

Corporation Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 29th January 2025 4.00pm – 7.00pm
Blossomfield Campus.

Present

Paul Assinder – Chair of Corporation
Christine Abbott
Susie Ankrett
Rebecca Gater – Principal & CEO
Sarah Horton-Walsh
Helen Kinghorn
Ravi Kumar
Tony Lucas – Vice Chair of Corporation
Mehreen Mirza
Dave Nanda (*on Teams and joined to observe only*)
Amirun Nehar
Sharmin Rima – HE Student Governor
Cheryl Piddler
Donna Poole – Staff Governor
Harrison Thompson

In Attendance

Heather Hunt – Deputy Principal and CFO, Pete Haynes – Vice Principal HR & Student Services, Sam Bromwich – Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance, Lee Jamieson – Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum, Nancy Buckley - Vice Principal Business Growth, Skills & Partnerships, Linda McLaughlin – Assistant Principal Quality and Innovation, Tina Taylor – Senior Governance Officer, Adam Thomas – Director of Student Services (*one item only*).

Apologies

Megan Bacalla – FE Student Governor, Graham McKean

1. Welcome and Announcements

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended a special welcome to Nancy Buckley on her return. Due to illness, Dave Nanda (DN) joined via Teams and would observe the meeting. The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance noted that while hybrid meetings are not standard practice, an exception was made for DN, who would send his questions after the meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted for Graham McKean and Megan Bacalla.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were none declared.

4. Membership Update

The Corporation **RATIFIED** Amirun Nehar's Term of Office for a second term until May 2029.

5. Chair's Action & Use of College Seal and Chair's E-Signature

There was none to declare.

6. Minutes and Actions Log of the Previous Corporation Meeting held on 26th November 2024 (joint A&R committee meeting), Confidential Minutes 26th November 2024 and Meeting minutes of 12th December 2024.

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26th November 2024 (joint A&R committee) and 12th December 2024 were circulated and **APPROVED**.

The confidential minutes of 26th November 2024 were received an **APPROVED**.

6.1 Matters Arising (verbal)

There were none to discuss.

6.2 Actions

The actions report was circulated, and an update was provided. The Assistant Principal for Quality and Innovation gave an update on action item number 9, confirming that both items were closed.

6.3 Top Key Risks

The Top Key Risks report was received and **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

7. Committee Minutes

The following draft minutes were circulated for information:

- Financial Oversight Group (FoG) 14/11/2024
- A&R Committee (joint Corporation) 26.11.2024
- Remuneration Committee 04.12.2024 (not shared with Staff and Student Governors and EMT due to confidentiality)
- Education Village Special Interest Group (SiG) 16.12.2024
- Education Village Special Interest Group (SiG) 16.01.2025

The Chair of the Remuneration committee noted that the Executive Management Team (EMT) review will be conducted by the Principal and CEO in the future and fed back through the Remuneration committee.

The minutes were **NOTED** as information.

7 Chair and Principal's Introduction & Update Report

7.1 Chairs Update

The Chair expressed gratitude for the support received following his appointment and acknowledged the significant contributions of the previous Chair, Barbara Hughes, noting that she set a high standard.

The governance team is collaborating with Peridot to recruit for two vacancies on the Corporation. They are initially seeking a specialist in Curriculum and Quality, with a preference for candidates who have an interest in Warwickshire and Coventry.

Additionally, the second governor vacancy aligns with the ongoing update of the college's strategy and therefore, our preference is to appoint once the new College Strategy has been published, later this year

The Head of Sustainability was thanked for organising a successful briefing on sustainability. New governors were reminded to watch the recording as part of their induction. **A governor**

remarked on the remarkable enthusiasm of students, which was also highlighted during the Student Conference. **ACTION**

The Governors Development Morning is scheduled for Saturday, 8th February. The Learning & Development team from Transformation Space will facilitate the session, which will focus on refreshing the college's strategy, making it an important event.

7.2 Principal and CEO Update

The Principal and CEO's report was circulated which provided governors with a start of year update on key areas of the College and to update on progress against the strategic plan.

- **Strategic Ambition 1**

The GCSE results were explained, highlighting a strong performance in English, with results exceeding expectations. However, maths results remain below the national average. Notably, the number of English entries has doubled, significantly impacting the overall results.

- **Strategic Ambition 2**

An update about the Learning Village was discussed under item 10.

- **Strategic Ambition 3**

A new structure for the Construction School has been introduced, with a video update, from the Assistant Principal - STEM Faculty, now live. The department currently has interim managers, and there have been challenges in recruiting for the role. To attract higher-calibre candidates, a Director of Construction position is being created, which will not be part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) but will be supported by the Head of School (HoS).

Additionally, the Long Service Awards on 19th December recognised 12 staff members for over 20 years of service at the college. Impressively, over 10% of the college staff have served for more than 20 years.

- **Strategic Ambition 4**

The Members report and Financial Statements have been submitted to the ESFA. The Estates Development Plan is on the agenda, with urgent projects needing approval, particularly those supporting safeguarding and growth for September.

Regarding student residences, BPG submitted a planning application aligning with the original proposals. An additional £300 million in funding has been committed to Further Education (FE), with £50 million ringfenced for this academic year. More details on the allocation will follow. The remaining £250 million will be confirmed by the Department for Education (DfE) in February 2025.

- **Strategic Ambition 5**

The Salix bid came in lower than anticipated, affecting the Stratford-Upon-Avon boiler replacement project. The Deputy Principal and CFO noted that due to insufficient funding, the bid had to be withdrawn as it was not viable. The team is taking this as a learning experience to improve future bids.

- **Reputation:**

The EMT recently visited Riverside College, an outstanding college with which we have collaborated. This collaboration is in addition to our ongoing partnership with Cheshire College South & West.

We have been shortlisted for the Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce award.

At the AoC conference, it was announced that we are finalists for the AoC Beacon Award, alongside Salford College. The results will be revealed in March.

The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

8 Accountability Agreement Update

To report updated Corporation on progress to date on the targets set out in the Annual Accountability Statement 2024/25.

The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

9 Termly Safeguarding report

The Director of Student Services joined the meeting, and the Termly Safeguarding update was presented earlier than scheduled due to a change in the agenda order.

The termly safeguarding report was shared which provided an essential update for Governors on Safeguarding and Prevent. A detailed explanation was provided.

Following a governor's comment, it was agreed to include details about which campuses the report covers and an analysis of children in care. Additionally, a summary of referral outcomes, indicating who is under a child in need (CIN) or protection plan (CP), will be provided. The Director of Student Services confirmed that while this information is included in the annual report, it can also be incorporated into the termly report. **ACTION**

The Chair commented on a recurring theme of mental health concerns and inquired about the status of mental health support for learners. The Director of Student Services acknowledged the issue, confirming that, whilst the student support team is managing and triaging cases to other services, a whole-college approach is necessary. Currently, there are 12 mental health first aiders, but more are needed. He added that the mental health team has undergone the mental health first aid 'Train the Trainer' programme, which means mental first aid training can be extended to more staff.

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services added that the college is signed up to the AoC Mental Health Charter, which has been reviewed recently and is more rigorous, with a greater emphasis on mental health reporting and Governor oversight. He made the point that a mental health referral made through MyConcern would not necessarily lead to a learner being safeguarded by the safeguarding team, as support might be more appropriately provided through other support services. He suggested that Governors should receive regular reports, in addition to the safeguarding report, on mental health **ACTION**

With there being no further comments or questions the report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

The Director of Student Services left the meeting.

10 Education Village (including feedback from SiG)

The Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum presented the report which sought approval for the proposed partnership with RMF for the Education Village project and to seek approval to release £609k of capital and non-capital investment (subject to WMCA approval of additional AEB funding.)

The following items were shared for information:

- Solihull College Financial Detail
- Solihull College Risk Register
- WMCA Business Plan

The Chair commended governors for their thorough scrutiny, highlighting it as an excellent example of effective governance, with diverse interests being considered in our evaluation and real governor added value. The Education Village Special Interest Group (SiG) has met twice (once with the Managing Director of RMF) concluding that there is now greater awareness among governors to build on the strong foundations of the School of Animal Welfare. This project aligns with several of College's strategic ambitions. The consensus amongst the Education Village SiG members is that they feel more assured now than at the start of the SiG process. The Deputy Principal and CFO noted that the project's success hinges on West Midlands Combined Authority approving the project funding in March, which is crucial.

The Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum highlighted that the business case now includes new discussions, marked in red text, which incorporates advice from governors in the Education Village SiG.

The Chair drew governors' attention to the recommendations within the report.

A governor expressed their reassurance about the strategic fit of the project but acknowledged future challenges in delivery and risk management. She questioned the need for immediate project approval, suggesting that more time would allow for additional due diligence. The governor also highlighting the importance of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as a critical document. In response, the Deputy Principal and CFO emphasised the importance of showing support 'in principle' only for the business case. In particular the WMCA will take assurance knowing that the governors are broadly supportive of the case. Governors should be assured that, if any concerns about the partnership arise in the future, they can be discussed again prior to final approval.

Referring to due diligence a governor expressed some reservations about the RMF Group, The Principal and CEO reassured him, highlighting a successful 6-year partnership with RMF, which has led to students' successful careers and strong trust developing between, RMF, ourselves, the Combined Authority and Solihull Council. They emphasised RMF's credibility and support from key stakeholders.

A governor commented that the new provision would attract a broader range of students to College. There was some confusion regarding the implications for College if demand for our teaching exceeded the funded provision outlined in the Case. The Principal and CEO clarified that the College decides which courses to offer and provided an explanation of the intended programs. It was emphasised that there is no inter-dependency between RMF learner numbers and courses and ours.

In response to a governor's query, a summary of the due diligence conducted by our solicitors will be provided for the Education Village SiG. **ACTION**

The proposal for Corporation was to approve the Case in principle. For assurance, the Principal and CEO confirmed that final approval would be contingent on WMCA funding. She emphasised the importance of proceeding now due to time constraints and the extent of future work involved.

Governors APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE the partnership with RMF for the Education Village. Governors Approved capital investment of £608,650, subject to WMCA approval of additional AEB funding and a successful conclusion of the due diligence work.

The report provided an update on the current bids and projects; a copy of the Bids and Projects over £100,000 was shared for information.

The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

12 Sub-Contract Report – Termly Update (including approval of Adult Skills Fund (ASF) subcontract)

The Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum presented the report which provided governors with an update on progress against the Sub-Contracting Plan for 2024/25 and to seek approval for a new subcontracting partner (ESFA funding).

The Chair noted that the approval is subject to due diligence and questioned the course of action if the due diligence does not produce a favourable outcome. The Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum responded to say the project would then revert to the other short-listed companies, and governors would need to agree on an alternative plan, which would require a Chair's Action. However, the Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum later updated that the final due diligence had been completed, the company had reviewed the contract, and no Chair's Action would be required to progress with the report.

Given that that the due diligence was complete and satisfactory, Governors formally **APPROVED** the new proposed subcontract, as detailed in Appendix 1.

13 Annual HR Report

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services presented the report which sought approval for a revision to the pay scales for business support staff and to provide an annual update to governors on HR matters.

The HR Presentation provided a detailed explanation, linking it to Strategic Ambition 3. It included the following key points:

- College profile and pay scale
- Lecturer salaries by region
- Annual Sickness Absence levels August 2020 – July 2024
- Students, Staff and Management Ethnicity Profile
- Gender Pay Gap Report
- Ethnicity Pay Gap
- Turnover and Leaver Views
- HR Objectives in 2024/25

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed that the college is paying above the National Minimum Wage. Details were shared about employees set to receive a pay increase in April. Unison had provided feedback on the spot points, suggesting a potential overlapping scale for scale 2 and 3, but this had been pushed back, to maintain differentials.

A governor questioned RSM's professional suitability to participate in a HR based review. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services acknowledged they might not be the ideal source but highlighted that their feedback was data-driven, considering the impact of cancelled classes and information from teachers. The individual responsible had an HR background. The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance added that extensive data analysis and significant preparatory work were conducted prior to the audit.

The Chair requested further details on the real living wage, which were provided. The discussion also covered the local salary comparisons for lecturers.

The Vice Principal HR & Student Services noted the internal auditors reviewed sickness data and triggers for managing short-term absences, making no recommendations, which positively reflects our accuracy and processes.

A governor commented on the Absence Management Research Project and Internal Audit findings contained within the HR report, suggesting that every Head of School should receive and be challenged on, the monthly report. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services noted that accumulative report will be available in September for review.

Discussions were held about reintroducing league tables. Further discussions addressed class coverage due to absences and the impact on students. It was noted that most absences are managed by merging classes, with the HoS prioritising minimising the impact on learners and that cancelling classes is a last resort. The audit revealed that the number of cancelled classes was significant but did not directly correlate with student absences due to teacher absences.

Following an update on the Gender Pay Gap, The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed that a gap exists but suggested that this related primarily to gender balance within the pay quartiles, as there is a higher proportion of females in the lower quartile. Discussions focused on resolving this by reviewing guidance in line with quartiles, with examples highlighting affected job titles. Governors suggested solutions to reduce the gap.

A governor requested gender pay gap data per group. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed he had produced this information previously but would redo the analysis. Confidence was expressed in the equality of pay grades. **ACTION**

Following a governor's question, The Vice Principal HR & Student Services confirmed that he will provide the average turnover rate in his next report. **ACTION**

A request was made to compare the college's performance to the sector next year, using benchmarks from the workforce data collection. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services noted that the college is quite risk averse.

Governors **NOTED** the report and **APPROVED** the changes to the pay scale for support staff.

14 Financial Matters

The Deputy Principal and CFO presented the report which detailed the reforecast budget for 2024/25. It was noted that the budget for 2025/26 budget will be updated at the Financial Oversight Group (FoG) in the March.

14.1 Finance Report Budget Re-Forecast 24/25 including November PMR and Reforecast and Cash Investment Policy.

The Deputy Principal and CFO provided the Corporation with the reforecast budget for 2024/25. A copy of the November Performance Monitoring Report (PMR) was shared for information.

Governors **APPROVED** the reforecast budget for 2024/25.

14.2 Treasury Management Annual Report and includes the Cash Investment Policy

The report provided an update on Treasury Management. The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

Governors **APPROVED** the Cash Investment Policy and to continue to invest with our financial institutions for a further 2 years per our tender.

14.3 Contributions Analysis 2024/2025 Forecast Report

The confidential item was not shared with Staff and Student Governors due to the confidentiality of the report. The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

15 Property Report Estates Strategy and Investment Plan

The Deputy Principal and CFO presented the final Estate Strategy Framework, detailing projects to be implemented by September 2025. Next steps for the overall investment plan were also discussed.

The Chair commented on the readability of the document.

Following a governor's question, the Deputy Principal and CFO provided an update about new staff workplace guidelines and objectives as stated in the report.

Discussions addressed the impact on timetabling and its integration into the strategy. The Deputy Principal and CFO noted that feedback is being implemented, and a consultant is assisting with staff timetabling and room utilisation to facilitate planning.

In response to a governor's question about the Woodlands Scheme, the Deputy Principal and CFO confirmed that most of the work involves remodelling the specified block, which remains unaffected by building changes. The aeroplane is a semi-temporary solution until remodelling occurs.

A governor expressed concerns about temporary structures, which will be addressed in the design work and brought back to the corporation. Assurance was given that future spending over the next five years has been factored into the arrival experience design.

Detailed discussions were held about the Stratford-Upon-Avon scheme's financial return, aligning with current funding and the potential for more capital in the future.

Governors queried the total spend on the Woodlands campus. It was noted that financial planning depends on annual revenue generation, and options will be reviewed in the July session for the 10-year investment plan. Further discussions addressed the volatility in brick applications. The Principal and CEO highlighted the growing demand for jobs in this area, noting that workshops are flexible to adapt as needed.

With there being no further comments or questions the Chair summarised the approvals:

- **APPROVED** the Estates Strategy Framework.
- Outcome of following projects for September were confirmed:
 1. Additional workshops at Woodlands to accommodate growth in Brick, Motor Vehicle and Electrical Installation learners. Total estimate budget of £3.5m. **APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE**
 2. Additional workshops at Stratford-Upon-Avon to accommodate growth in Brick and Carpentry and plumbing (Level 2). Total estimate budget of £2.5m. **APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE**
 3. Replacement boilers to provide heating for Stratford-Upon-Avon campus with a budgeted cost of £500K. **APPROVED**
 4. Installation of barriers, access control and integrated ID card system at the Woodlands campus with a budgeted cost of circa £250K. **APPROVED**

It was agreed to approve the next steps for agreeing the cash available for investment and prioritising future projects.

16 Governance Items

There were no items to discuss.

17 Confidential

The item was discussed under 14.3.

18 POLICIES

The item was discussed under item 14.2.

19 Items for Information

The October PMR and the Gifts and Hospitality report were shared for information and **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

20 Any Other Business

There were no items to discuss

21 FUTURE DATES

Dates were confirmed as per the agenda. Governors were advised that the Governors Development morning on 8th February will finish at 1.15pm

The meeting concluded at 7.15pm

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'P. Assinder', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Signed:

Dated: 19.03.2025

Paul Assinder – Chair of Corporation