

CORPORATION OF KIDDERMINSTER COLLEGE

Minutes of the Governors/SMT Strategic Planning Day held on Thursday 25th February 2010 at 13.30 hours

Present

Derek Arnold
Annie Conway
Mick Cooper
David Cory
Paul Crowley
Adrian Davis
Andy Dobson
Sonia Farnaby
Mark Garnier
Jonathan Grice
Stella Hammond
Derek Harrison
Tim Mason
Anna Place
Kevin Sant
Karen Stevens
Adrian Ward
Carol Warren

In Attendance Angharad Hale, Clerk to the Corporation

Apologies Harry Grove
Chris Sheeran

Group 1 – Funding & Finance Chair's Feedback

The group agreed 3 underlying parameters before considering the questions outlined for discussion. Firstly, the funding settlement for 2010/11 has given the College a window of opportunity to sustain current activities and plan for on-going cuts in funding in future years. Secondly, the College has £2.6 million in the bank. Thirdly, the group felt that the discussion time is too short to fully cover the topic but are willing to reconvene.

Q.1 Are there opportunities to access new sources / maximise existing income?

BDU needs to determine its strategic direction. Either maximise the potential for income nationally and plough the profit back into courses that benefit the local area or deliver courses that are primarily for residents of the Wyre Forest.

ICT should consider the same questions and determine whether they are to be profit motivated for the benefit of other departments.

The group proposed carrying out a profit analysis for each department within the College and using this information to make decisions about which courses are profitable. It was confirmed that any decisions made about courses would not be solely based on profitability.

Q.2 Should the College continue to recruit Full Time students above agreed funding target? What are the implications of placing limits on student numbers?

It was noted that this links closely to accommodation issues and that numbers can't be increased until it has been determined how profitable a course is, as proposed under Q.1.

It was agreed that risks taken in over recruiting in previous years has paid off but we are now entering a more risky environment.

Q.3 What areas of College expenditure could we target to produce cost efficiencies?

4 areas were identified for consideration.

Should evening classes be consolidated down to 3 instead of 4 evenings?
A review of salary bandings could be carried out for all staff contracts.
Sickness and absence statistics are not particularly good.
A voluntary redundancy programme could be considered once the less profitable areas have been identified (as proposed under Q.1)

Q.4 What are the key 'threats' to producing balance budgets?

College income is 80% dependant on LSC funding. Should we strategically decide this is a weakness and if so how could we reduce the dependency? If we seek to derive more income from the private sector there are no obvious large local employers.

The pensions deficit is £2.4 million and we need to continue to seek reassurances through the auditors.

There is a potential redevelopment of the 5 high schools in the Wyre Forest.

Group 2 - Accommodation Chair's Feedback

Current accommodation has high utilisation, 64-67% compared to the national average of 42%. It was noted that this also makes us cost effective. It was suggested that we carry out (or look at existing) room surveys to ensure the best use of space is being made.

There needs to be a balance between decisions made re recruitment, as discussed by group 1, and any decisions re expanding the accommodation.

The group considered what we need additional space for and suggested the following ;

- Space for additional income
- Student experience
- New markets
- Outside courses
- Staff room / facilities
- Health & Safety issues (query whether current accommodation meets Health & Safety laws / enables us to be a good employer)

The group then worked on an action plan for taking things forward in 2 parts.

A) Housekeeping and making best use of current accommodation

It was suggested that the College could ensure current space is being used to its full potential by looking at the versatility of rooms (eg use of fold away room dividers in bigger rooms), desk space, re configuring furniture, good housekeeping and the possibility of paperless offices. This would require time and a commitment from all staff.

Elgar House may also have shorter lease options and we could look at moving courses across that tie in with what is currently offered there. There is an empty space above the current BDU.

Potential curriculum developments were also discussed and a list compiled of what is currently offered on the Market Street site. It was suggested that the BA Top up Dance starting in 2011 could potentially be held over 2 longer days rather than 4 shorter days.

B) Re-visit Sladen site and Brintons lease

It was proposed to look into the possibility of a phased building project at the Sladen site, starting with the £1-1.5million available to us. Curriculum areas such as plumbing or electrical qualifications could be considered for this site initially with the longer term aim to offer sports qualifications.

It was noted that the BSF project at Baxter College means that the community are losing playing fields at that site. There may be a possibility of utilising additional funding for providing an alternative facility at that site.

There needs to be communication with the County Council regarding their intentions for the site and whether it is worth us setting up a construction site.

Alongside this, the College could approach Brintons and ask if there is a possibility of a shorter term lease, currently there is a potential tie in of 25 years.

The group felt that these options were enough to consider at the present time.

Group 3 – Review of Governance & Strategic Leadership in English FE Chair’s Feedback

Commissioned by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) and the Association of Colleges (AoC), this report reviews governance and strategic leadership in the whole further education (FE) system, and in particular looks forward and reviews the implications of the proposed move towards shared regulation and the introduction of the machinery of government changes in 2010.

The report makes 10 recommendations which were discussed by the group.

Recommendation 1 – To introduce a Code of Governance for FE Colleges

It was noted that the Code was intended to be enabling rather than overly prescriptive and would allow colleges the flexibility to adapt to their own local circumstances. It would also be a ‘living document’ i.e. constantly reviewed.

The benefits include providing Governors with clarity regarding their role and setting a national benchmark for good practice, which has worked well in other sectors.

It was felt that we already do much of what is being proposed in the report particularly in terms of the relationship between governors and College management.

The group agreed that they would endorse the idea of a national Code of Governance.

Recommendation 2 – Shorter and more enabling Instruments & Articles

It was agreed that much of what is being proposed ties in with Recommendation 1 and the group were happy to endorse this proposal.

Recommendation 3 – Review of development, training and support of College Governors and Clerks to ensure more integrated arrangements for delivery

It was noted that LSIS and AoC are in a position to implement most of what is being proposed without any changes in legislation.

Governors felt that it would be helpful to have further support both at induction and on-going. Ideas were discussed such as a mentor for all new governors, a telephone ‘tree’ to provide governors with a partner to discuss papers with outside of meetings or a chance under Any Other Business for governors to flag up any topic they need further information or assistance to understand.

It was noted that the self assessment system to review performance was limited in value and peer assessment may be a better model. Governors also seemed unaware of what training or budget is available to them.

It was agreed that we need to improve the needs analysis for governors and link it back to a formal development plan. It would be beneficial to produce and make available to governors an annual list of training opportunities. There also needs to be a formal succession planning process in place.

It was agreed that we need to strengthen the induction process for Governors, including having an elementary list of courses that would be of benefit for new Governors.

There needs to be an awareness of the College's mission statement and governors should be able to link back to this in all they do.

A brief discussion took place regarding proposals in the report to include more SMT members as members of the Corporation. It was agreed that whilst it would be desirable to see more of SMT members at Corporation members, it is not necessary to make them members. Furthermore, it may be detrimental to the relationship between governors and College management, which needs to include a critical friend element.

It was noted that in the LSIS paper regarding HE in colleges, there is a recommendation for both a HE student governor and dedicated HE governor. It was agreed that in general terms the role of the student governor should be reviewed including consideration of how to best include the Learner Voice.

Recommendation 5 – To introduce remuneration for independent members

The group agreed with the AoC suggestion that this could be deferred for consideration at a later date. It was noted that funding would be the biggest issue and any governors who did wish to receive remuneration would not want it to come out of an already stretched College budget. Many would object on principle.

Recommendation 6 – Role Description for Chair

It was agreed that this would be beneficial. It is vital for any prospective Chair to know what they are committing to and therefore the Vice Chair should also be issued with a copy. Succession planning for the Chair needs to be debated as there are different approaches. The Corporation needs to be clear what sort of Chair they are looking for. The relationship between the Chair and the Principal / SMT is vital.

Recommendation 7 & 8 – Study on role of Clerk and role description

It was agreed that we need to compare the Clerk's current job description with the AoC / LSIS model version. It will be necessary to review what the role needs to entail in the current climate and review the terms on which the Clerk is appointed. It was noted that this should be done as soon as possible.

Recommendation 9 – Corporation to consider adopting public benefit and corporate social responsibility strategies

It was agreed that we need to be able to evidence what we already do to provide public benefit. Most governors have links into the community and do much indirectly but this is not reported in a formal way.

Ideas were discussed to enable reporting back of activities, such as an item at the Corporation meeting or governors to e-mail the Clerk when they have undertaken an activity that would provide public benefit, enabling the Clerk to produce a written list of activities as evidence. This list could also be circulated at Corporation meetings with a note of who had carried out the activity so they could be contacted by other governors if they wished to find out more.

Recommendation 10 – Clerk to compile a list of issues relevant to their own Corporation

It was noted that this activity had been completed.