

CHAIR APPROVED

**The Corporation of New College Durham**

**Minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee meeting  
held on 16 November 2023**

**Present:**

Stephen King (Chair)  
Joy Brindle  
Andy Broadbent  
Christine Warren

**Apologies:**

Chris Patterson

**In attendance:**

Alison Maynard (Deputy Principal)  
Karl Fairley (Deputy Chief Executive)  
Paul Bradley (Chief Finance Officer)  
Colleen Peters (Vice Principal)  
Bob Metcalf (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services)  
Elaine Bonham (Executive Director of HR and Corporate Services)  
Kimberly Stevenson (Executive Director of Estates, Facilities and Corporate Services)  
Nik Whiting (Executive Director of ICT and Corporate Services)  
Caroline Winter (Head of Governance & Corporation Secretary)

**Action**

**23/55 Chair's introduction and starred items**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded members to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting. No interests were declared.

Members confirmed that they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda items C, E1, E2 and E3.

**23/56 Apologies for absence** were received from Chris Patterson

**23/57 Minutes of previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2023 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as accurate, subject to the typing error in the heading, and would be signed by the Chair.

**23/58 Matters arising**

23/46 – members approved the amendments to the Budget Policy by email prior to circulation to Corporation in November.

23/49 – the suggested changes to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy would be included in the draft circulated to December Corporation.

23/50 – emails were circulated to committee members to clarify the queries raised in relation to recycling performance and the Durham pound.

23/50 – the risk in relation to poor academic success rates was discussed in detail at the Further Education Quality Curriculum and Students (FEQCS) Committee meeting the previous week and the risk relating to loss of staff in key teaching areas was subject to regular discussion at both FEQCS and Finance and Resources Committees.

## **23/59 Marketing Update (Paper B)**

Alison Maynard presented Paper B, which was the first update to the Committee on marketing activity and spend. The Chair advised that the context for the paper was that a large proportion of College activity was supported by marketing with a significant budget spend, and it was important for the Committee to have oversight in accordance with its terms of reference.

Alison briefed members on the evolution of the College's marketing activity over the last five years, marketing spend, campaign and advertising activity, applications and enrolments over the same period, action to address the declining trend in HE enrolments, progress against 2022/23 KPIs and planned activity in 2023/24.

The Chair welcomed having a paper that outlined the role of marketing within the College and how it supported a range of activity. Members considered the link between advertising and enrolment numbers and commented that much of the data in the report related to outputs. Members discussed the wider range of factors beyond advertising campaigns that could influence an individual's decision to come to the College including school engagement, website information and the development of the College estate and investment in its facilities over the last few years. Whilst the difficulty in capturing the impact of advertising was recognised, members asked whether students were asked what had influenced them to come to NCD or where they had seen an advert, or how they had learned about the College. Alison confirmed that where students did not choose NCD this was followed up with them to understand why and also their alternative destination. Alison explained the journey approach to marketing which made it unlikely that someone would only see an advert once, but instead would see an advert via a range of media such as standing at a bus stop, in the cinema as well as on social media etc. The challenge of marketing in a mixed economy college where delivery crossed multiple funding streams was also highlighted.

Members referenced the marketing strategy approved in July 2021 and commented that there was no sense of the aims and objectives articulated in the strategy coming through in the current paper. Members understood the immediate focus on enrolments and emphasised the strong links to the work of the school engagement team but queried whether this needed to be set within the wider strategy to ensure an understanding of whether activity

was focused in the right areas. Members also observed that the KPIs contained in the marketing strategy were not included in the strategic KPI paper, however it was noted that this had been considered as part of the wider review of KPIs and members had agreed that as output measures, these would be incorporated into other areas of activity. Members felt there was some merit in developing a set of KPIs that could be monitored, which would assist the marketing team in reporting on activity and progress made. It was confirmed that the output metrics would continue to be monitored at operational level and further consideration would be given to the approach to reporting to the Committee.

Members commented on the fall in HE numbers and acknowledged this was a sector rather than local issue, but the efforts to address the position were welcomed.

The Chair commented that this work had been a very useful exercise for both the team and the Committee. Members' feedback was recognised and welcomed on what was the first marketing update and would support further development of the report in future. The importance of linking to the strategy and the wider activity across the team was reiterated. The Chair asked that the Committee's thanks were fed back to the team for producing the paper.

#### **23/60 Enrolment Update 2023/24 (Paper C)**

Members received Paper C, the enrolment update which detailed the latest recruitment position for Further Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education. Members noted the current position and the actions detailed in the report to continue to recruit students across the various funding streams.

#### **23/61 New College Durham Draft Annual Accounts 2022/23 (Paper D1)**

Bob Metcalf presented Paper D1, the New College Durham draft annual accounts for 2022/23. The financial statements had been audited by RSM UK Audit LLP (RSM), who presented their management letter to the Audit and Risk Committee on 20 November 2023. RSM were reviewing final iterations of the document to undertake final checks of text and figures.

Part of this discussion is recorded confidentially under minute 23/61a.

Members reviewed the financial statements and queried some of the references in the narrative relating to the previous Ofsted inspection and responsibility for the College website in the context of publication of the accounts. Members also made a general observation about the lengthy narrative but recognised the challenge in attempting to reflect the breadth of the College's work within a strategic report.

Members commended the College on the strong financial results and agreed to recommend Corporation receive and approve the financial statements for the year ended 31 July 2023, subject to checking the position on the queries raised.

**23/62 Westfirst Draft Annual Report 2022/23 (Paper D2)**

Bob Metcalf presented Paper D2, the draft annual accounts of Westfirst Limited for 2022/23.

Members reviewed the financial statements and noted that minor adjustments were being made prior to circulation a final version of the accounts to Corporation in December. A letter of comfort from the College to Westfirst would be provided to confirm its continuing support, the wording of which was currently being reviewed by the external auditors.

Members noted the annual report and financial statements for Westfirst Limited for the financial year 2022/23.

**23/63 Financial Regulations – Use of Single Suppliers 2022/23 (Paper D3)**

Paul Bradley presented Paper D3, the annual report on the use of single suppliers for goods and services in 2022/23.

Members reviewed the instances in which the Chief Finance Officer approved the waiver of minimum written tenders during the year. It was noted that the external auditors had confirmed to the Audit Committee meeting a few days earlier that the number of instances the waiver had been used was relatively low in comparison with similar institutions. Members welcomed this assurance but remained keen to understand the reasons for the waivers in light of the increase on the previous year. Paul explained the reasons in each case as set out in the report and whilst members accepted the position, they emphasised the element of judgement needed to balance the benefits of maintaining existing supplier arrangements with those of testing the market. Paul confirmed that regular discussions took place with the Head of Procurement to determine when it was appropriate to test the market and members noted that a recent benchmarking exercise suggested that the College's approach differed to other organisations due to having an internal procurement team.

Members noted the use of suppliers in 2022/23.

**23/64 Payment Card Security Policy (Paper D4)**

Bob Metcalf presented Paper D4, the Payment Card Security Policy. Members noted that all companies were required to have a policy in place in order to process, store, transmit or access card payment data and the document was a refresh of the previous policy.

Bob briefly outlined the use of card payment machines across the College and confirmed that no data was stored by the College. In response to a member's question about problems with using cards on site Bob confirmed that the card payment process usually ran smoothly subject to wi-fi access.

Members approved the College Payment Cards Security Policy.

**23/65 Procurement Policy (Paper D5)**

Bob Metcalf presented Paper D5, the Procurement Policy. Members noted the proposed policy would replace the existing Code of Tendering Practice and provided a full overview of the procurement process, which was expected to be very useful to staff and ensure best practice across the College.

In response to a member's question on the thresholds for determining the appropriate procurement process, Bob confirmed these were set either through the College's Financial Regulations, government requirements or EU regulations. Bob advised a further review of the policy would be required to reflect new procurement regulations due to come into force however it was felt that the current refresh could not be delayed any further.

Members approved the College's Procurement Policy.

**23/66 Financial Monitoring to 30 September 2023 (Paper E1)**

Members reviewed and noted the financial position of the College at 30 September 2023.

**23/67 Westfirst Financial Monitoring to 30 September 2023 (Paper E2)**

Members reviewed and noted the Westfirst Limited financial reports to 30 September 2023.

**23/68 Capital Developments - Update (Paper E3)**

This item is recorded confidentially under minute 23/68a.

**23/69 Review of cost of living pay award (Paper F)**

This item is recorded confidentially under minute 23/69a.

*Karl Fairley left the meeting at 5.19pm.*

**23/70 Employee Satisfaction (Staff Survey) (Paper G1)**

Elaine Bonham presented Paper G1, which summarised the results of the 2023 staff survey and follow up activity. Members reviewed the key findings and discussed the key themes around

communication, hybrid working, health and wellbeing, workload and pace of change. Members welcomed the depth and integrity of the report and the positive nature of the feedback with staff highlighting in particular the investment in facilities, Principal's update and meet and greet sessions with the senior leadership team.

*Karl Fairley re-joined the meeting at 5.23pm.*

Members noted the report.

#### **23/71 Draft Annual Health and Safety Report 2022/23 (Paper G2)**

Elaine Bonham presented Paper G2, the Annual Health and Safety (H&S) Report, which provided assurance to members on the implementation of health and safety requirements and enabled Corporation to fulfil its statutory duty to effectively review the health and safety provisions within the College.

Members reviewed the report which detailed the accident/incident statistics for the year, the continued high level of compliance with legal requirements and recognised standards, the review of the College's safety documentation to reflect the latest legal requirements, an update against operational performance measures, a summary of the H&S inspection regime and achievement of the RoSPA Gold Award.

Elaine also updated members on the outcome of the recent internal audit review of Health and Safety arrangements which had provided substantial assurance.

Members agreed to note the report and refer the Health and Safety Statement to Corporation.

#### **23/72 External Funding Update (Verbal update)**

This item is recorded confidentially under minute 23/72a.

#### **23/73 Strategic KPIs 2023/24 – update (Paper H)**

Karl Fairley presented Paper H, which updated on progress made against the Corporate Services KPIs as of 31 October 2023. It was noted that the information had been presented in a simplified format and updates would be brought to each meeting of the Committee. Karl emphasised that the paper would not replace the more detailed reports to the Committee for example on cyber security and gender pay but would ensure members received regular updates throughout the year. Members asked about the timetable for the accreditation process for ISO50001 (sustainability) and noted that although a detailed audit of current documentation had taken place confirmation was still needed on the full requirements for accreditation.

Members welcomed the format of the information which provided the latest performance picture at a glance, combined with a helpful link to a short narrative where appropriate. Members commented that there were no surprises in the report due to the updates received in other papers. Whilst members still had queries about how some of the KPIs were defined, it was agreed that the format worked well and the measures would evolve over time. Members asked that the 'notes' column was replaced with progress so the journey over time could be reviewed at each update to the Committee.

**KF**

**23/74 Any other business - none**

**23/75 Date of next meeting: 7 February 2024**

**Signed**.....**Date**.....