

PLANNING & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING OF 16 MAY 2024

15:00 via Microsoft Teams

Present: Sue Cook; Alex Killick (Chair); Ian McLaughlan; Gwen Raez; Nora Senior

In attendance: Jon Buglass; Sue Clyne; Audrey Cumberland; Ian Deed; Jonny Pearson; Marcus Walker (Clerk); Alan Williamson

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

1.1 The Committee NOTED apologies from Ross Laird and Luna Morrison.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 No declarations of interested were noted.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1 The Committee APPROVED the minutes from 29 February 2024 as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING REPORT

4.1 The Committee NOTED that actions arising from the previous meeting were complete, overtaken or on the agenda.

5. PRINCIPAL & CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT

5.1 The Committee NOTED that the Board of Management had held a joint Strategy Session, on 1 May 2024, with the Senior Management Team. The Principal advised the Committee that the Session invited attendees to consider wider collaboration with Regional Economic Partnerships, regional planning, and delivery; models of regional collaboration; and opportunities for Edinburgh College and its partners. The Committee NOTED that the Senior Management Team would explore and develop potential approaches to enhance collaboration, skills planning and delivery across the wider economic region and feedback to a future meeting of the Board.

- 5.2 The Committee NOTED that all staff had received an update on the headline findings of the 2024 Hive Staff Survey. The Principal advised the Committee that a Collective Action Programme (CAP) had been set-up to establish Action Working Teams to consider the development of priority actions, which aimed to support enhancements to the College's culture.
- 5.3 The Committee NOTED that, following approval from the Board of Management and the SFC, the College had opened a Voluntary Severance Scheme on 6 May 2024. The Principal advised the Committee that the Scheme would close on 31 May 2024 and a full update would be provided to the Board of Management on 11 June 2024.
- 5.4 The Committee NOTED that the Principal had written to lecturing staff on 8 February 2024 following confirmation from EIS-FELA that Action Short of Strike (ASOS) would commence from 12 February 2024. The Principal advised the Committee that due to the hugely detrimental impact of the previous resulting boycott on students a decision had been taken by colleges within the sector to recognise that what was being proposed was a breach of contract and could therefore directly impact on their pay.
- 5.5 The Committee NOTED the College's decision to institute a 100% pay deduction for lecturing staff should they choose not to record the progress and attainment of learners. The Principal informed the Committee that a further communication would be sent to lecturing staff on w/c 20 May 2024, reiterating the College's position.

Nora Senior joined the meeting

6. FINANCE REPORT

6.1 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO MARCH 2024

- 6.1.1 The Committee NOTED the financial performance of the College as outlined in the Management Accounts to March 2024.
- 6.1.2 The Committee NOTED that the Senior Management Team continued to progress a major project on Priority Based Budgeting in relation to the forecast financial deficits for the 2024/25 and 2025/26 budgets. The Director of Finance & Infrastructure advised the Committee that current year financial gaps were being largely offset by staff vacancy management and a increased bank interest income (from higher bank balances).
- 6.1.3 The Committee DISCUSSED the month-end cash position to March 2024, which included circa £3m for the 2022 and 2023 cost of living pay awards backdated to 1 September 2022. The Committee NOTED that the cash-flow position of the College would reduce significantly when backdated pay awards are paid (-subject to ongoing negotiations with trade unions).

6.1.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the significant financial pressures on the college sector and the need for the College to continue to deliver against its financial sustainability plans. The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, commended both the Chief Operating Officer and the Director of Finance & Infrastructure for their close management of the College's operating position which tracked closely with the profiled budget deficit.

6.2 INDICATIVE COLLEGE BUDGET 2024/25

6.2.1 The Committee NOTED an Indicative College Budget 2024/25, and a supporting presentation by the Chief Operating Officer, which outlined the budgeting process, budgeting pressures, additional costs, budget reductions, savings, impact on cash-flow, risks and mitigations, and sensitivity analysis.

6.2.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the Indicative College Budget 2024/25 and welcomed the opportunity to endorse a breakeven budget despite the significant challenges faced by the college sector. The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that a savings target of £3.1m would need to be achieved to enable the College to operate at a breakeven adjusted operating position and would be primarily achieved through further cost efficiencies underpinned by a voluntary severance scheme.

6.2.3 The Committee DISCUSSED the Indicative College Budget 2024/25 and the ongoing work to identify cost savings and the anticipated outcome of the Voluntary Severance Scheme. The Chair informed the Committee that it was important that the College considered all aspects of cost saving whilst ensuring that the staff and student experience was not detrimentally impacted upon.

6.2.4 The Committee NOTED that the indicative budget presented to the Board of Management would likely change by the date of the next scheduled Board meeting.

6.2.5 The Committee AGREED that the updated Indicative College Budget would be presented to the Board on 11 June 2024 for consideration and, if appropriate, approval.

7. HUMAN RESOURCES REPORT

7.1 The Committee NOTED the Human Resources Report that included updates on employee relations, HR operations, staff wellbeing, Health & Safety, and Organisational Development since its last meeting on 29 February 2024.

7.2 The Committee NOTED that pay negotiations for the three years from September 2022 to 2024 had stalled with trade unions undertaking discontinuous strike action and ASOS (Paragraphs 5.4 & 5.5 refer). The Director of HR & OD informed the Committee that, whilst national bargaining remained ongoing, recognised trade

unions continued to lobby the Scottish Government for additional funding for the sector.

- 7.3 The Committee NOTED that the College had presented at the national Black Leadership Group Four Nations Conference, in March 2024, on decolonialising the curriculum and inclusive recruitment. The Director of HR & OD highlighted to the Committee that further work was being undertaken to explore recruitment interview outcomes, as data illustrated that although applicants from BAME ethnicities were applying for vacancies and are being shortlisted, comparatively few were being appointed.
- 7.4 The Committee DISCUSSED Quarter 3 (2023/24) employment data and welcomed the increase in completion rates (above 80%) relating to statutory and mandatory training.
- 7.5 The Committee DISCUSSED an increase in staff absences through '*Work-Related Stress*' across Quarter 3 and its interrelation with a decrease in '*Anxiety*' related absences over the same period. The Director of HR & OD highlighted to the Committee that, despite movements across the Quarter, over the past 12 months the College had seen '*Anxiety*' become the number one reason for staff absence, when historically it had been '*Work-related Stress*'.

8. RECRUITMENT, RETENTION & CREDITS DASHBOARD

- 8.1 The Committee NOTED an overview of the performance of the College against its 2023/24 activity targets. The Vice Principal Education & Skills reminded the Committee that the SFC had set the College a total activity target of 164,857 credits for the academic year.
- 8.2 The Committee NOTED that the credits position of the College, as of 16 May 2024, was 161,946. The Vice Principal Education & Skills advised the Committee that, based on unaudited credit activity to date, the College had achieved over 98% of its credit target and therefore would avoid any financial clawback.
- 8.3 The Committee DISCUSSED the level of demand for College courses and the continued issue of credit price equity relating to the College's credit price compared to the sector. The Principal advised the Committee that the SFC were aware of the College's current level of credit activity, and its continued concerns around its credit pricing, and had agreed to reflect on points previously raised by both the Chair of the Board and the Principal.
- 8.4 The Committee DISCUSSED the College's Curriculum Strategy and the equality impact assessment (EIA) process undertaken in relation to decisions on the viability of specific courses. The Vice Principal Education & Skills provided the Committee with reassurance around the EIA impact assessment process undertaken by the College, which utilised data captured during the enrolment process.

9. ESTATES & DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE REPORT

- 9.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update on ongoing Estates & Infrastructure Projects at the College as of 16 May 2024.

- 9.2 The Committee NOTED that following a recent tender process the catering contract for Edinburgh College had been awarded to CH&Co (trading as Gather & Gather) for a period of 5 years. The Director of Finance & Infrastructure informed the Committee that key factors in the decision to award Gather & Gather the contract were a guarantee of nil cost operations in Year 1, a commitment to sustainability, and ambitious plans for investment in campus facilities.
- 9.3 The Committee DISCUSSED the catering contract award and welcomed assurance that consultation with students was considered as part of the tender process, and that the winning tenderer was a real living wage employer. The Director of Finance & Infrastructure advised the Committee that any risks related to the contract would be monitored through ongoing contract management to ensure that all key performance indicators and service level agreements were met.
- 9.4 The Committee NOTED an update on guidance from the SFC advising the College that capital funding for 2024/25 could no longer be used to fund Resources (RDEL) and must be used for Capital (CDEL) works. The Committee DISCUSSED the potential impact of the change in guidance and a communication put forward by the College and sector, to the SFC, to continue to use these funds for lifecycle maintenance which the Director of Finance & Infrastructure believed sat within the definition for CDEL works.

10. HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT

- 10.1 The Committee NOTED a quarterly Health & Safety Report outlining activity over Quarter 3 of the academic year 2023/24. The Director of Finance & Infrastructure advised the Committee that there had been two RIDDOR Reports made to the Health & Safety Executive during the period.
- 10.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the RIDDOR Report and NOTED that appropriate risk assessments had been undertaken by the College in both instances.
- 10.3 The Committee DISCUSSED trend data on reported 'near misses' and AGREED that such information should be provided within both the summarised annual and quarterly Health & Safety reports.

11. ANNUAL REVIEW OF RISK APPETITE STATEMENTS

- 11.1 The Committee NOTED that it was good practice for boards of management to review their risk appetite statements on an annual basis. The Chief Operating Officer advised the Committee that, given that the College's Risk Appetite Statements were agreed in October 2023, it had been decided that a light touch review would take place in the current academic year – with committees of the Board reviewing statements within their remit.
- 11.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the Risk Appetite Statements relating to *Regulation & Compliance; Finance; Reputation* and, *Workforce*. The Committee AGREED that the following points should be considered further by the Board of Management on 11 June 2024:

- i) Regarding the *Finance* Statement, the written narrative should explicitly indicate that the College should ensure it remains financially solvent.
- ii) In the wider financial sustainability context, should the College's *Finance* Statement be considered 'Open'.
- iii) The wording relating to *Cyber & Information Governance* should be reviewed to reconsider the phrase 'actively seeking' risk.

12. DIGITAL STRATEGY 2023-26 PROGRESS REPORT

12.1 The Committee NOTED a verbal update from the Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance on progress relating to the Digital Strategy 2023-26. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance advised the Committee that across the three core themes of the Strategy most goals were 'in-progress', with all performance targets set to be completed by July 2026.

13. EDINBURGH COLLEGE BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE ACTION PLAN 2024-30

13.1 The Committee NOTED that the College had developed a British Sign Language (BSL) Action Plan 2024-30 in line with its legal obligations as set out in the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Scottish Government's BSL National Plan. The Vice Principal Innovation, Planning & Performance advised the Committee that the BSL Action Plan 2024-30 had been considered and approved by the Senior Management Team and, to be fully compliant with the 2015 Act, had published the document on the College website.

13.2 The Committee DISCUSSED the BSL Action Plan 2024-30 and AGREED to endorse its implementation to address systemic issues that been identified as key barriers for BSL users to learn, work, and visit at Edinburgh College.

14. REVIEW OF COMMITTEE OPERATION 2023/24

14.1 REVIEW OF COMMITTEE OPERATION 2023/24

14.1.1 The Committee NOTED that at the end of each academic year the Committee is required to review its annual activity. The Committee Chair advised the Committee that the same evaluation form, which asked members to consider the committee's operation and its performance monitoring and strategic roles, would be completed by all committees of the Board.

14.1.2 The Committee AGREED that its operation was compliant with its terms of reference, as outlined in 'Part 1' of the evaluation form.

14.1.3 The Committee DISCUSSED its performance over the academic year and AGREED that members' feedback should be relayed directly to the Chair and the Clerk, prior to a finalised version of the report being recirculated to the Committee (out-with the meeting cycle) for approval.

14.2 PLANNING & RESOURCES COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024

14.2.1 The Committee NOTED that it had been asked by the Board to present an annual report to the Board on 11 June 2024. The Chair advised the Committee that the report would highlight key matters of business considered by the Committee and future areas of development.

14.2.2 The Committee DISCUSSED and AGREED that a finalised version of the Annual Report would be reviewed the Chair, prior to its presentation to the Board.

15. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

15.1 COMMUNICATION FROM EIS-FELA BRANCH

15.1.1 The Committee NOTED that the Chair of the Board had been notified of a vote of 'no confidence' in the Board of Management from the local EIS-FELA Branch on 16 May 2024. The Chair of the Board advised the Committee that this matter would be noted at the next meeting of the Board of Management on 11 June 2024.

15.2 DEPARTURE OF A STUDENT BOARD MEMBER

15.1.1 The Committee NOTED that the tenure of the Student Board Member, Luna Morrison, would end on 30 June 2024. The Chair, on behalf of the Planning & Resources Committee, thanked Ms Morrison for her contribution to the Committee throughout the academic year.

16. FOR INFORMATION

16.1 COMMITTEE PROGRAMME OF WORK 2024/5

16.1.1 The Committee NOTED its proposed programme of work for the 2024/25 academic year.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

17.1 To be confirmed.

Meeting closed at 17:00