

## Colchester Institute Corporation

*Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Finance and Resources Committee  
held on 23rd March 2021*

**Present:**Richard Wainwright, *in the Chair*

Steve Blake

Alison Andreas

Kevin Prince

**In attendance:**

Elaine Hart

Director of Human Resources

Gary Horne

Executive Vice Principal: Finance and Corporate Development

Hazel Paton

Clerk to the Governors

Jill Wognum

Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Patrick Giddings and Jasmin Patel.

**2. Declaration of any conflicts of interest**

None

**3. Agreement to Starred Agenda Items**

Members were invited to indicate any items which they wished to star for discussion or question. It was agreed to remove the star from agenda item 16 – One Year Strategic Plan Action Plan – relevant goals. Items that had not been starred were noted and/or approved without discussion.

**4. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 (CIC/FR/21/2/1/), were received and approved as an accurate record.

**5. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

None, other than on the agenda.

**6. Chair's Action**

- 6.1. The Chair **APPROVED** (27.01.21) the award of a 5 year encrypted back-up solution contract to Rubrick. The Committee received and noted CIC/FR/21/2/2, Request for Approval - Rubrick Back Up Solution.

The Executive Vice Principal: Finance and Corporate Development reported that the Rubrick Back Up Solution, which provides an encrypted offline backup service, had become operational that day and was an essential tool to support systems recovery in the event of a cyber-attack.

- 6.2. The Chair **APPROVED** (03.02.21) the appointment of the Professional Team for the Salix Project. The Committee received and noted CIC/FR/21/2/3, Request for Approval - Salix Project Professional Team Appointments.

**7. HR Management Information Report – Quarter 2**

CIC/FR/21/2/4, HR Management Information – Quarter 2, was received and presented by the Director of Human Resources. It was reported that the second quarter largely coincided with the third national lockdown and as a result there were considerable variances to what would normally be expected in some areas. The Committee's attention was drawn to the headline data:

- The College's flexible workforce continues to be at 30%. It was reported that hourly paid and fixed term contracts were currently being reviewed with the aim of reducing the College's reliance on hourly paid and flexible staff.
- Core staff headcount had reduced from 640 (Quarter 1) to 633.
- The number of hourly paid staff/roles had reduced compared to same time in the previous year.
- Turnover was at 11.9% against the most recent sector average of 18.2%.
- Sickness absence was now below sector benchmarks.
- Mental ill health was the top reason for sickness absence in the quarter, mainly due to three long term sickness absence cases. Short term sickness absence had reduced significantly during the pandemic. It was reported that a lot of the absence was due to a small number of staff. The College was actively engaging with these staff members to try to get them back to work.
- The area of mandatory training with the lowest completion rate was Health and Safety. It was hoped that a new, single module, online Health and Safety training package, which had replaced an eight module online package, would help in terms of achieving higher completion rates.

Governors noted that there had been 21 leavers between Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 and asked the reasons for leaving (if known) and whether salaries were a factor. It was reported that the reasons for leaving were mainly to take up a new job, and salaries were definitely an issue for the College. The Executive Vice Principal: Finance and Corporate Development reported that the College Risk Management Committee was due to meet the following day and this was a referring theme in the departmental risk registers. As an example it was reported that two members of the ILT Department had very recently resigned; this was a considerable risk for the College as they were in the same sub-team.

Governors questioned the total number of days affected by Covid-19 during the last year. It was confirmed that in a lot of cases staff were still working from home. The College has not had a lot of Covid-related sickness and the number of reported cases of self-isolation is down. The data had been collected to fulfil a reporting requirement to the DfE (Department for Education).

Governors questioned an apparent anomaly in the sickness absence days in Quarter 4, which was significantly lower than in other quarters, and were advised that Quarter 4 includes the main summer vacation period.

Noting that the College was performing well against benchmarks, Governors questioned whether the benchmarks were current or pre-pandemic. It was reported that the benchmarks related to 2018/19 and acknowledged that other colleges are likely to be seeing similar changes. The challenge will be maintaining low sickness absence rates going forward. A proposal for more flexible working was due to be considered the following week.

## 8. **HR Operational Plan**

CIC/FR/21/2/5, HR Key Priorities – Update on Progress, was received and presented by the Director of Human Resources. It was reported that:

- The upgrade of Select HR in late December had created a number of problems, impacting the timescales for developmental projects.
- The HR Team were now back providing a skeleton service on site with the remainder working effectively from home
- The Learning and Development role, which had been removed in 2020 following the resignation of the post holder, would hopefully shortly be reinstated. The College Executive had considered a job description for the role earlier that day.
- There continued to be very high levels of compliance in respect of Safeguarding.
- The College used 64% of its Apprenticeship Levy in the period August 2017 to February 2021.
- There were currently 11 live vacancies with five in hard to fill roles. The HR Team will be working with relevant managers to find creative solutions to fill these roles.

- Work would start shortly on developing and implementing a flexible/agile working policy.
- An action plan has been produced to meet the AoC Mental Health Charter.

#### 9. **Wellbeing Report**

CIC/FR/21/1/6, Wellbeing Report, was received and presented by the Director of Human Resources. It was reported that:

- The Employee Assistance Programme continues to be available and a number of staff have taken up the opportunity for counselling services.
- The Wellbeing Committee continues to meet monthly.
- An all staff survey was carried out in October 2020, followed by a follow-up survey focussing on wellbeing. Seven themes were identified from the follow-up survey (147 responses), and actions were being taken forward.
- The College would like to recruit more Workplace Health Champions
- A sub-committee has been established to take forward the Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter action plan. Actions include mental health and wellbeing training, which will be part of the remit of the new Learning and Development role.
- The College was working towards Working Well Accreditation at Level 3.
- The HR Team continue to provide Covid-19 support for staff and managers.

Governors questioned whether the 147 responses to the staff survey represented a good response rate. It was reported that this was a follow up survey, inviting those people who had raised concerns in the all-staff survey to provide more information. It had taken the form of 'you have said xx, what three things would make a difference?', and only a sub-section of staff had been expected to respond. Governors asked for a flavour of the issues raised and proposed actions. It was reported that the fortnightly staff briefing issued on 12<sup>th</sup> March had included feedback on the most frequently raised suggestions. It was **AGREED** to include this feedback in these minutes for the information of all Governors (appended).

In response to a question it was confirmed that, at the appropriate time, a further mental health and wellbeing survey would be run to measure distance travelled.

#### 10. **Gender Pay Gap**

CIC/FR/21/2/7, Gender Pay Gap Report 2020, was received and presented by the Director of Human Resources. It was noted that the College is required to publish its gender pay gap report by 6<sup>th</sup> April each year but because of the pandemic, did not have to do a report last year, and this year the publication date had been extended to October 2021. The College had uploaded its report for 2020 to the Government Portal prior to the announcement of the extended publication date

Governors noted that Colchester Institute has a mean gender pay gap of 8.65% and a median gender pay gap of 25.48%. The main reasons for the gender pay gap were explained:

- women historically take part time roles, which are lower paid;
- where skills supplements are paid because of shortages in high-demand areas. these are largely in male dominated areas such as plumbing and electrical.

Governors noted that actions included building on the good practice that had resulted from the pandemic regarding flexible/agile working and questioned to what extent flexible working would have a positive impact on reducing the gender pay gap. It was reported that more flexible working practices may have a limited impact. Learning Support Practitioners (over 100) are predominantly female, and much of their work can only be done in person. The College was currently looking at the hourly paid roles; if there are fewer people in those roles on more substantial contracts it will reduce the median pay gap.

Governors asked how the College gets assurance that there is not a pay gap for people doing similar roles. It was reported that the average pay for male teachers is higher than that of female teachers because the College has to apply a skills supplement to recruit into certain subject areas, such as Construction Trades, which are predominantly male. Where a skills supplement is offered, it is applied equally to female staff.

Governors asked about the College's strategy in respect of flexible working and were advised that there is a willingness to embrace at a minimum far higher levels of flexible working, and move towards agile working. The Executive felt that the time was right for a step change. Staff moving out of their current office accommodation as part of the building refurbishment programme, and the recent investment in upgrading the IT infrastructure, provides an opportunity to be more radical with working practices going forward. **Action: the College Executive will report further at the next meeting.**

11. **Staff Equality Report**

CIC/FR/21/2/8, Staff Equality Report, was received and presented by the Director of Human Resources. It was reported that the workforce was predominantly female (60%) and the ethnic profile reflected the local population as reported in the 2011 census. The College's data on disability was incomplete. Of the 676 staff who had made an entry, 8% had reported a disability. The College has an ageing workforce, with 32% in 50-59 age group. Actions include improving the quality of the data using updates to Select HR data collection categories and asking staff to review and update their equality data.

Governors asked about the potential impact as staff in the largest age group retire over the next ten years. It was reported that the planned changes to working practices discussed earlier in the meeting might make it easier to attract younger people with more current skills. It was reported that in HE, more younger staff were being recruited to do a role for part of their time while building up a separate career outside the College. The College has struggled to attract younger people to areas such as electrical and welding because they do not see the opportunities to advance in the same way as in industry.

12. **Policy Review - Annual and Special Leave Policy**

CIC/FR/21/2/9, Annual and Special Leave Policy, was received and considered. The policy replaces the previous Annual Leave Policy and puts in place a new Special Leave Policy. The Director of Human Resources highlighted the main changes and new sections. Many of the changes were to bring the policy in line with statutory requirements.

Governors questioned the number of additional annual leave days that could be purchased (maximum of ten working days per annual leave year). It was confirmed that requests to purchase additional annual leave could be refused for operational reasons.

Clarification was sought on the Christmas Closure Period. It was confirmed that staff are not required to take annual leave when the College is closed in the interests of efficiency during the Christmas/New Year period, and are paid during this period.

Governors asked about the leave entitlement for staff who are on furlough. It was reported that annual leave continues to accrue and staff are told to take leave during furlough.

The Committee **AGREED to recommend the Annual and Special Leave Policy to the Board for approval.**

13. **Essex Pension Fund**

CIC/FR/21/2/10, Essex Pension Fund – Interim follow up to meeting discussion, was received and noted.

14. **Management Report and Accounts February 2021**

CIC/21/2/11, Management Report and Accounts February 2021 [Period 7], was received and presented by the Executive Vice Principal: Finance and Corporate Development. It was reported that since the Period 7 report had been published, the ESFA had announced that the Adult Education Budget (AEB) funding threshold had been reduced from 97% to 90%. The 90% threshold is higher than expected, and is unlikely to be achieved by the majority of colleges, given the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The AoC reported the sector average was predicted to be 80%. Unless there is a further reduction in the threshold level as there was last year, it may be necessary to deteriorate the full year forecast by over £300k. This will most likely impact on the Financial Health grade, which could move from Good to Requires Improvement. The College is looking at opportunities to improve the financial outturn position following the easing of lockdown through the recommencement of commercial activities and full cost provision. Governors asked if there were any cost reductions associated with the reduced AEB income. It was reported that most of the costs are staff related and it is difficult to achieve savings on the salary line this late in the financial year. It is possible that some staff could be furloughed but as these staff are engaged in work that was activity that was expected to be paid for by guaranteed funding this was really outside the scope of the Job Retention Scheme. Arising from the discussion it was reported that given the level of outcry in the sector, there may be a further announcement, possibly after Easter. The Principal reported that she was taking the lead on a letter to the ESFA on behalf of most of the Essex colleges, and the AoC were advising members to contact their local MP's on this issue which had already happened locally

It was reported that unlike schools, that had been funded for the additional costs associated with Covid, colleges had not been paid for any of these extra costs.

It was noted that cash in the bank at the end of March (a traditional cash pinch point) was good compared to previous years, partly due to the receipt of funding for capital projects.

Governors noted that the staff costs as a percentage of income was now at 69.49% and asked how this compared to sector benchmarks. It was reported that FE Commissioner uses a benchmark of 65% and the average for colleges in the previous year was 67%. The College will continue to push for improvement wherever possible through transformational change to reduce staff costs through the digitisation of tasks currently carried out manually.

15. **Principal's Report March 2021**

The Principal presented her written report (CIC/FR/21/2/12). The Committee noted that the FE Commissioner had recently announced a revised set of financial benchmarks, designed to assist in governor and senior leadership discussions when monitoring the financial health of the College. Governors noted in the Period 7 Management Report that the College meets four of the six revised benchmarks, the two not currently met being pay cost as a percentage of income and adjusted current ratio.

16. **One Year Strategic Plan Action Plan – relevant goals**

The Committee received and noted CIC/FR/21/2/13, Strategic Plan – One Year Action Plans.

17. **Property Issues**

The Executive Vice Principal: Finance and Corporate Development updated the Committee on the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (Salix) project. It was reported that there had been positive progress following earlier concerns that the project was at risk because of the scale of the asbestos in the building. On the recommendation of the Health and Safety Executive, who had carried out a spot check on a sub-contractor, the College had engaged a consultant member of the Faculty of Asbestos Assessment and Management (FAAM) and the project was now moving forward with an approved methodology for removing windows across the two blocks which was more cost effective than the methodology originally suggested. The project start date is dependent on the delivery of the scaffolding, which will take at least five to six weeks. The College should achieve £200k savings on the windows compared to the original cost plan, which will offset additional VAT costs. The work

was being programmed to minimise disruption to teaching activity. With many students needing to work through the summer because of the disruption to learning as a result of the lockdown there will be a very short period during which the windows in some areas can be taken out and replaced.

**18. Review of Meeting**

After discussion it was AGREED:

- (i) the Chair's written report to the next Board meeting would include:
  - Flexible working – impact of working practices on the gender pay gap; staff expectations and opportunities to attract new staff
  - The number of staff leaving due to pay (21 staff left in the last quarter)
  - Mental health and wellbeing services
  - AEB funding threshold
- (ii) The update on the Lennartz VAT would be recorded as a Part II confidential item.
- (iii) It had been a very effective meeting.
- (iv) The papers presented to the meeting, and the executive summaries, had been appropriate.

**19. Date of next Meeting**

Wednesday, 14th July 2021 at 4.30pm

**20. Any Other Urgent Business**

**20.1. CIE Ltd**

The Executive Vice Principal: Finance and Corporate Development reported that it was his intention to invite CIE Board members to an extraordinary meeting in April to consider the current performance of the subsidiary company and issues in respect of going concern. If the CIE Board decides to transfer the operation back to the College, the decision will be referred to the Colchester Institute Corporation Board for final ratification ahead of what could be the closure of the company at year end. It was noted that this had been discussed at the last meeting of the CIE Board (December 2020).

**20.2. FE Capital Transformation Fund Stage 1 Bid**

It was confirmed that the College's application for FE Capital Transformation Fund funding had been submitted the previous day, the revised deadline for applications. A response should be received in May 2021.

Wellbeing Follow up Survey

5.1 Separately, members of the Wellbeing Committee, and our TU reps, have analysed your responses to the **Wellbeing Follow Up Survey** sent out just before Christmas. The chart below shows some of the most frequently raised suggestions as to how the College could better support staff wellbeing and an initial response as to how these are being, or will be addressed.

Issues raised	College Response
Staff are enjoying the flexibility of working from home and would like to continue this long term as it is felt that this style of working has not had a negative impact on College processes but actually improved wellbeing and mental health.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are committed to more agile ways of working going forward, building on the good practice we have established during this pandemic emergency. We are therefore establishing a steering group, chaired by the Director of Human Resources which will look at all aspects of agile and remote working and establish policies and protocols as to how this can be taken forward at Colchester Institute, with the appropriate investment in and adaptations to physical and technical resources.</li> </ul>
More support for Working remotely from home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are sourcing an online training /awareness package to support staff in their remote working.</li> </ul>
More wellbeing activities supported by the College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are committed to a Wellbeing Day this summer, although the format and content are not yet finalised, we hope that this will take place on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2021.</li> <li>• We have shared fitness and yoga resources and links to sources of assistance with mental health and wellbeing and will continue to do this.</li> <li>• We will continue to seek practical ways to support staff with their physical and mental wellbeing, and would welcome more volunteer Wellbeing Champions. The more people who are able to support such activities, the more we can provide</li> <li>• We have signed up to the AoC Mental Health Charter (see above).</li> </ul>
Staff would like to be able to take Lunch Breaks and be encouraged to do so	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to understand more about what is preventing colleagues from taking lunch breaks.</li> <li>• We will encourage a meeting free hour between 1 pm and 2pm and teaching timetables will normally permit a break for teaching staff either at 12.00 or at 1.00.</li> </ul>
Staff feel overwhelmed by emails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We want to look at ways to reduce email overload</li> <li>• When we introduce Microsoft Teams later in the year, the instant messaging function will replace the need for a number of quick communications that we currently use email for.</li> <li>• In the meantime, there are some <a href="#">email protocols</a> on this link, aimed at reducing the volume of emails circulating and assisting colleagues to deal with email overload.</li> </ul>

<p>Some staff feel that there is a lack of regular communication with their manager.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fortnightly Briefings are designed to keep staff up to date with developments, particularly at times of uncertainty and change. These will continue.</li> <li>• It is an expectation of all managers that they hold team meetings, one to ones and Check-Ins with their staff.</li> <li>• Managers will be reminded of the importance of these and will be asked about their meetings schedules by senior management.</li> </ul>
<p>Paper timesheets for staff on hourly paid contracts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A project to set up on-line timesheets for hourly paid staff via Select HR is underway and will be rolled out later this year.</li> </ul>
<p>There is a concern about where to find drinking water on campus now that water coolers have been removed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list was provided in the Fortnightly Briefing issued on 11<sup>th</sup> September. Please click <a href="#">here</a> and scroll to item 7.</li> </ul>
<p>Help with on-line teaching, google classrooms etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training has been provided since March 2020 and there was a particular focus on this at the recent Learning and Teaching Development Day.</li> <li>• Anyone requiring assistance with online teaching, is invited to email <a href="#">Caroline Fritz</a> in the first instance.</li> </ul>