

## **Northern Regional College**

### **Governing Body – Unreserved Business**

**Minutes of the Governing Body meeting held on 4 October 2023 in Farm Lodge commencing at 5.00pm.**

**Present:** Mr K Nelson (Chair), Mrs L Crilly, Mr B Devlin, Mr T Dornan, Dr P Graham, Ms J Hemphill, Mr M Higgins, Mrs C McGovern, Ms D McIlwaine, Mrs P Martin, Mr G McAllister, Mr R McKernan, Mr I Murphy, Mr B Patterson, Mr S Shevlin, Mr D Small, Mrs J Taggart

**In Attendance:** Mrs C Brown, Mr S Lavery, Ms J Small

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

#### **117.1 Apologies**

Mr MacAuley.

#### **117.2 Declaration of Interests**

In relation to items to be considered under reserved business, Mrs Crilly made members aware of a potential interest in relation to Departmental advice and Mr Devlin advised a family connection to a member of staff in the College.

#### **117.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 were approved.

Proposed: Mr Murphy

Seconded: Dr Graham

#### **117.4 Matters Arising**

None.

#### **117.5 Chair's Communication/ Correspondence**

The Chair reported a busy summer period covering annual assessments and thanked governors for their engagement in the process. He relayed governors' feedback from meetings and noted response and actions to be taken as below:

- Upcoming training on governance and on audit and risk will be provided by DfE.
- The Principal and Chair will again meet with campus staff over the Christmas/New Year period and provide opportunities for feedback.
- Opportunities will be made available for members to sit in on other committee meetings as observers.

## **Actions:**

- **A glossary of key terms to be developed to include safeguarding terminology.**
- **The organisational chart to be updated and photos included.**
- **Provision of in-depth information on relationships with funding bodies and how this enables the running of the College, will be picked up.**

Details of proposed membership for 23/24 Committees was noted.

**Action: Any requests for change of membership to be notified to the Secretary by 11 October, for consideration by the Chair.**

The Chair read a summary of members' feedback on induction training provided on 16 August and noted the positive comments.

### **116.6 Principal's Report**

Members noted that an update on strike action would be taken as priority, being the current key risk for the College.

In the context of her report, Mrs Brown outlined the process in place to minimise disruption from current strike action along with the focus on mitigating the impact of lost learning for students affected by recurring one-day strike action. Members heard that feedback from students, especially from part-time, day release and fee-paying students, was starting to come through with employers central to monitoring activity. Mrs Brown highlighted that whilst the College was currently managing to continue the curriculum, the real impact would become clear at assessment and exam periods.

The Principal reported disruption across the sector and a detrimental impact on students. Whilst mitigations had been put in place to safeguard students, effects would again become apparent during the year. He reported on sectoral engagement undertaken with Trade Unions (TUs) and efforts to halt strike action as soon as possible and noted thanks to staff for continuing to deliver high quality service during this time.

In response to members' questions, the Principal summarised pay negotiations which had taken place for 21/22 and 22/23 and outlined budget constraints on colleges as non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) subject to civil service rules.

The Governing Body noted the disruption to the College to date and encouraged engagement with TUs, with a strategy to be developed once written demands are received.

The Principal highlighted a number of items within his report including DfE shared strategic priorities, with a bilateral meeting to be held week commencing 9 October; he noted the roles

College staff were playing as sector representatives for sector initiatives and highlighted the competency and influence of College staff in the sector; the admissions and enrolments position for 2023/24 was outlined; update on student achievements; and new funding schemes.

During discussion members noted: a current achievement rate of 80% with a final position to be established over the next week; pay increments are currently included in the annual business case for pay awards; a trend around increasing FE applications.

#### **116.7 Education Committee**

Dr Graham provided a summary of discussion at the meeting on 20 September and the draft Committee minutes of the meeting on 20 September 2023 were endorsed.

Members took note of a change to the timing of the meeting cycle to align with Departmental revised submission dates for the self-evaluation and quality improvement reports.

The curriculum strategy was also noted.

#### **117.8 Audit & Risk Committee**

Mrs Martin updated members on key business considered at the meeting on 27 September 2023 including 3 areas of non-compliance for the mid-year assurance statement 23/24; information governance with focus on updates to policies and procedures following wider public-sector data breaches; internal audit reports with satisfactory assurance was recognised and the 23/24 internal audit plan was discussed, and the draft 2022/23 Annual Report and Accounts was received.

Members were apprised of a request from NIAO for a change to the minutes of the A&R Committee meeting on 31 May 2023 and a subsequent amendment was endorsed.

#### **117.9 Resources Committee**

Mr Murphy outlined the business discussed at the meeting on 12 June 2023 with particular emphasis on excellent progress on new builds and a challenging budget situation. He acknowledged the work of the College team. Members heard that the CDP Progress Report had been submitted to the Department and that the Committee would consider options to deliver a prioritised curriculum in line with future budget reductions.

The draft minutes of the meeting on 12 June 2023 were endorsed.

#### **117.10 Finance Update**

Mr Lavery spoke to this report. He advised that the College was adhering to the draft 2023/24 budget allocation whilst also liaising with the Department on possible in-year resources. He outlined ongoing efforts to reduce costs and noted that extra business income would also be

used to offset budget cuts. Information on surveys for reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) was noted.

Mr Shevlin queried longevity of external funding being allowed without reduction in DfE core budgets. Mr Lavery clarified that whilst funded as NDPBs, the Department expected colleges to become more self-sufficient and would encourage this through the new Partnership Agreements (PAs).

In response to a question by Mr Small, Mr Lavery confirmed that the MASN budget allocation had been finalised for the current year.

Members were advised that the College currently had no international fee-paying students, with one application pending awaiting confirmation of finance. The upcoming course in partnership with Larne Football Academy offers potential to generate more international applications.

**Action: To be included in the Strategy Day - assessment of spare delivery resource for income generating activities; options for generating income from spin out companies and international fee-paying students.**

#### **117.11 CDP Progress Report**

Consideration was given to this report which had been submitted to DfE in August 2023. For the benefit of new members, Ms Small outlined the background and requirements for the report and the impact of revised timings for submission to the Department.

Ms Small took members through the different Report Cards and explained red risks, noting that due to the requirement to report only delivery related to Departmental funding in Report Card 2, the report did not reflect the extent of external engagement work undertaken by the College. It was hoped that a change to the reporting template, which would in future be more aligned to delivery against 10X, would take into account funding generated by the College from external activity.

In response to a query from Dr Graham, the Principal advised that discussion on extensive requests for data collection by the Department had not taken place at the recent meeting as intended but College staff will pick-up at forthcoming meetings. Reference was made to lack of evidence that expected streamlining of data requests had resulted from implementation of the Learner Management System (LMS).

In response to a question by Mrs Taggart, Ms Small advised that the College researched funding opportunities with outside colleges, with labour market partnerships and with a range of other external parties.

### **117.12 New Build Update**

The GB considered this report and noted details of delivery programmes, expenditure forecast, key risks and other client matters. Members welcomed the College's nomination for Project Delivery Profession Awards and the interest this would generate from prospective new students. Maximisation of promotional opportunities by the Encamp Project as the College prepares to move to the new Causeway Campus was also welcomed.

The Chair thanked everyone involved in this achievement and looked forward to the next year.

Mr Patterson's offer to provide promotional assistance at a community level was noted.

### **117.13 Any Other Business**

None.

### **117.14 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on 22 November on MS Teams, subject to review.

The meeting ended at 6.21pm.

Mr K Nelson



Date 22 November 2023

Chair

Mrs K Wallace



Secretary