



Minutes of the Search Committee Meeting held on Monday 4 March 2024 at 3pm via Teams

Present: Janet Gater (*Principal*)
Mick Martin (*Foundation Governor*)
Tracy Mawson (*Co-opted Governor*) – Chair
Helen Stevenson (*Foundation Governor*)

In attendance: Ruth Potter (*Clerk*)
Ron Matthews (*External Governance Reviewer*) – observer

The Clerk opened the meeting in prayer.

1. **ROUTINE AND STANDING ITEMS**

1.1 **Declarations of interest**

Attendees were invited to declare whether they had any direct or indirect personal, prejudicial or pecuniary interest or conflict of interest in any matter which formed part of the agenda for this meeting or was likely to be discussed at this meeting. No interests other than those already declared and recorded on the Register of Interests were noted.

1.2 **Apologies for absence**

All members were present. The meeting was declared quorate.

1.3 **Items to be included under any other business**

No items of additional business had been submitted for consideration prior to the meeting.

1.4 **Minutes of the Search Committee meeting held on 6 November 2023 (*previously circulated*)**

The minutes were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair in accordance with Article 12 (3) of the Articles of Government. The publication of the minutes was authorised in accordance with Article 13.

1.5 **Matters arising from the minutes (*previously circulated*)**

Committee members noted the items on the action log prepared by the Clerk. With regard to Action 1, it was suggested that direct contact could be made with two recently inspected north-west sixth-form colleges if required.

Action 3, minute 3.7 – E&D contextual data

The Chair referred members to the supplemental report on E&D contextual data. The report formed part of the whole college Equality and Diversity Annual Report due to be presented to Quality and Standards Committee the following day. Governing Body data in relation to key protected characteristics was compared to student profile data and St Helens Local Authority 2021 census data. A key priority was for the Governing Body to be as representative of the local community as possible. Areas of underrepresentation were discussed and it was agreed that these would be considered as part of usual recruitment activity. Discussion ensued on learning

disability and neurodiversity and the extent to which student voice was captured from Foundation Learning students.

Q – Was benchmark data available on governing body diversity profile against which the College’s board could be compared?

A – Yes. Data was now available as a result of the annual FE Governor Workforce data collection exercise. The latest data would be circulated for information.

ACTION – Circulate benchmark diversity data from the most recently published FE Governor Workforce report.

2. GOVERNING BODY REVIEW

2.1 Membership and Succession Planning *(previously circulated)*

The Chair referred members to the Clerk’s report from which the following points were highlighted:

- Vacancies – three Foundation Governor vacancies remained. The Clerk reported on the actions taken to openly advertise the vacancies – College website, parents’ newsletter, St Helens Chamber newsletter, targeted mailshot to local accountancy firms – which had unfortunately not yet yielded any formal applications. Online platforms for matching potential volunteers to governor vacancies were also being explored. The Principal confirmed that other headteachers across the area had reported similar difficulties in recruiting practising Catholics as Foundation Governors. Discussion ensued on other potential recruitment strategies to fill the outstanding vacancies and suggestions included:
 - advert in parish newsletter
 - share details at staff briefing
 - advert in education sector publications.

Q – Given difficulties in recruiting Foundation Governors, would there be scope to change the composition of the Governing Body to increase the number of co-opted governors?

A – Instrument of Government sets out clear rules for the composition of the Governing Body designed to ensure Foundation Governors are in the clear majority due to the Catholic nature of the College. Any variation to the provisions within the Instrument and Articles of Government would require the consent not only of the Governing Body, but also the Trustees and the Bishop.

Q – Would there be any flexibility from the Archdiocese in terms of criteria for Foundation Governors?

A – This could be explored further with the Archdiocese.

- Committee membership – an updated membership list and governance structure diagram was shared including changes to the Quality and Standards Committee and Remuneration Committee membership approved at the last full Governing Body meeting.
- Link governor scheme – a proposal to re-introduce a Chaplaincy Link Governor role was highlighted. Discussion ensued on the most appropriate title for the role and members agreed that Catholic Ethos Link Governor was preferable as it suggested a wider remit encompassing Catholic life across the whole College. The Clerk reported on efforts to develop an appropriate role description which

would be ready for presentation to the full Governing Body when it met later that month. A Foundation Governor with extensive experience of Catholic leadership and denominational inspection had indicated that they would be willing to undertake this role, subject to final approval by the full Governing Body.

The Committee **recommended approval** of a new Catholic Ethos Link Governor to the full Governing Body and the appointment of Andy Rannard to this role.

The Committee **noted** the membership and succession planning update and **agreed** the following actions:

- ACTION – (a) Advertise Foundation Governor vacancies in parish newsletter, amongst wider College staff and, if need be, in education sector press**
(b) FGB agenda item – Catholic Ethos Link Governor

3. GOVERNANCE DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Governance Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) – progress report (*previously circulated*)

The Clerk presented this report and referred members to the QIP progress update and RAG rated action log. It was noted that eight actions had been closed out. The following points were highlighted with regard to certain areas with amber or red RAG ratings:

- Action 1(b), Recruit Foundation Governors to fill vacancies (red) – the challenges faced with recruiting practising Catholics to these roles with the requisite skills and experience had already been discussed under item 2.1. Additional actions had been agreed to support existing strategy.
- Action 1(e), Governing Body EDI reporting (amber) – updated EDI report had already been discussed under item 1.5.
- Action 2(c), Link Governor scheme (amber) – this was on track for successful completion by the end of the year, following which link governor activities and reporting would fall into business as usual.
- Actions 3(a-c), College leadership (amber) – all actions were on track.
- Action 4(a), Strategic performance dashboard (amber) – this action had been delayed due to changes in college IT systems, however the Principal's termly report now included a RAG rated report on headline KPIs, and it was anticipated that the next strategic plan would be supported by one-year measurable plans that would lend themselves to a clearer type of dashboard report.
- Action 4(b), Strategic planning next steps (amber) – on track following strategic planning session held in December.
- Action 4(c), Local needs duty and skills agenda (amber) – positive impact of Skills & Careers Link Governor noted. Formal reporting would be through Quality and Standards Committee directly into the Governing Body.

Discussion ensued on the status of a number of the amber actions which were on track in line with anticipated schedule and hence presented no cause for concern.

The Committee:

- **noted** the QIP progress report
- **confirmed** that additional actions to support the recruitment of new Foundation Governors should be pursued in line with item 2.1.

3.2 **External Governance Review – update** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair referred members to the update prepared by the Clerk and the confirmed activity timetable. She reminded members that the meeting was being observed by the external reviewer as part of the process and that a number of one-to-one discussions with governors had already taken place. The Clerk reported that the activity timetable had been developed so as to provide an opportunity for the draft report to be presented to Search Committee when it next met on 20 May 2024. Following this, the final report would be presented to the full Governing Body at its Summer Term meeting in July.

The Committee **noted** the reporting arrangements and activity timetable.

4. **GOVERNANCE / REGULATORY UPDATE**

4.1 **Governance and regulatory update** *(previously circulated)*

The Clerk referred members to her report and highlighted the following points:

- Restrictions on student governors in the Instrument and Articles of Government – standard clause that restricted student governors under the age of 18 from voting on contractual/financial matters may need to be varied to ensure compliance with charity law. Further guidance was awaited from the Sixth Form College Association (SFCA). The Clerk confirmed that as a Catholic college, variations to the governing document also required the consent of the Trustees and the Bishop, hence there were potentially additional implications for any required amendments.
- Political activities in advance of a general election – the Clerk signposted members to the requirements set out in the College’s Accountability Agreement as well as the general Charity Commission guidance.
- Local needs duty – new guidance issued by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2023 aligned the reporting requirements for the Governing Body’s statutory local needs duty with the annual return of the College’s Accountability Statement. Submission deadline was 30 June 2024 and reporting would be through Quality and Standards Committee into the Governing Body.
- FE and sixth form college corporation governance guide – this key guidance document had been updated by the DfE and was stored on GovernorHub and used as part of the governor induction process.
- College financial handbook – following reclassification as central government sector, the DfE’s new handbook for colleges was due to be published in March with a view to implementation from 1 August 2024. The document would be reviewed upon publication and implications reported to governors as appropriate.

The Chair thanked the Clerk for her report and members **noted** the update.

5. **GOVERNOR TRAINING**

5.1 **Governor and Clerk training log – mid-year review** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair referred members to the log which captured all training and development activity undertaken so far during this academic year. Reference was also made to the Governing Body’s training and development plan for the year and the Clerk highlighted ongoing issues in identifying a suitable source of unconscious bias training. The ED&I Link Governor was assisting on this matter.

Q – Which members of the Governing Body had recently undertaken Safer Recruitment training?

A – Mick Martin had completed the ETF Safer Recruitment in FE training course the previous year (February 2023).

The Chair of Governors and Search Committee Chair both confirmed that they had also recently refreshed this training and agreed to submit their certificates for inclusion in the training log.

ACTION – Submit Safer Recruitment training completion certificates to Clerk.

6. OTHER MATTERS

6.1 Governor Training

Members were invited to update the Clerk on any training activities they had completed since the last meeting. No further activities were reported.

6.2 Any Other Business

None

6.3 Date of next meeting

Monday 20 May 2024 at 3pm

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution at the meeting. There being no further business to address, the Chair closed the meeting at 3.45pm.

Signed by the Chair _____ 

On this day _____ 18 June 2024 _____