

St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

**Minutes of the meeting held at the Town Centre Campus, St Helens
Thursday 11 May 2023 at 4.00pm**

Present:	Bill Nixon (Chair)	External Governor
	David Balsamo	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Zulakha Desai	External Governor
	Phil Han	External Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Jen McGill	Staff Governor
	Alun Owen	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Jim Pinsent	External Governor
	Nick Shore	External Governor
	Tracey Turner	Staff Governor
In attendance:	Ian Johnson	Head of Finance
	Gillian Hayhurst	Governance Director (minutes)
	Mark Thompson	Interim Director of HR & OD (via Microsoft Teams)
	Graham Try	The KWP Ltd

132 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from John Heritage and Kellie McCann.

133 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

134 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 March and 28 March 2023 were approved as accurate records, including the private and confidential addendums.

135 **Performance and compliance**

The report provided a summary of progress against key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the agreed approach to assurance reporting, and the compliance report.

It was noted that retention figures are currently below the previous year and this may impact on 16-18 funding in 2024/25.

The national achievement rates have been published and data shows an overall decline in the previous year. More students are undertaking external assessment and the wider impacts of the pandemic are increasing the risk of failure. The board queried why the College is predicting higher pass rates compared to last year, despite having lower retention rates. A more rigorous, prudent approach is being taken for achievement forecasting including weekly meetings with staff, evidence sampling and additional sessions for students using Small Group Tuition funding. The Curriculum and Quality Committee will deep dive into this further at its meeting on 16 May 2023.

A discussion was held on whether health and safety should be marked as non-compliant if there is an action plan in place to address items arising from the audit. The new Health and Safety Manager is now in post and driving completion of the actions. The Governing Board asked that more detail is provided on the outstanding actions in future reports.

In response to a query on staff turnover, governors were informed that the figure within the performance report is a target and not a forecast. The College has appointed a new Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development and will be interviewing for a Director of Management Information Systems shortly.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted progress against the high-level KPIs and targets for 2022/23.

The Governing Board noted the intention to provide an updated College Operational Plan for 2023/24 to the July 2023 board meeting

The Governing Board noted the compliance report.

136 **Financial update**

The report presented the St Helens College Group management accounts for the eight months ending 31 March 2023 for consideration.

Consideration was given to the current cash flow forecast

[REDACTED]

In response on a query regarding the Adult Education Budget underspend, curriculum planning is underway for 2023/24 and the current shortfall of £250k could be subcontracted.

The Governing Board queried whether the low risk ratings within the report are an accurate representation of the situation. Currently, there is nothing to indicate that the College's financial health will not be within the parameters set by the board at financial year end. While it could be argued that financial management could be given a medium risk rating, the Finance, Resource and Commercial Committee had reviewed the variations to budget and these were primarily due to one-off, unforeseen costs in year. Decisions taken by the board regarding capital expenditure (CapEx) could have a negative impact on finances impacting on future risk ratings. The College will need to provide evidence to the external auditors to support its going concern statement for this year's financial statement, particularly if there is a potential breach of any covenants within the management accounts, whether or not these have been approved.

RESOLVED: The board noted the management accounts for the eight months ending 31 March 2023.

137 Estates update

The report presented an update on the Estates Masterplan with particular emphasis on the Decant project for the board's consideration.

The Governing Board discussed the options within the report, considering the conflicting priorities identified. While proceeding with phase 1 of the Decant project would provide additional classroom space, it would not add any standalone benefits to the College. Proceeding with phase 1 over the summer and delaying phases 2a and 2b could increase the costs substantially and undertaking the whole the project does not allow for additional growth in its current form. Senior leaders had been advised by a contractor that the work could be completed over the summer, however experience suggests that there is a high risk that phase 1 will not be completed prior to the students returning in September, and costs may overrun. It may be appropriate to delay the project until [REDACTED] the College has the necessary funds to proceed with all three phases of the Decant project.

The Governing Board considered the potential risks of not proceeding with the Decant project, particularly with regard to essential maintenance that would be required on the SKB Building. A structural survey has been commissioned, which will provide a more detailed analysis, including whether Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) has been used in its construction. The use of RAAC increases the risk of structural failure of a building.

The board discussed the reputational risks associated with any decisions taken to postpone or stop the Decant project, particularly as staff and students are aware of the timescale for implementation and have been involved in the design. Staff governors advised that board that there has been some deterioration to existing facilities since the staff were advised of the Estates Masterplan and anecdotal feedback suggests that staff would support prioritising investment in essential works, such as heating and new teaching equipment, to provide the best offer to students.

The Governing Board supported the proposed 'option C' in principle and requested that a detailed report is presented in July 2023 showing an overview of the projects, benefits, costs and implications for curriculum. This option addresses immediate improvement needs within existing estate and focuses investment in growth areas such as construction and engineering. The board noted that the proposals will result in strategic decisions being required on the future of the STEM Centre and that this will also be addressed within July's report, particularly where the recommendations do not align with the current Estates Masterplan. With regard to the Decant project, the Governing Board asked for this project to be paused until the SKB structural survey is undertaken and a full project review completed.

Liz Duncan left the meeting for a short period.

The draft budget for 2023/24 will be presented in July 2023 and will use 'option C' as the basis for CapEx.

RESOLVED: **The board resolved not to approve the timescales for reviewing the Estates Masterplan and noted that a report will be presented to the July 2023 meeting detailing the projects under 'option c'.**

The board noted the findings and recommendations relating to the external review of estates projects.

The board resolved to suspend the Decant project pending a structural survey on the SKB Building and further project review.

Ian Thompson and Graham Try left the meeting. Mark Thompson joined the meeting.

138 Urgent matters for escalation to the board

Jim Pinsent left the meeting for a short period.

The Lead Governor (Safeguarding) advised the board that the Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing Team had supported 2,350 cases year-to-date, compared to 1600 during 2021/22. Staff training in this area has improved, which could also account for some of the increase. Examples of the complexity of cases were provided, including additional 'Voice of the Child' support that is being provided to Social Services. The provision in place to support staff, such as supervision, was discussed. It was noted that members of the team also support academic staff to deal with difficult situations, even though this is not directly within their remit. The governors noted that a review of team resources and remuneration is being undertaken to ensure that talent is retained and suitably rewarded.

The Governing Board expressed their appreciation for the work that the Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing Team does.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the update on the Safeguarding, Mental Health and Wellbeing Team.**

139 **Corporate risk register**

The Governing Board was asked to consider whether any of the discussions have resulted in changes to the risk register.

The Governing Board requested that the Risk Management Group considers whether risks relating to estates are appropriately rated given the earlier discussion.

Whole-year retention, attendance and achievement rates will also be considered for escalation to the risk register.

It was acknowledged that the College is managing a lot of significant risks, which are on the increase.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted that there were no amendments required to the risk register as a result of the discussions.**

140 **Any other business**

There were no items of any other business.

Date of next meeting

- Extraordinary Governing Board meeting – 24 May 2023
- Termly performance meeting – 6 July 2023

Jen McGill and Tracey Turner left the meeting. Alun left the meeting for a short period.

141 **Discussion: senior staffing**

An in camera discussion was held with external governors. A private and confidential minute is available from the Governance Director.

142 **Senior Post Holders**

An in camera discussion was held with external governors. A private and confidential minute is available from the Governance Director.