment profiles have been smoothed out and the adult funding payment mechanism has changed. The environment is changing however it is still a bit unclear. Government do not want colleges borrowing from banks therefore a new mechanism has been put in place however this does not address the issue of colleges running out of cash. The College currently has good cash levels therefore this is not seen as a risk to the College at present. This does put colleges in a difficult position for financial planning and there are also ongoing pay negotiations which are taking place nationally.

Karen Spencer reported that it is hoped things will be clearer when the new financial handbook is released in Autumn and that at present colleges do not know what they do not know.

Deanne Morgan reported that the College had to submit a return to the DfE on how the College complied with the public sector duty of managing public money from November 2022 to 31 March 2023. This return was signed off by Karen Spencer as the Accounting Officer and submitted in advance of the deadline. Deanne Morgan informed Governors that the College’s financial regulations will be amended going forward to ensure they address managing public money.

The Search and Governance Committee noted the update on ONS reclassification.

10 FE Commissioner Termly Newsletter – Spring Term

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

11 Any Other Business

There were no items of any other business.

12 Dates of Future Meetings, Terms of Reference and Calendar of Business

The Search and Governance Committee received and considered the report on dates of future meetings, terms of reference and calendar of business, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

The Committee noted that dates of future meetings will be circulated later in the term.

The Search and Governance Committee considered the two versions of the Terms of Reference for the Committee. Ruth Lucas highlighted that the first version was based on the Committee’s current Terms of Reference and the second version was a more expanded version.

After consideration, the Search and Governance Committee approved the second version of the Terms of Reference.

The Search and Governance Committee received and reviewed the Committee’s calendar of business and noted that governance items had been added in. The Committee approved the Committee’s calendar of business.

Key Points From The Meeting For Corporation:

1. Item 1 – Annual Accountability Statement

To receive and approve the Annual Accountability Statement.

2. Item 2 – External Governance Review

To receive and approve the appointment of the reviewer for the External Governance Review.

3. Item 3 – FE Commissioner Termly Newsletter – Spring Term

To receive and note the FE Commissioner’s termly newsletter for the Spring Term.