

**Finance and General Purposes Committee**  
**held on Monday 20 November 2023 5.00 pm**  
**in A10, College Road Campus**

**MINUTES**

**1. Apologies for absence - none**

**Attendees:** Mervyn Jones (Chair), Peta Darnley, Clive Hodgeman, John Auckland, Abigail Appleton (Principal & CEO)

**Present:** Tim Williams (Finance Director), Rebecca Semple (Clerk to Governors)

**Declaration of Interests - none**

**2. Minutes of the last meeting**

- I. **Approval of the minutes of the last meeting held on 25 September 2023** - minutes approved as true and accurate record
- II. **Matters arising – none**

**3. Financial Statements for year ending 31 July 2023 (draft)**

- The Finance Director presented Financial Statements, which the Committee received and agreed to recommend to Board for noting.

**4. Finance Report - the reports below were presented by the Finance Director**

- I. **ESFA Financial Health Letter and Governing Body's Dashboard Benchmarking** – this report was noted by the Committee and no concerns raised. The Finance Director noted that scoring method has not been changed as had been expected, and that ESFA meeting in July confirmed no concerns regarding finances. A new ESFA partner is now in place.  
A Committee Member asked about potential downward pressures on reserves. Reduced HE/FE recruitment was discussed as main impact, along with impact of utilities increase over past two years.
- II. **Management Accounts to 30 September 2023** – report was noted by the Committee  
The Committee noted that this is essentially a working paper to show the implications of potentially implementing a pay increase (linked to a recent ESFA grant recently received). The Committee agreed that this report will be submitted to Board (Dec 11<sup>th</sup> 2023) based on the already approved 3% increase, and a paper produced for February 2024 Board meeting regarding the annual pay award.  
The risks and benefits of investing in an account with a higher rate of interest account was discussed.  
Other key points highlighted by the Finance Director included:
  - Small movements bring accounts to a £73,000 positive balance overall. £143,000 ESFA grant has played a major part in this
  - Some challenges experienced in spending capital grants due to nature of spend and timing (eg. need to undertake some works while students are not in college).
  - Level of UWTSD fee increase is still under discussion. A possible benchmarking exercise to aid UWTSD negotiations was discussed. The possibility of looking strategically at degree

awarding powers as an alternative option for more long term future was noted.

**Action:** Finance Director/Principal to undertake benchmarking exercise to support negotiations with UWTSD.

**5. Premises and Accommodation Report** – reports below were presented by the Finance Director

- I. **Digital Skills Centre** – The Committee heard that works are progressing, with some small unexpected delays. Completion date extension to April 2024 is likely, with some potential associated additional costs related on cause of delays/nature of build/development.
- II. **ESFA Capital** – The Finance Director updated the committee on key points of this report:

- Smaller projects are currently being undertaken internally. Tender route is to be taken for undertaking/project-managing larger works, as these skills not held within existing internal teams. **College Road Campus lease** – The Finance Director updated the committee:
  - Hive lease is ready to be signed
  - Action:** Chair to sign Hive lease
  - Hereford Council have removed the recently-identified asbestos
  - Lease states that HCA contract covers upkeep of basement (where boiler is located), requiring potentially £0.5million for replacement. Boiler working currently, but not an ideal or efficient heating system and this was unexpected. The Principal is due to meet with Herefordshire Council Finance Director to progress discussions.
- Committee Members commented on potential differences between servicing and replacement of services in commercial contracts, and a specific energy company was recommended for possible free review of energy costs and current provision, which was agreed as a useful and timely and action which could support the ongoing discussions with Herefordshire Council.

**6. Annual Reports**

- I. **HCA People Annual Report** - Report noted. The Principal highlighted some key areas:
  - Staff development has focused a lot on priorities such as safeguarding, harassment in past year, and focus now moves to Teaching and Learning staff development
  - Advertising and recruitment challenges experienced noted to be similar to the wider sector
  - Increase in sickness days noted – traditionally an indicator of staff wellbeing, but further investigation has attributed this to isolated issues rather than being a wider issue. However, results of staff survey alongside this indicate that this is an area that should be continue to be monitored.
  - The creation of a Staff Forum is under discussion. UCU (union) request to formally recognise them (voluntary for HCA, due to size) is likely to arise, and will require consideration. The Principal is awaiting further clarity from UCU regarding what signing up to recognition involves, and a detailed proposal will come to Board via Committee discussion if request reaches this point.

**II. Health and Safety Annual Report**

- Report received and noted
- Chair reminded Committee of UK court case around university responsibilities for student welfare currently in the media. Main issues following this investigation included liaising with parents, which the Principal commented that HCA do in high risk cases unless there is a good reason not to. The Principal also noted the recently increased wellbeing support offer implemented for students
- The Principal noted some concern around current resource dedicated to reviewing and improving of Health & Safety processes. Decision has therefore been made to focus the Health & Safety and Facilities manager purely on Health & Safety for a year, to give this area the best chance of improvement. Facilities Management is being moved to Operations Manager for this time. Workshops Management will in turn be moved from Operations Manager to Vice Principal Student Experience & Business Development, hoping the link with curriculum will provide an added benefit by bridging a gap that SLT were already aware of. Health & Safety & Facilities Manager and Operations Manager are both in agreement with this approach, and Principal also noted support from other departmental colleagues around H&S at last H&S meeting.

**Decision:** Committee agreed to recommend report to Board for information

### **III. Annual Treasury Management Report 2022/23**

- Report received and noted. Nothing to add to above discussion

**Decision:** Committee agreed to recommend report to Board for information

### **IV. Sustainability Annual Report 2022/23 and Action Plan**

- Report received and noted
- Formal tracking of sustainability activity across all areas is an area for development – capturing work and improvements already underway, but data not yet captured. Working towards producing baseline data is first step in this process.
- Useful peer learning achieved via entering Herefordshire Council Green Awards (award which HCA have won in the past week)

**Decision:** Committee agreed to recommend report to Board for information

### **V. Annual Estates report (updated from September)**

- Report received and noted
- Committee noted that Operations Manager has updated this report following some omissions noted in September around operational detail within smaller capital costs

## **7. Policies for approval**

### **I. Run Hide Tell Policy**

- Principal proposes this policy - developed very much in line with other Folly Lane colleges, and will be presented to students as part of safety week.
- Principal confirmed that this policy is a start of further work in this area and will be a basis for rolling out run hide tell as a first measure, along

government guidelines and using West Mercia Police advice. Can then be developed further as necessary for more complex situations

- Emergency Incident planning discussions are underway, led by the Principal. Regular meeting also in place with other college Principals looking at a cross-Folly-Lane policy

Chair queried the initial communication process for an incident such as an intruder. Principal confirmed that currently there is no way to communicate with all staff in an emergency, but options are under discussion (eg. an app for all staff).

The Chair asked whether college rooms/areas are zone-able/lockable for easy isolation. Principal agreed to take this consideration as part of further emergency incident planning and development

A Committee Member asked whether there are security agencies that offer reviews/advice around this (as fire services do). The discussion then held around this resulted in an acknowledgement that this doesn't exist as a standard advice service as yet, and police limit their involvement at a certain level that may not help at this stage.

**Decision:** *Committee agreed to approve this policy in its current state, with acknowledgement of stated aims as above, and to recommend to Board for information.*

#### **8. Any other business**

- **HCA website tender update (Principal)** – current website is not fit for purpose and doesn't meet legal requirements for accessibility. Panel have considered tenders for improved website, and interviewed three applicants. One standout bid received. Procurement: would normally have gone to market with higher tender price for this level of spend, to test value for money/ask two other applicant to tender again for a higher budget. However, risks of doing this were noted, associated with both time and resource.

The Committee agreed that going back to the other two tender applicants with chance of larger tender for comparison is the correct process for ensuring best value. A Committee Member noted that they would be interested to see website pitch.

**Action:** Principal to share pitch with Committee Member JA

- **Current Prospectus (Committee Member query)** – The Principal confirmed that FE are reverting back to prospectus in hard copy format, and agreed that that the alignment of the prospectus design with the design of the new website is sensible.

#### **9. Date and time of next meeting:** Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2024 5.00 pm

Minutes approved by: ..... Date: .....