

**Approved Notes of Corporation Strategic Planning Day
Held on Thursday 30 January 2025
In the Function Room, Peakman Campus, Redditch**

Present: David Ash, Chair of Corporation Chris Hallam Vice Chair of Corporation Michelle Dowse, Principal Donna Gibson, Clerk to the Corporation Jane Britton, Governor Gaynor Cheshire, Governor Phil Colledge, Governor Helen Davies, Governor Vicki Davies, Governor Adam Hall, Governor Julie Hurlston, Staff Governor Tony King, Governor Allen McConaghie, Governor Steve Stanier, Governor	In attendance (except for items 7 & 8) Simon Kibble, ELT Cherie Clements, ELT Julia Breakwell, ELT Matt Gower, ELT Mo Horan, ELT Peter Robinson, ELT External Contributors: David Hughes, AoC (via Teams)(Item 4) Jo Pretty, FEC (via Teams)(Item 8) Peter Marsh Consulting (Item 9)
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No	Item	Action For
1	Welcome The Chair of Corporation welcomed the newer members of the Corporation and ELT to their first Corporation Strategy Day. The Clerk confirmed that apologies had been received from Paul Hine and Steve Smith.	
2	Chair of Corporation Introduction and Update The Chair provided an overview of the day, which would comprise updates and activities with a strategic theme. They noted that these would help to support the strategic direction of improving the consistency and quality of teaching and learning, as well as contributing to the ongoing improvements toward the quality of Governance. The Chair advised that the Corporation would be receiving external support from David Wright, National Leader of Governance. The support would include looking at Board behaviours, structure, attending a committee meeting and a Corporation, and building on the improvements made since the External Review of Governance. Corporation will receive feedback at the end of the process.	
3	Principal & CEO – Accountability Statement & Local Needs The Principal provided an overview of the agreement and the duty, along with the proposed timeline and submission date, the guidance for which is yet to be released by the DfE/ESFA. The Corporation were assured that many of the actions in the 24/25 statement were in progress, some may continue into 25/26, but it is important to capture what	

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	should be included in the 25/26 statement. There will be some changes and the College will approach its strategic partners as part of the process, as it did previously. The Corporation were reminded that is a statutory requirement for the Boards of Colleges to assess the local landscape and what their college will do to address local requirements. Governors were asked to provide their thoughts on what could/should be the focus for 25/26, so that they could be considered. The Principal, the Chair of Corporation and some members of ELT will meet the ESFA in April for an annual strategic conversation and the statement is an agenda item for that meeting. The Principal also referred to the new Provider Dashboard, advising the Corporation that it consists of historical data, is currently a pilot and feedback is being collated. An example of the skills section was shown to demonstrate how Governors could expect future data to be presented. The Principal advised that with so much change coming out from the new Government, and with its everchanging policies, focus and direction, they and the Leadership Team remain cautious and mindful that the Government could change direction, and we need to be ready to respond at pace where necessary.	
4	Association of Colleges - The National Landscape	
	Governors received a presentation from David Hughes, Chief Executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC). The topics covered were Government thinking on strategy and policy; funding and finances and what this might mean for the College. Highlights from David's presentation were: • Economic growth is weak and Government finances are tight with high borrowing costs. • Lack of investment is likely to impact both strategic and policy ambition. • The Government have several missions they are pushing, in response the AoC launched the Mission Accepted Report that looks at the role of colleges across the 5 key missions. • A comprehensive strategy for post-16 education and skills is expected soon. • Skills England will understand skills needed to deliver industrial strategy & missions. • Devolution will help deliver skills needed for local growth plans. • A clearer role for colleges, universities, schools – with improved accountability • This government wants one post-16 system driven by its missions, particularly economic growth (industrial strategy) and opportunity. In terms of funding: • An update on revenue funding is expected on 13 February. • Fiscal statement is due on 26 March. • Colleges can expect £300m for 16 to 19 funding 25-26 financial year.	

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	• £50m as one-off April to July grant for all colleges, based on AY24-5 allocation. • £250m for 2025-26 AY for increased learner numbers • Nothing extra for adult funding, apprenticeships, there may be a small increase in fees for HE Other areas: • A more explicit role of colleges (Technical Excellence Colleges) and a refocussed Lifelong Learning Entitlement • Stronger focus on college-university collaboration Possible opportunities could include. • 16 to 19 - growth in numbers & potentially on rates. • Youth Guarantee - reducing NEETs. • Improving the employment rate - getting 2 million adults into work. • Joint college – university business development teams to engage employers. • New pathways and curriculum What can be anticipated: • Three-year spending review by July 2025 • DfE decisions on 2025-6 college funding • Limited extra funding and extra costs <i>A Governor questioned the skills slide information, noting that it looked like the Government was operating in isolation and if that was the case, could AoC lobby them? DH responded that there is a lot going on, there are 8 Government strategies impacting post-16 and the 10 priority policies for colleges, so many separate conversations are taking place. On the Government's side there is a lack of vision for education and skills, and the skills strategy does not go far enough, it should be bolder and more ambitious. Similarly, the Government make ongoing reference to university and college collaboration, but AoC are doing most of the work. The AoC Team is small but is relentless in challenging and lobbying Government.</i> <i>A Governor had noted that the Government is attempting to give clear messaging about large numbers in specific areas – such as construction, but without giving much detail about who will be delivering the training. Will there be a separate budget?</i> <i>DH confirmed that the AoC are pushing back on this. Pay is a big part of the picture, and within that is a £10k pay gap between staff in schools and those in colleges. Additionally, the pay gap varies around the country, and it will be difficult to bridge the gap. There does need to be an increase in colleges offering construction and more money is needed to fund the teachers. AoC are making the case on behalf of colleges and the DfE do recognise the challenges. It has been added to the DfE risk register as a red risk because not enough has been done to address it. The Select Committee is an ally of the AoC and have been working</i>	

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	<i>closely in the background to assist AoC in putting a compelling case forward to the Treasury.</i> Going forward colleges should be reassured that the work of colleges is firmly believed in beyond the sector, demands made need to be practical, colleges should continue to lobby and engage with their local MPs and ask them to take their case back to Whitehall. The Chair of Corporation expressed the Board's appreciation to David for taking the time to join the day and for giving such useful insights that would inform future discussions for the Board. It was noted that everyone is appreciative of the efforts of the AoC and how, despite only being a small team, it takes on the challenge of lobbying on behalf of Colleges. DH thanked the Board for the invitation to the day and acknowledged the importance of the role the Principal plays by being on AoC Groups but also supporting the AoC agenda both locally and nationally. Their support is much appreciated.	
5	Governor Improvement Strategy - Governor Activity College (Learning) Walks	
	Matt Gower, Vice Principal Quality, provided an introduction of how the learning walk activity would work and a reminder of what to look for. Governors would be in groups of two, each led by a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and would visit allocated classes. A crib sheet had been prepared to guide Governors on what to look for during the walks. If appropriate Governors were encouraged to speak to students, as this would provide them with additional insights into the students' own perspective of college life.	
6	Feedback from Learning Walks	
	Governors fed back the following comments: • The environment was calm and peaceful. • Students were a credit to the College and were polite and courteous. • Some students have expressed their satisfaction with the experience they are having, however, students who had been moved from another campus for some lessons, expressed their dissatisfaction at the move. Governors had noted this with interest, as it is these types of feedback that cannot be portrayed in reports that are seen by the Board. They were also aware that there may be operational reasons why students may have been relocated. • Classes appeared to be settled. • Students came across as honest, articulate, and employable. • In terms of employability Governors could see the journey of learning from school to college and the progression to employability. • It was noted that some of the Construction trade's lessons were not taking place at Alliance House due to the adverse weather and the cold temperatures (Governors noted that similar provision is offered at Malvern but indoors). • Attendance was good.	

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	• South Bromsgrove High School students who attend at Alliance House to do practical work are engaged. The tutor is pleased with their progress. The Principal noted that this triangulated with feedback they had received directly from the school and the students when they met them. It is a positive liaison between the school and the College. • An interview skills session had been observed – the students were engaged and showing reactions, the tutors' interactions with them were impressive. • Public Services students had demonstrated their thought process when considering the career they want to pursue. • Students were able to identify and articulate their transferable skills. • Students had expressed a preference for the small class sizes. • Accessible software was being used to speak to text, this was good to see as many employers are looking to accommodate equipment/software that helps with accessibility in the workplace. • Lecturers were seen pausing videos and asking questions to check learners understanding. • Good use of resources. • Could see that staff know their students. • Progression could be seen. • Poor quality of maths abilities was noted, Governors understood that was the level students had arrived with (unable to do maths without using mobile phones). • Observed evidence of new staff being developed. <i>A Governor questioned if targets are linked, how can walks undertaken by staff during the year be linked back to targets? In response they were advised that the intention is to link the two and have discussions about what is seen. Processes are still under review but coaching and feedback to staff will be at the heart of what is done.</i>	
7	Risk Strategy - Governor Session - College Risk Appetite – how averse are we to risk	
	The Vice Principal, Finance & Corporate Operations gave an overview of where the College is now and what the current risk appetite is. We have already progressed to a new format Strategic Risk Register and now need to develop and determine our risk appetite. To determine the appetite, the themes need to be considered: Curriculum (new provision and projects), Quality, Finance, Systems and IT, Governance & Corporate and Student Support. The roles and responsibilities of the Corporation were noted, the item is covered by Audit Committee and is well documented in the revised FE Code of Good Governance, College Financial Handbook, and the Managing Public Money Guidance – Section 4.3 Risk. Corporations should set the appetite and the leadership team manage it operationally. The next step is agreeing the format and Governors were presented with some options to consider. Based upon some further discussion and the activity	

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	undertaken the consensus was to adopt example 2 but to present it in a more visual way like that taken from our internal auditors RSM. <i>A Governor asked if the Managing Public Money guidance has an explanation of “eager”? It was noted that there is no specific reference, and the guidance acknowledges different organisations will take different approaches.</i> Based upon the agreed template to be adopted, a paper would be prepared for Audit Committee and the Risk Management Plan/Policy revised accordingly. The item can then be revisited at the September Corporation Workshop.	VPFCO/ Clerk
8	Governor Improvement Strategy - Governor Session – Effective Challenge For Governors	
	Governors received a session from Jo Pretty, FEC, intended to assist Governors to know when to challenge, what to challenge and to be able to determine what is for information, what is for discussion and what is for approval. Governors undertook activities designed to highlight: • how effective is their challenge of quality assurance and quality improvement? • what are the main areas that your college would want to tell Ofsted? • identify the College's top three strengths and one area for improvement. Feedback from Governors was: • they feel that the level of challenge is better than it was. • until recently the Board's composition meant that there was a lack of ability to challenge on teaching and learning issues, which meant the Board had to rely on the information provided by ELT. • the trajectory now feels to be upwards. • the Teaching and Learning Committee membership has been boosted. • better systems are in place to capture challenge. • their skills set is evolving and developing. • information from ELT is improved and is honest/realistic. Governors were asked to consider a statement and identify where would the correlation of the impact for students against the statement be. Noting that better student attendance, better student pass rates, improved student voice and good progression would all be acceptable expectations. Governors were advised that it is not unreasonable to ask for: • trend data if it is not there. • the direction of travel • benchmarking against national averages The Chair of Corporation thanked Jo for joining the afternoon and extended the Board's appreciation in providing the assurance that they are on the right track.	

9	Estates Strategy – Joint Session With ELT	
	Governors received a presentation that built upon the discussions at the December Corporation meeting, and addressed the questions and challenges posed by the Corporation to PMC. A thorough discussion ensued, during which Governors were provided with detailed information about the proposed projects implications, timelines, and costs. There was an opportunity for Governors to ask additional questions and present further challenges. By the end of the session, Governors were reassured that the proposed projects would improve, enhance, and support a positive student experience. An update on progress would be reported to the Finance & Resources Committee on 11 March 2025, with a follow-up session scheduled for the Corporation meeting on 1 April 2025.	
10	Acknowledgements, Reflections and Closing Comments	
	The Chair of Corporation acknowledged that the day had been informative, purposeful, and focused and had again contributed to the Governors' understanding of the working of the College. Governors had benefitted from their sessions, along with the number of learning walks undertaken in the morning being unprecedented. The Corporation are reassured that we are going in the right direction. The Principal was thanked for her contribution and the Chair acknowledged that her contacts being willing to join the day is indicative of how the College profile and reputation is improving. Members of ELT and SLT were thanked for their contribution. The Clerk was thanked for clear communications about the day and the logistics for those taking part. The Catering staff and students were thanked for a lovely lunch service, with the Corporation acknowledging that once again they had exceeded expectations. A feedback form would be circulated by the Clerk for Governors to complete.	Clerk