

**PETER SYMONDS COLLEGE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GOVERNORS**

**HELD ON MONDAY 14 OCTOBER 2024 at 3.00 PM**

**Present:**

Lynne Evans (Chair)	Sara Russell (Principal)
Syamantak Bhattacharya (online)	Onkar Chiroma
Alan Sydney (online)	John White
David Williams	Michael Wesley
Joanna Townsend	Norman Levy
Lucy Walsh Waring	Dave Stickland
Hugh Stafford-Smith	Briannah Butler
Christopher Airiemiokhale	

**In Attendance:**

Nick Allen	(Vice Principal)
Lucy Edevane	(Deputy Principal W&P)
Stephen Cowling	(Deputy Principal SS&S)
Irfan Khan	(Finance Director)
Carolyn Godrich	(Personnel Director to the end of item 4 only)
Vicky Owen	(Clerk)

Item		Action
1.	<b>Apologies</b> – Scott Stemp, Caroline Rand	
2.	<b>Minutes of the meeting dated 8 July 2024</b> The open minutes were accepted as a correct record. Confidential minutes were dealt with under item 17.	
3.	<b>Matters arising</b>	
3.1	<b>Point 7.2</b> The amendment was made to the Summary report of the EGR and it has been published. Completed.	
3.2	<b>Point 7.3</b> The Search Committee’s recommendations arising from the EGR are on the agenda at item 9. Completed.	
4.	<b>Policies: Admissions Policy; Staff Code of Conduct; Recruitment Procedures</b> <i>Papers circulated: Admissions Policy draft direct to Board; Code of Conduct Employees draft 24; Recruitment Procedures draft 24</i>	
4.1	Unusually, these drafts have come directly to the Board rather than via committees, due to time constraints.	
4.2	<b>Code of Conduct</b> – CG summarised the changes. The Board commented that they had previously talked about the fact that, while students should normally talk to their tutor about concerns, there needs to be the opportunity for them to approach someone else if they prefer. They sought assurance that nothing in the Code prevents that and CG was able to give that.	
4.2.1	Referring to section 4 ‘Conviction of a relevant offence’, the Board asked for a definition of such. CG explained that the College can decide depending on	

	<p>the nature and level of an offence, following guidance. She will put a note to that effect and also cross refer to the College’s Policy on the Recruitment of Ex-Offenders.</p>	
4.2.2	<p>The Board commented that there is no explicit reference to safeguarding and asked whether this is because it is clearly embedded in the document. CG said that it is but agreed to make a specific reference.</p>	
4.3	<p><b>Recruitment Procedures</b> – CG said that this is quite a ‘light touch’ review. The Board commented that, in some sectors, interview candidates are given sight of interview questions shortly before their interview to assist them in case they find it hard to process information and asked whether the College has considered this. CG said it could be done and SMT agreed, noting that assessment needs to be appropriate to the requirements of the job.</p>	
4.3.1	<p>The Board also asked what adjustments are made to assist people with disabilities attending for interview. SMT replied that previous adjustments have included the provision of an interpreter and someone bringing an assistance dog.</p>	
4.4	<p>SMT said that drafts of the above documents, as staff policies, have been discussed with the JNCC (the staff negotiating committee).</p>	
4.5	<p><b>Admissions Policy</b> – SC drew the Board’s attention to the small clarification on the first page which is a change since the Policy was approved by them in the summer.</p>	
4.6	<p><b>Resolved: the Board approved 1) the Code of Conduct Employees as per the copy circulated subject to the amendments above; 2) the Recruitment Procedures as per the copy circulated; 3) the Admissions Policy as per the copy circulated. All in favour.</b></p> <p>(CG left the meeting.)</p>	
5.	<p><b>Presentation from Nick Allen on headline results for 2023/24</b> Due to the nature of this discussion, it is recorded as a separate confidential minute.</p>	
6.	<p><b>Principal’s matters</b> <i>Paper circulated: Principal’s Matters September 2024 (Updated since P&amp;R at sections 3 and 4)</i></p>	
6.1	<p>SR explained that, since she updated the document, she has received a call saying that Ofsted will conduct a full inspection next week. This is not unexpected and is welcome as there is much to celebrate in the College. Staff are aware, but it has not yet been announced to students. SR will lead a whole staff briefing tomorrow. SMT members have been talking to Ofsted today and expect to agree areas for ‘deep dives’ shortly. Regarding governor involvement, it is expected that inspectors will want to talk to the Chair and a few others, with a focus on Leadership &amp; Management and on the skills agenda. More information will follow.</p>	

<p><b>6.2</b></p> <p><b>6.3</b></p> <p><b>6.4</b></p> <p><b>6.5</b></p>	<p>SR talked through the highlights of the document including the increase in enrolment numbers which had been carefully managed so as not to exceed a number which would adversely impact the student experience.</p> <p>She explained the implications of the government’s decision to fund a pay increase for teachers in schools and academies but not for sixth form colleges in the FE sector. This is very problematic as colleges of both sorts are members of the same national negotiating body. SR said that, in her view, this is the first time that the College has been disadvantaged by not being an academy. The pay negotiations (for the September 2024 pay review) are likely to be protracted.</p> <p><b>Questions from the Board</b></p> <p>The Board asked whether, if the government’s funding decision does not change, SMT will recommend that the College makes up the shortfall from its own funds. SR said that, among the colleges covered by the collective bargaining agreement, there is a great range in what they feel they can afford without government funding. It is SMT’s view that it is important to keep in line with the settlement reached in the collective of which we are a member. If there were any question of reviewing that stance, it would be brought to the Board as it could have significant implications.</p> <p>The Chair reported that she and SR had discussed the importance of revisiting the option of academisation from time to time. SR said that it will be among agenda items for a SMT ‘away day’ and it was agreed that it should be on the agenda for the February 2025 Board meeting.</p>	
<p><b>7.</b></p> <p><b>7.1</b></p> <p><b>7.1.1</b></p> <p><b>7.2</b></p> <p><b>7.2.1</b></p>	<p><b>Report from the Policy &amp; Resources Committee</b>  <i>Papers circulated: P &amp; R Minutes draft 23 09 24; Finance Paper; HSCP Safeguarding Audit 2024; Review of 2023 HSCP Safeguarding Action Plan;</i></p> <p><b>Finance</b></p> <p>IK said that the Report provides and update on the year-end position 2023/24. The overall position is a surplus in accordance with the forecast. Boarding and Catering are good and the cash position is strong. IK is recommending moving some money from the current account.</p> <p>IK said that he will be providing an update on the AHED Recovery Plan to future meetings, but the current indications are positive. The plans for the introduction of a new Finance system will start soon.</p> <p><b>Estates</b></p> <p>Regarding the construction of the new Music Block, there is very good news in that the College is now able to claim 100% of the grant rather than 74%. All is going to plan and the big invoices will be coming in soon.</p> <p>Fire alarm systems across the Owens Road site were upgraded over the summer and AHED will be done at October half term.</p>	

<p><b>7.2.2</b></p> <p><b>7.2.3</b></p> <p><b>7.3</b></p> <p><b>7.4</b></p>	<p>There is another Salix bid round in December 2024 and the College will be preparing a new bid.</p> <p>The Board noted that pianos will need to be moved when the Music building is complete and asked if provision has been made for the cost of insurance for the move. IK confirmed that it has.</p> <p>JT summarised the remaining business of the Committee which included the HSCP Audit Improvement Plan and new Audit as well as the report of the committee which oversees the Robert Hirst Design Grant which is a pleasure to receive.</p> <p><b>Resolved: the Board approved the transfer of £1.5m to Lloyds 95 days' notice account. All in favour.</b></p>	
<p><b>8.</b></p> <p><b>8.1</b></p> <p><b>8.2</b></p> <p><b>8.3</b></p> <p><b>8.4</b></p> <p><b>8.5</b></p>	<p><b>Report from the Audit Committee</b>  <i>Papers circulated: Audit minutes draft 30 09 24; Confidential Audit Mins draft 30 09 24; Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire 2023 243; Data Protection Policy draft 24; Health &amp; Safety Policy draft 24; Careers Privacy Notice NEW draft 24</i></p> <p>MW summarised key points from the Committee: the Questionnaire is much the same as before with some necessary updates; the Annual Data Protection Report summarised activity in this area and SC had reminded the Committee that internal auditors had completed a review of GDPR arrangements, with a 'substantial assurance' outcome; there were no fraud and whistleblowing incidents to report; the Committee approved a draft Annual Programme of Work for its business.</p> <p>The Committee discussed the External Governance Reviewer's recommendation re training of the Audit Committee as requested by the Search Committee, to identify their areas of need and proposals to address them. See item 9.</p> <p><b>Careers Privacy Notice</b> – the Board noted an error re a contact which needs to be changed, suggested that it should link to the Data Protection Policy and vice versa and also recommended that it cover retention periods. SC will amend. The Board also asked why there is a reference to CCTV and SC replied that this is because visitors e.g. Careers speakers, are likely to be captured on CCTV.</p> <p><b>Data Protection Policy</b> – the Board noted a repetition of 'writing' in section 9.1 and updates to reflect the changes in the Privacy Notice.</p> <p><b>Resolved: the Board approved</b>  <b>1) the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire as circulated and for SR as Accounting Officer and the Chair of Governors to sign;</b>  <b>2) the Health &amp; Safety Policy as per the copy circulated;</b>  <b>3) the Data Protection Policy subject to the changes discussed above;</b>  <b>4) the Careers Privacy Notice subject to the changes discussed above.</b></p>	

	<p><b>5) the appointment of a panel of the Audit Committee (expected to comprise MW, DS, HSS) with IK and NA (all subject to availability) to make a recommendation for the appointment of internal auditors in spring 2025 to commence with the audit of 2025/26 onwards. All in favour.</b></p>	
9.	<p><b>Report from the Search &amp; Governance Committee</b>  <i>Papers circulated: Search mins draft Sept 24; Confidential pen portraits of candidates for Board 141024; Conflict of Interest Policy Governors NEW draft 24; EGR Action Plan draft following Search &amp; Audit Oct 24</i></p>	
9.1	<p><b>External Governance Review (EGR) Action Plan</b> – JT summarised the recommendations from the EGR and the Committee’s proposal in response to each. It is the Board’s report and for them to determine. She expanded on some points, for instance that the Committee is concerned that, if executive summaries are provided for each report (item 5) then Board members may not read the whole report. This would, in the Committee’s view, be a point of risk as the Board comprises people with a wide range of expertise who currently engage in rich debate. Nothing should be done that might undermine that.</p>	
9.2	<p><b>Governor Recruitment</b> – the Board noted that some candidates are alumni and commented that this is unusual, asking why it might be the case. The Clerk said that advertising had been done locally, compared with the last major recruitment round which had been led by Peridot on a regional basis. She intends to ask successful candidates where they saw the opportunity when they come for induction. SR commented that people may be motivated to ‘give back’ if they have had a good experience. The Board considered whether having several alumni could be negative but concluded that it would not be; they bring a wide range of skills and other experience.</p>	
9.3	<p><b>Reappointment of existing governors</b> – The Committee was very pleased to recommend the reappointment of existing governors. JT explained that, regrettably, OC will soon have to step back from the Board but he has agreed to continue in the role of Safeguarding Link Governor pending an appointment being made.</p>	
9.4	<p><b>Skills Audit and FE workforce survey</b> – the Clerk will send both of these out very soon.</p>	
9.5	<p><b>Artsmark Award</b> – NA summarised how the award works and progress to date.</p>	
9.6	<p><b>Resolved: the Board approved</b>  <b>1) the Action Plan arising from the External Governance Review 2024 as recommended by the Search Committee (with Audit Committee for item 8) as per the copy circulated;</b>  <b>2) the Conflict of Interest Policy Governors as per the draft circulated;</b>  <b>3) the appointment of the following as governors for terms of three years unless stated otherwise due to transition arrangements: Alan Sydney for a third term of two years commencing 9 October 24 following nomination</b></p>	

	<p>by the trustees; Scott Stemp for a second term commencing 5 October 2024 following nomination by the trustees; Syamantak Bhattacharya for a second term commencing 5 October 2024; John White for a second term commencing 6 December 2024; Onkar Chiroma for a second term commencing 6 December 2024;</p> <p>4) the appointment of RP, KM, OH and AB as independent governors to be effective from dates to be agreed;</p> <p>5) the appointment of new governors to committees and roles as follows: OH to Audit and be the Careers Link Governor; KM to join Personnel and be the EDI Link Governor; AB to join C&amp;QA and be the Boarding Link Governor. All in favour.</p>	
10.	<p><b>Risk Management</b></p> <p>NA confirmed that the RMG has not met since the last Board so there is nothing to report. Papers remain available to governors in the Board folder of the shared online area. The Board asked when the RMG is meeting and NA said it is in November.</p>	
11.	<p><b>Student Update to include statement of transactions</b></p> <p><i>Paper circulated: Student Union Statement of Transactions 23-24</i></p>	
11.1	<p>BB and CA reported on a recent ‘get to know us’ event for students to meet members of the Students’ Union. SU leaders have also gone into L6 lectures. It is currently Black History Month and they have been organising displays. Remembrance events are also being planned. The recent Student Parliament was well attended, with new L6 students offering new ideas and showing good engagement; some new students have joined the Parliament. Meanwhile preparation continues on UCAS applications.</p>	
11.2	<p>The Board asked what students are planning for Remembrance and they replied that they will take part in the College ceremony and may have other things with ‘poppy’ or ‘wear red’ themes.</p>	
11.3	<p>Referring to the Student Parliament, the Board asked if the SU makes any visits to the UK parliament. BB and CA were not aware of such and a Board member offered to help advise them on the application process if they are interested. SR said that this is something that our new MP may also be able to help with and confirmed that expenses would be paid. She also encouraged them to consider going to the NUS Conference.</p>	
11.4	<p>The Clerk said that the Board might be interested to know that both BB and CA have said that they would like to take part in the new Unloc ‘Changemaker’ programme which sounds as if it could offer a good opportunity for personal development as well as benefit to the Board. SR said that they have also attended SMT to discuss their work.</p>	

11.5	The Board thanked the students for their update.	
12.	<p><b>Health &amp; Safety (standing item)</b></p> <p>IK said that there is nothing new to report. There have been no RIDDOR reportable incidents.</p>	
13.	<p><b>Confirmation of written resolution</b></p> <p><i>Paper circulated: Written Resolution Safeguarding Policy Sept 24 prepared by the Clerk; Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy</i></p> <p>The Board approved the Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Policy with effect from 2 September 2024.</p> <p>(Staff and Student Governors left the meeting. Staff have already received the Safeguarding and DP training and students are not required to do so.)</p>	
14.	<p><b>Annual Safeguarding Update to include Prevent</b></p> <p><i>Paper shared after the meeting: Governors' Annual Safeguarding Update 2024; see also HSCP papers under item 7.</i></p> <p><b>14.1</b> LKE reminded the Board of governors' responsibilities and the training that they must undertake. She set this in the context of the legislation and went on to outline the individual responsibilities which all staff have. She highlighted some particular areas: suicide concerns and allegations against staff including low level concerns. She explained the role of the LADO and the vital importance of reporting what might appear to be minor concerns because they might be part of a pattern which has been flagged by other settings.</p> <p><b>14.2</b> LKE spent some time on the topic of IT monitoring and filtering before summarising the changes to KCSIE in September 2024 and reminding the Board about the consultation around lesbian, gay, bisexual and gender questioning children earlier in the year.</p> <p><b>14.3</b> She then moved to discuss the increased emphasis on Prevent, summarising the assurance that is provided to governors on this area, including how the College works with other specialists to respond to local threats.</p> <p><b>14.4</b> Finally, LKE showed the Board information about the current Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) team and how to report an immediate concern, before providing useful links to further information.</p> <p><b>14.5</b> <b>Questions from the Board</b></p> <p>Given the increase in student numbers and the greater complexity of need, the Board asked whether LKE believes that there is sufficient resource in the</p>	

<p><b>14.6</b></p>	<p>College to respond to safeguarding and Prevent issues. LKE said that she is happy that there is. A new DSL (LW) has been in place for a year and is doing a great job. There has also been an additional appointment of an Associate Director of Support who works at the level between the Directors of Curriculum &amp; Support and the Senior Tutors with a pastoral focus. He is doing a lot of IT monitoring follow up, is taking on some of the existing cases and is training as an additional DSL.</p> <p>This training was shared after the meeting with governors who were not in attendance. (DW left the meeting.)</p>	
<p><b>15.</b></p> <p><b>15.1</b></p> <p><b>15.2</b></p> <p><b>15.3</b></p> <p><b>15.4</b></p> <p><b>15.5</b></p> <p><b>15.5</b></p> <p><b>15.6</b></p>	<p><b>Data Protection Update</b> <i>Paper shared after the meeting: Data Protection at Peter Symonds</i></p> <p>SC introduced his update by explaining that this is broadly the training which is given to staff and he wishes to both provide reassurance to the Board that employees receive appropriate input on the subject and also ensure that governors are themselves aware of the issues.</p> <p>There were no ICO reportable incidents last year but there were, as is inevitable, some mistakes made and SC stressed the importance of a ‘no blame’ culture so that staff report. He outlined what DP means for the College and for individuals, with examples of how data breaches can occur and steps to avoid them.</p> <p>Regarding governors in particular, SC acknowledged that many use their own devices for College business and that it is important to use the online storage to access documents and not to save them on their own machines. It is good practice where possible to send a link to a document saved online rather than attach it to an email in case the email is wrongly addressed.</p> <p>SC went on to brief governors about freedom of information requests, subject access requests and the potential benefits and risks of AI.</p> <p><b>Questions from the Board</b></p> <p>The Board asked whether the College can refuse to comply with a FoI request. SC said that they can for a range of reasons and told them about one occasion in the past year when that had been done.</p> <p>A Board member commented that there has been publicity about people making FoI requests maliciously to slow down an organisation. SC was interested to hear about that. He does not think it has happened to date, but it is helpful to be alert to the potential.</p> <p>Video training was shared after the meeting with governors who were not in attendance.</p>	

<p><b>16.</b></p> <p><b>16.1</b></p> <p><b>16.2</b></p> <p><b>16.3</b></p> <p><b>16.4</b></p>	<p><b>Any other business</b></p> <p>The Clerk drew the Board’s attention to the invitation to all Board members to attend for the first item of the Audit Committee meeting at 3 pm on Monday 18 November 2024 and to the various other events listed on the agenda. Please contact the Clerk if you are able to attend the events as some are ticketed and others require seats to be set aside.</p> <p>She also asked governors to let her know if they can do Oxbridge interviews. These are held online. A crib sheet is provided and the Oxbridge Co-ordinator will happily talk to volunteers beforehand should they want that.</p> <p><b>Alertus app</b> – a Board member asked whether it is right to say that the Alertus app is an additional level of security along with all the current protocols for Prevent. LKE explained to the Board that it is and that the College has for some time been able to communicate ‘all staff’ messages through fixed screens in case of an incident but has now invested in an app which staff and students are encouraged to download. This means that messages can be sent to people in areas such as social spaces, sports pitches and indeed to those who are about to come onto the site.</p> <p>The lockdown drill is referenced in the Prevent Risk Register and is an important element in the College’s Prevent strategy, with the app playing a part in that. The Board agreed that it would be good to give Governors the option to download the app onto their devices. The Clerk will organise.</p> <p>A member of the Audit Committee noted that their Committee had asked for a conversation about meeting in person rather than online from time to time but had been told that Search would like to discuss it again. The Chair confirmed that this is the case and that it will go back to the next meeting of the Search Committee.</p>	<p><b>Clerk</b></p>
<p><b>17.</b></p>	<p><b>Confidential minutes of the Board meeting on 8 July 2024</b></p> <p>This is recorded as a separate confidential minute.</p>	
<p><b>18.</b></p>	<p><b>Private business</b></p> <p>The Chair drew the Board’s attention to the new practice as outlined on the agenda which asks members to notify the Chair or Clerk in advance if they wish to raise private business. This means that governors and SMT can leave together. There was no private business.</p>	
<p><b>19.</b></p>	<p><b>Date of next meeting</b> – Monday 9 December 2024 at 3 pm There being no other business the meeting ended at 6.20 pm</p>	