

New College Telford

Finance and General Purposes Committee

Tuesday 8 December 2009

Minutes

Present: Mr D Hopkins (Chairman)
Dr R Hargreaves
Mr G Clark
Mr A Pickerin
Mr M Crowson

In attendance: Mrs B Tyley
Mr D O'Connor
Mr P Taylor (Clerk)

1 Appointment of Chairman

Mr Hopkins was appointed Chairman of the Finance and General Purpose Committee for the ensuing year.

2 Apologies

None. All members present.

3 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee of 22 September 2009 were confirmed.

4 Declarations of Interest

None.

5 College Planning and Development: An Update

Mr Clark explained that his report to the Committee updating them on College planning and development was oral, and that a number of significant policy documents, which had circumstances allowed would have been taken to the Student Achievement and Standards Committee, would be tabled for information to the Committee. The three areas of policy are: safeguarding, support for students and equalities. Mr Clark noted that relevant governor training in these areas was planned for the New Year.

On **safeguarding**, Mr Clark tabled an information paper (copies in minute book) on safeguarding describing the significance of the Safeguarding Policy and the related policies, procedures and systems together with the draft Safeguarding Policy itself which will be brought forward to the Corporation for consideration and approval. Mr Clark described the policy's main elements and noted its importance for the life of the College.

After a brief debate in which members supported the principles embodied in the documents, and recognised the importance of the policy, the Committee resolved to note the Safeguarding Policy and support the Principal's intention to bring it speedily to the Corporation for consideration.

On **support for students**, Mr Clark tabled a draft policy statement (copy in minute book), outlining key policies and procedures in the areas of entitlement, student services and personal tutorial. He reported that he and senior colleagues had reviewed the operation of support for students in the College, and had concluded that it was in need of extension and development. He outlined the main elements of the support to full time students provided by the tutorial programme and the other support provided. He described also the programme's extension to include students other than those who are following courses designed primarily for 16-19 year old learners. He noted in particular the challenges presented in offering support to adult part-time leavers including those following 'learndirect' programmes and those on Travel to Learn programmes. He stressed the importance of an entitlement to appropriate support to all New College students.

Members again supported the principles embedded in the document and resolved to note the Policy Statement on Support for Students and support the Principal's intention to bring it speedily to the Corporation for consideration.

On **single equalities**, Mrs Tyley tabled for information a draft Single Equalities Scheme for the College (copy in minute book). She explained that the College had a legal duty to promote equality and was required to produce race, disability and gender disability schemes. The single equalities scheme was intended to create an integrated approach consistent with the requirements of the three schemes and other related legislation, and would support and develop the College's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity. She summarised briefly the main responsibilities involved, and the key elements for staff and students, and the procedures for monitoring and reporting the outcomes.

After a brief debate in which Mr Hopkins and others commented that it was very helpful to draw the various strands together in a single policy statement, the Committee resolved to note the Single Equalities Scheme and support the Principal's intention to bring it speedily for the Corporation for consideration.

6 Accommodation Update

Mr Clark introduced the report (copy in minute book) explaining that it summarised the proposals made by the College's architectural advisors at the Committee's last meeting and considered alternative proposals and financial matters. Mr Clark summarised the alternative proposals involving the refurbishment and re-designation of some parts of B Block for refectory and student use, and the building of additional classroom space to the rear of the existing gym and hall. He tabled some sketch plans (copy in minute book) illustrating the proposals and summarised the key developments involved. Mr Clark noted that it had been intended to invite the architects to the meeting for a detailed consideration of the proposals, but pressure from other matters, including the current Ofsted inspection had prevented intended development work, including the planned consultation with staff. For this reason, Mr Clark could not bring the matter to the Corporation as a formal proposal for the Committee and subsequent consideration by the Corporation at its December meeting.

In extended debate, members of the Committee expressed disappointment that further substantive progress was not possible, but fully appreciated the difficulties arising from the exceptional workload upon the Principal and Vice Principal in the recent period. Dr Hargreaves and Mr Crowson were concerned that any potential delay would mean that a start on redevelopment could not be made in 2010. Mrs Tyley responded that a delay of some few weeks was regrettable, but that it did not necessarily follow that a target start in 2010 was unachievable. However, she noted that further work with the architects was necessary as was an opportunity for the architects to discuss the emerging proposals with the planning authority. Members commented on the potential difficulty of securing authoritative advice and guidance from officers of the authority. Turning to the detail of the emerging proposals, members commented favourably on the various elements of the scheme, in particular the use of the hall and stage as a more flexible space than both sports halls and dance studios. Mr Pickerin provided some helpful comments on the practicalities of the layout of sports and changing facilities.

Members agreed that it was of the utmost importance to ensure that any proposal should be the right one for the College since the cash reserves need to part finance the project could only be spent once. Accordingly they accepted the Principal's proposal that the Committee should meet early in the new year to take the matter forward with a substantive proposal and decision.

The Committee resolved to receive the report.

7 Draft Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 July 2009

Mrs Tyley introduced the report (copy in minute book) noting that it included details of accounting policies and notes to the accounts. It identified a historical cost (operating) surplus of £80,000 in 2008/09 and an income and expenditure deficit of £72,000 once initial depreciation of inherited assets is taken into account. She noted also that the College expects to receive an unqualified audit opinion, and that no material changes in the figures were

anticipated. Mrs Tyley paid warm tribute to the work of Mr O'Connor on the preparatory work for the report and financial statements.

Mrs Tyley summarised the trends in financial performance from 2005/06 to 2008/09 set out at table 2 in the report. She particularly noted the College's strong cash position over the period in operation, which has at year end remained above £2.1 million. Mrs Tyley and Mr O'Connor provided information on matters of detail in the reports and figures in response to questions from Mr Pickerin and Mr Hopkins. Mrs Tyley reviewed the implications for 2009/10 and subsequent years, and drew the Committee's attention to the potential variations to the approved budget for 2009/10 set out in the report, largely arising from: good student recruitment in September 2009; further work undertaken on the estates strategy; pay settlements; and income assumptions from investments.

The Committee congratulated Mrs Tyley and Mr O'Connor on the production of the report and resolved to:

- 1 commend the financial statements to the Corporation for approval; and
- 2 note the emerging financial position 2009/10.

8 Management Reports for the Period Ending 31 October 2009

Mr O'Connor introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee explaining that the reports covered the period August to October 2009, and identified a historic cost surplus of £113,000 in the period compared to the profiled budget surplus of £38,000. He summarised the main variances against profile set out in detail in the report. He noted that some contingencies remain (set out in more detail in the report), and that the overall position remains a positive one. In response to a question from Mr Hopkins on the diversity of income target in the key performances indices set out at table 3 of the report, Mrs Tyley commented that notwithstanding the October 2009 figure being below target on diversity of income, other indices were very positive and the financial health position overall remained good.

In debate, having declared a non-pecuniary interest in the matter, and making it clear that no change in banking arrangements was being proposed, Mr Crowson commented that the investment figures in section 6 of the report showing money market investments suggested that the rates of return could be improved. In response Mrs Tyley noted that it was the intention to proceed to tender of banking services in the new year, and that a new treasury management policy statement was under consideration which would cover investment policies.

The Committee resolved to receive the reports.

9 College Financial Regulations

Mrs Tyley introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee, explaining that they have provided an effective framework for financial control. However, the recent annual review of the regulations undertaken by her and Mr O'Connor had indicated the need for some minor amendments to ensure their continuing relevance.

She summarised briefly the proposed changes, identified in the regulations by bold print. The amendments are proposed for: purchasing and orders (para 9.2 and 9.11); contracts (para 10.2); credit card use (para 13.10); and expenditure (para 7.4).

The Committee resolved to approve the amendments to the regulations and commend the financial regulations as amended, for approval to the Corporation.

10 Health and Safety Report 2009/10

Mrs Tyley introduced the report (copy in minute book) for the Committee, noting that it identified progress in improving health and safety practice in the year. She referred to the details of the staff health and safety training undertaken in the New Year and the major development work undertaken in the College. She confirmed that no serious incidents had occurred and that there were no major concerns to bring to the attention of the Committee. She referred to the first aid statistics for 2008/09 set out in the report together with comparative data for 2007/08. In response to comments from members she confirmed that the figures included off-site incidents which were dealt with by New College staff.

The Committee resolved to approve the report.

11 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee will take place at 5.30pm on Tuesday 19 January 2010.