

Preston College

Redacted and Abridged¹ Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 25th November 2021 at 5.40pm in the Boardroom

Present:

Mr J Boydell	Chair
Mr S Browne	
Mrs L Doswell	Principal and Chief Executive
Ms J Jones	

In attendance:

Mr S Nixon	Executive Director - Resources
Ms G Thornton	Head of Human Resources
Mrs C Rayner	Clerk to the Board

Apologies:

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair noted that apologies had been received from Mr Edwards.

It was noted that a quorum was present.

The Committee agreed that Mr Boydell, Chair of the Governing Body, should chair the meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Appointment of Vice Chairperson

The Committee appointed Ms Jones as Vice Chairperson.

Resolved: The Committee appointed Ms Jones as Vice Chairperson.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting – 7th October 2021

The Committee agreed the Minutes of the meeting on 7th October 2021 as a correct record.

Resolved: the minutes of the meeting held on 7th October 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record.

5. Matters arising

The Committee noted the report on progress of actions from previous meetings.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report on progress of actions from previous meetings.

¹ Please note that any matters which the Corporation is satisfied should be dealt with on a confidential basis have been removed from these minutes

6. Management Accounts

Mr Nixon, Executive Director of Resources, presented his report on the Period 2 Management Accounts. Mr Nixon reported:

- that whilst Period 2 accounts showed the performance of the College for 2021/22 to date, Period 2 was still very early in the academic year and a more accurate assessment could be made when the Period 3 accounts were considered at the Board meeting on 9th December 2021;
- there were no specific concerns at present, costs appeared to be well controlled across the College, together with positive starts to the year for many income streams. However, this would be confirmed through the business planning process;
- performance for 2021/22 would be impacted if there were further Covid lockdowns;
- a positive start to apprenticeships and adult recruitment;
- whilst it was still early in the term, fees, loans and full cost work were progressing well.

Members queried whether it would be possible to increase the staff pay award by more than 1% in 2021/22 given inflation pressures. Mr Nixon explained that management were currently working on staff pay scenario planning and modelling which would include: the Board's request to explore the feasibility of paying a national living wage, a review of the differentials between the different job family groups and review of roles which had become more difficult to recruit for during the pandemic. Members also commented that pay should be considered as part of a range of benefits for staff including holiday entitlement. Management undertook to review the feasibility of increasing pay by more than 1% in 2021/22 as part of the ongoing staff pay scenario planning.

Resolved: The Committee noted the Period 2 Management Accounts and commentary.

Action: To review the feasibility of a staff pay increase of more than 1% in 2022.

7. Annual Report and Financial Statements

Mr Nixon referred to the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements. Mr Nixon reported:

- Grant Thornton, the College's external auditors, were completing the final stages of the external financial audit and no significant issues had been raised;
- the unadjusted misstatements section would be updated with the additional revenue shortfall identified. The Committee noted the impact of this shortfall on the College's surplus for 2020/21. The Committee discussed and agreed that the adjustment should be shown clearly in the management accounts for 2021/22;
- the Audit Committee had considered the draft management letter at its meeting of 24th November 2021 and would hold a short meeting before the Board to consider an updated management letter.

A member of the Audit Committee explained that at its meeting the Audit Committee had noted the College's going concern position and the underlying financial position before actuarial adjustments related to the performance of the pension scheme. He explained that the Audit Committee had agreed that as the College's going concern position was a matter for the Board, it would be helpful for the Board to have a presentation from the Pension Scheme administrators to

provide assurance and to ensure all governors understood the risk. Mr Nixon provided further information on FRS17 adjustments and the impact on the presentation of the College's financial statements. It was noted that the session with the Pension Scheme administrators was planned for spring.

Management also referred to plans to offer training to new governors on the College's financial statements, financial terminology and the management accounts which could be offered to all governors.

Resolved: The Committee approved the financial statements for 2020/21 and recommended formal adoption by the Board at its meeting on 9th December 2021, subject to management review of the presentation of the College's surplus position in the management accounts.

8. People Strategy Action Plan 2021/22

Ms Thornton presented the People Strategy Action Plan 2021/22. Ms Thornton referred to considerable operational challenges during 2020/21 and the impact on the plan. Ms Thornton referred to the main strategic HR projects, at Appendix A, which the College had committed to undertake in the academic year 2021/22 in order to deliver against the activities identified as the people component of the Five Year Plan and those required by external stakeholders for compliance reasons. Ms Thornton referred to the work required as part of the increase in employers' National Insurance contributions in 2022 as an example of how some of the activities contained in the action plan continue to be impacted by external factors.

The Committee considered the People Strategy Action Plan 2021/22 and noted that the action plan had not been included on the Committee's October agenda pending the Board's strategic planning meeting on 21st October 2021.

In response to a query from a member, Ms Thornton responded with her views on the College's external brand perception from an HR perspective. Ms Thornton referred to the College achieving Investors in People Gold status and the external recognition received by the College after being selected to take part in the Investors for People National Award for Top UK Employer in the Gold category. Ms Thornton also referred to networking opportunities going forward.

In response to a query on whether staff fully understood their roles, Ms Thornton referred to the Staff Survey results which would be considered later in the meeting.

Members suggested it could be motivational to share success stories from student alumni with staff. Management explained that this already happened anecdotally but undertook to explore if alumni stories could be formally captured for sharing with staff and learners. Members also suggested it would be beneficial for alumni to talk to existing learners.

Resolved: The Committee noted the People Strategy Action Plan 2021/22.

Action: Management to explore formally capturing and sharing alumni stories with staff and learners.

9. Policy Review

Ms Thornton presented her report on the proposed changes to the Remote Working Policy. Ms Thornton reported that the College had introduced a Remote Working Policy in September 2021 to improve employment benefits for staff and increase the College's workforce agility options. The first iteration of the policy provided the opportunity for staff to work occasionally off site, if their roles were suitable for remote working. She referred to the revised policy, at Appendix A, which allowed for more permanent or regular arrangements. She reported:

- the benefits to the College and staff in allowing more flexible home working;
- an assessment would be made before approval to ensure sufficient cover on campus;
- there would be a trial period followed by a review;
- guidance would be provided for managers on the implementation of the policy;
- an Equality Impact Assessment and health and safety review had been completed.

The Committee discussed the proposed changes with management and in response to questions and concerns of potential unintended consequences noted:

- the Head of Department/School would make an initial assessment of requests for remote working over a specified period and then the request and the Head of Department/ School recommendation would be submitted to Executive Leadership Team (ELT) to ensure an equitable approach across the College;
- the anticipated up take by staff;
- the risk of grievances and issues within teams would be mitigated by ELT making the final decision on all requests;
- acknowledgement of the importance of face to face contact with learners and assurance from management that the policy would not be detrimental to this;
- that the arrangements should not be contractual in the first instance and that the new arrangements should be trialled.

Following discussion the Committee asked Ms Thornton to amend the draft policy to address the concerns raised.

The Committee agreed the revised policy could be considered by written resolution between meetings if required.

Action: Ms Thornton to revise the Remote Working policy in light of the Committee's feedback and consult with the unions.

The Committee to review the proposed amendments before consideration by the Board.

10. **Staff Satisfaction Survey**

Ms Thornton presented her report on the Staff Satisfaction Survey. Ms Thornton reported:

- for the third year running the College had participated in the staff satisfaction survey run by York College and aimed exclusively at the FE sector;
- the College response rate for 2020/21 which was in the top half of response rates when compared with all other colleges who took part in the 2020/21 survey. The response rate was also a slight increase on 2019/20;
- on the College's top and bottom 5 scored questions for 2020/21, alongside the comparisons for 2019/20 and 2018/19;

- management would explore the lower scoring questions, with some responses likely to relate to the impact of Covid and remote working. However, four out of the five bottom ranked elements still showed a good level of satisfaction.

The Committee noted the staff survey report and the full Staff Survey Benchmarking Data report at Appendix B. The Committee discussed with management possible reasons why more staff did not complete the survey and whether it was possible to see if there was a higher response rates in some areas of the College compared to others. It was noted that there was a plan to gradually increase the data collected to help identify any trends including response rates.

In response to a question on how management explored the staff survey data it was noted that any issues raised could be explored at Staff Voice sessions, with the next session scheduled for November 2021.

Resolved: The Committee noted the Staff Satisfaction Survey 2021.

11. **Health and Safety Annual Report**

Mr Nixon presented the Health and Safety Annual Report. Mr Nixon reported:

- the report had been prepared by Miss Keegan who had been in post as Health and Safety Officer for one year. Mr Nixon commended Miss Keegan's commitment to the role;
- learners and staff had moved from on campus to remote learning throughout the year and therefore lower levels of activity within College would explain the drop in incidents reported during 2020/21 and comparative data should be treated with caution;
- areas such as health and beauty and dance were more likely to have incidents than construction;
- the College's Health and Safety Committee continued to meet monthly;
- plans for Miss Keegan to complete an inspection with the unions;
- plans for a detailed review of the Health and Safety Policy in 2021/22.

A member highlighted the importance of the Health and Safety Committee reviewing near misses as well as incidents as this is where potential issues could be identified. Mr Nixon undertook to remind staff of the importance of near miss reporting and to provide further information to the Committee on near misses in future reports.

The Committee noted the Annual Health and Safety Report 2020/21 and agreed the General Statement of Intent, incorporated within the Annual Report, for recommendation to the Board for approval.

Resolved: The Committee:

- **noted and approved the content of the draft Annual Health and Safety Report 2020/21 at Appendix A;**
- **confirmed commitment to Health and Safety by its recommendation to the Board the approval of the 2021/22 General Statement of Intent.**

Action: To include information on near misses in the next report.

12. **Financial Regulations Review**

Mr Nixon presented his report on the review of the Financial Regulations. He reported that, as the existing Financial Regulations were considered fit for purpose, no changes were proposed.

Mr Nixon referred to discussion at the Board about whether the Board should approve redundancy/settlement payments exceeding specified amounts. A sample review of Financial Regulations in other colleges suggested that this was not commonplace, and in any event would be better covered in other HR policies where relevant, particularly for large payments or where Senior Post Holders were involved and would generally be reported through a note to the accounts.

Resolved: The Board re-approved the Financial Regulations dated December 2020.

Mr Nixon and Ms Thornton left the meeting.

13. **Date of Next Meeting: 10th February 2022**

The Committee noted that the next meeting would be held on 10th February 2022.