

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 18 March 2020 by Skype, commencing at 5.00pm.

Present: Mrs I Allison, Mr K Chambers, Mr R Cochrane, Ms A Dynes, Mr W Hutchinson, Dr D Lennox (Chair), Ms Y Mallon, Dr K McCambridge, Mr W McCluggage, Mrs G McConnell, Mr I Murphy and Prof T Scott.

In Attendance: Mrs M Donnelly, Mr M Higgins, Mr P O'Neill, Ms J Small and Mrs K Wallace, Secretary.

93.1 Apologies and Welcome

Dr Lennox assumed the position of Chair for the meeting. An apology was received for Mrs Eve.

The Chair welcomed Ms Jenny Small to her first meeting of the Governing Body and thanked members for agreeing to the virtual meeting.

93.2 Declarations of Interest

None.

93.3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2020 were approved.

Proposed: Mr McCluggage

Seconded: Mr Murphy

92.4 Matters Arising

None.

93.5 Chair's Communication

Chair appointment: The Department had advised that the appointment process for a new Chair was ongoing and was expected to reach conclusion shortly.

Covid-19: Prof Scott reported arrangements to adjourn face-to-face teaching in the current week following consultation with the Committee Chairs and in anticipation of a Ministerial announcement on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Confirmation of arrangements for the coming week were awaited from the Department, following submission of a draft statement by the 6 college Principals to suspend face-to-face delivery. Members noted arrangements in place to ensure critical delivery of operations and curriculum, pending guidance from awarding bodies. Members of SLT had met earlier with Trade Union representatives, who were amenable to arrangements. Prof-Scott referred to developing volunteering arrangements to support local communities.

Mr Higgins outlined preparations to ensure critical financial operations, IT and software resources, to enable a significant number of staff to work from home. He also outlined the status of contractual commitments and the gateway for the new build project, noting the necessity for this to proceed to ensure project can proceed. Members were advised that risk to the project and timeframe was being monitored in conjunction with the Department.

Ms Dynes and Mr Hutchinson joined the meeting at 5.30pm.

Governors welcomed the daily updates and communication being delivered via website and email to staff and students and noted registration of interest by the College to assist manufacturers who had responded to the Government's call to make essential health items.

The Chair and members commended staff on their commitment to putting in place extensive contingency arrangements at short notice.

Mrs Allison joined the meeting at 5.40pm.

93.6 Correspondence

Departmental correspondence and papers on CDP were noted.

Prof Scott reported that the College had received an extension to the College inspection until 9 April 2020. She further advised that Principals had agreed that submission of student numbers should be deferred until after the current Covid-19 pandemic crisis and this would be communicated to the Department via the Chair of the Principal's group.

Members noted that, in the absence of a Chair, the Committee Chairs had agreed to step in to support the Chief Executive. It was agreed that Mr McCluggage would liaise with Prof Scott in drawing up communication to the Department in relation to the CDP and risk assessments.

Prof Scott highlighted that breaking news in relation to school and university closure arrangements whilst the meeting was ongoing had now rendered the College's prior information on closures outdated and absence of a clear position in relation to FE colleges was noted.

93.7 Tribal Action Plan

The GB noted progress on the Tribal action plan, having been considered by the Resources Committee on 20 January.

93.8 Principal's Report

The Principal provided a verbal update on the actions taken to date in relation to readiness for remote working in response to the Covid-19 emergency. She acknowledged the commitment of staff who had stepped up to do additional work at this time.

Mr Higgins summarised the College financial situation to the 31st March 2020. He advised that the College would remain within tolerance levels due to additional funding secured from the Department. Additional capital funding provided by the Department had been invested in IT.

Members noted the Department's previous indication to continue to support funding for staff in post and were advised that an email had been sent by Mr McCluggage to the Director of FE in relation to the funding pressure for 2020/21.

93.9 Education Committee

The Chair gave a verbal update of the meeting held on 16 March 2020. Members noted draft minutes of the meeting on 12 February 2020 along with reports on CDP, safeguarding and student engagement. The Chair thanked Mr Cochrane for his contribution to the student engagement report.

The Chair reported that Mr Hutchinson and Mrs McConnell had agreed to join the Education Committee until the end of the academic year and that Mrs McConnell had also been appointed as Safeguarding Governor.

Members noted that the CEF meeting scheduled for 16 March to discuss a response to potential strike action by lecturers, had been cancelled. The Chair thanked Mr Murphy for previously agreeing to attend the meeting as he was unavailable.

93.10 Audit & Risk Committee

The draft minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 27 February 2020 were taken as read. Mr McCluggage highlighted the need to engage an Internal Audit service from summer onwards. It was noted that the Canvass presentation had been postponed.

The Vice-Chair confirmed that he had approved Prof Scott's communication on College closure arrangements, as required by the Department.

93.11 Risk Register

Mr Higgins summarised additions and adjustments to the Risk Register following review on 31 January. Members noted that although recorded changes included mitigating actions and control updates, these now needed to be reassessed in the light of the Covid-19 emergency.

Mr McCluggage highlighted the need to include the risk arising from the lack of a Chair on the register.

Prof Scott advised that following initial review of the College's Risk Assessment, the Department had asked in an earlier email for some minor amendments to the scoring to be considered.

93.12 Any Other Business

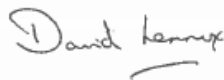
Members appreciated that the key priority for the College was to ensure critical business arrangements and that consideration of efforts to support the health and wellbeing of staff and students would continue to be discussed offline. The potential for civic and community response via the 4 local councils would then be considered, given that many of the HSC students were currently working additional hours and/or volunteering.


93.13 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that an interim meeting of GB would be arranged before Easter, to take place by Skype.

ACTION: The Secretary will poll members on a suitable date for a GB meeting. She will also arrange a date for a short Audit & Risk meeting/call, in April.

The meeting ended at 6.18pm.

Dr D Lennox  _____ Date 1.4.20
(Vice Chair) 1 April 2020

Mrs K Wallace  _____
(Secretary)