



WEST NOTTINGHAMSHIRE COLLEGE
FINANCE & ESTATES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Finance and Estates Committee meeting held (via Microsoft Teams) on Thursday 23rd June 2021

GOVERNORS PRESENT: Charles Heaton, Chair
 Andrew Cropley, Principal/CEO
 Tony Westwater
 David Gillies (from 5.45pm to 8pm)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Maxine Bagshaw, Director of Governance
 Gavin Peake, Director: IT, Estates & Learning Resources
 Jon Fearon, Finance Director

ACTION by whom	DATE by when

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

The chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on agenda items for discussion. No declarations were made and standing declarations were noted.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence and it was noted that David Gillies would be joining the meeting slightly late.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29TH APRIL 2021

The minutes were reviewed and it was agreed that they were an accurate record of discussions.

AGREED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 29th April 2021.

There were no matters arising.

4 ACTION PROGRESS REPORT

The committee considered the update provided and there was

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discussion on a number of items:

- In relation to the updated expenses policy, it was explained that changes are to be made to align with the HR system updates and that there has been a slight delay in relation to this. The finance director confirmed that there were no real risks associated with the existing policy and that the update intends to just clarify a few minor issues, e.g. hotel stays, travel expenses, etc. The aim is to use the HR system to ensure automated compliance, e.g. requiring staff to upload their own car insurance documents. The committee asked what a realistic completion date is and were advised that this is December 2021. The committee confirmed that they were satisfied with the time extension requested, given the minimal risks and assurance that the policy is being policed. They acknowledged that, in reality, this is a historic issue rather than current.
- In relation to the pay report, the finance director advised that it was not available in time to present to this meeting; therefore, it was agreed that he would circulate to committee members outside of the meeting.
- In relation to the debtor report planned, the finance director explained that there are only a very small number of debtors and that this is something that will be covered in the balance sheet discussions later in the meeting.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

5 **BALANCED SCORECARD REPORTING – PROGRESS WITH ESTATES WORKS**

The detailed report provided was considered and the committee were advised that the college is now down to the last £1,700 to spend. There are only small items that are still outstanding, and he provided assurance that all funds will be spent. The committee were advised that the carpet has arrived at Chesterfield Road on time, which is a relief. In relation to Refined, the roof works planned are now starting and will continue for a period of eight weeks.

The committee were advised that there has been a huge amount of work done at Chesterfield Road, and the only risk that is starting to emerge is in terms of the delivery of supplies in most areas. He indicated that there was a particular challenge regarding anything ordered that includes a microchip and that the lead in time for many items has been considerably extended. He advised that the Chesterfield Road site will be operational and ready for the start of the year but may not be ready to 'showcase' the site to new parents over the summer.

The committee were advised that the garden works at Refined cannot be started until the roof work is completed and, therefore, this will take

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place in September. It is envisaged that this is the only aspect that will not be completed over the summer.

All agreed that the college had done really well to undertake the works required and spend the funding in quite difficult supply and demand situations.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

6 **RISK REPORT**

The finance director introduced this item and indicated that, as the college is now coming to the end of the year, it is pleasing that, in the main, risks had been managed and mitigated. The only remaining red RAG-rated risk is in relation to the ESFA cap on franchising. He confirmed that this was something that the college has known about for a while, and is planning for, and that there will be a change in delivery model, which will be a key feature going forward.

(David Gillies joined the meeting at 5.45pm)

The committee were advised that the risk register will be rewritten for 21/22 and a particular risk that will be highlighted is in terms of the risks associated with planning for growth. Student demand for courses is significant for a number of reasons, including COVID and the new sixth form centre. He confirmed that there will be a need to review numbers very carefully and advised that the college currently sits 900 acceptances up on the prior year position; however, it is acknowledged that all of these students may not turn up at the start of the academic year. The committee were advised that the trend of acceptances is not diminishing and that the momentum is really strong.

The finance director described the 2020/21 risks as being associated with getting to a stable position and said that COVID has not significantly impacted (i.e., the college has been able to adapt).

The committee asked what the likely level of student drop-off is in terms of acceptances/turn-ups. The finance director indicated that the college believes that 900 is high but that it is very likely that the college will be 500 learners up on the current year. The CEO confirmed that the college is very inclusive and, therefore, tries very hard to accommodate all student applications, if student needs can be met, and that, if they can't, there is a very distinct process to deal with these.

The committee were reminded that the risk in this area relates to lagged funding and that there is no certainty regarding in-year growth funding, which will be a challenge to manage. The principal confirmed that the college is clear in relation to the entry requirements and,

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potentially, TAGs may impact upon the level of course that is appropriate for any individual. He confirmed that the college does anticipate having to manage some ability challenges.

In relation to A-Levels, the college is 300 students up in terms of applications. Whilst it is known that not all will come, as some will stay in school sixth forms, this is still a significant increase. The college is seeing applicants with grade 8 and 9 expectations, which is highly likely to lead to continuing interest and improving performance. The principal advised that having more students allows the college to offer more subjects, which again will help to continue the recruitment momentum in future years.

The committee were advised that the college has introduced some waiting lists for some courses, e.g. Level 3 Animal Care. He confirmed that there are very thorough plans in place to make sure students are given really clear information in terms of expectations, i.e. the amount of work involved in each course, and that this may result in some movement across programmes.

The committee asked what the constraining factors are in terms of being able to respond to growth. The principal indicated that these are:

- estate capacity, i.e. the actual physical space available
- staff capacity/staff recruitment
- lagged funding and the financial risks associated with this; it is believed that the value of the growth risk is circa £600k.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

7 MONTHLY MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS – MAY 2021

The finance director introduced his comprehensive report. Key matters noted were:

- The college has reforecast the outturn income position in relation to AEB.
- Apprenticeship income has been reduced.
- In-month performance for EBITDA is good.
- Pay costs are slightly ahead but are more in line with the plan. Some posts will cease in June, e.g. COVID-related positions and some temporary/agency staff. COVID has meant an extended delivery year, which means that some costs have carried on for longer than originally envisaged.
- College will see some pay cost savings in July.
- In relation to non-pay when grant-funded items are excluded, the college is on target.
- College has done well to achieve non-pay savings.
- AEB outturn from direct delivery is expected to be £2.7 million.
- Treatment of bksb is outside core operational activity. The

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management accounts focus on the performance of own college business without getting distracted by other matters. That said, the college will account for bksb income generation in the annual accounts for the period that it continued to be owned by the college.

The committee specifically noted the position in relation to temporary pay costs and questioned whether the overspend is anticipated to occur again at the same level. The finance director indicated that this is not anticipated, not if the situation with COVID does not continue. He advised that the college has had to use 'cover' when staff were not available and, in addition to this, there was additional staffing to support testing when students came back to site. He advised that the college's priority has been to ensure that teachers remain in the classroom and, therefore, it has brought in agency staff to support the other operational aspects required.

The committee were given assurance that the college is trying really hard to replace agency staff with permanent employees and that, in terms of the budget, additional staffing costs have not been factored in at the level seen this year on a continuing basis. The committee were advised that construction provision has circa 65%-70% of the agency costs incurred and that, to try and address this, the college is trying to be flexible in terms of recruitment options. The other area that has had high agency/cover costs is health and social care.

The committee then went on to discuss the cash flow position at page 9 and it was explained that, as a consequence of the forecast and outturn position envisaged for AEB, this means a significant amount of cash will need repaying in December 2021. This will lead to a big dip in the cash flow forecast, with up to £2.3 million cash to repay. This then takes the college down to a low point of £4.3 million. However, all acknowledged that this was still a robust position. The committee were advised that March is also a challenging month, as the ESFA typically pay less on profile that month, and that this is something that happens each year.

One member of the committee made an observation in relation to accrued expenses on the balance sheet. It was explained that a large amount of this relates to grants, and the committee therefore questioned whether it is worth separating out and providing a deferred income breakdown. The finance director confirmed that he would provide a summary analysis table within the monthly management accounts going forward. He explained that colleges receive the cash in advance, which is significant for the first three months of the year but then reduces. Colleges always tend to have a cash peak at the start of the year. A challenge from the committee was to present deferred income as a separate line within the accounts.

Finance
Director

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One member of the committee noted that the transfer from the bksb bank account was negative and asked why this was the case. It was explained that the college was due a proportion of the cash and not all of it. The finance director envisages that this may just be a timing issue regarding the treatment month by month.

The committee asked for further information regarding the debtors analysis. The finance director indicated that the bad debt and debt which is 90+ days old relates to one subcontractor, in the main. The committee asked whether it was possible to remove this. The finance director indicated that he would explore the potential to formally write this off within the management accounts but still pursue it externally. He indicated that the real level of bad debt is circa £30k and the longer-term debt is £140k, which is not of significant concern given the turnover of the college.

The committee then discussed the financial health indicators and asked what the college would need to do to get to 'outstanding' rather than 'good'. The finance director explained the range of options and confirmed that he would refine the targets for 21/22. The committee agreed that the position in relation to grants distorts the calculation as there is no margin, i.e. in and out activity, and they questioned whether this could be made clearer within the management accounts.

A challenge from the committee was to always compare like with like, i.e. monitoring performance of the college without bksb activity included.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

8 CURRICULUM PLAN 2021/22 – CONTRIBUTION ANALYSIS

The finance director presented his report and explained that it provides an insight into the curriculum planning process. When going forward, there will be a sharper focus on contribution analysis within the management accounts for 21/22. He explained that the college would be completing a more granular analysis regarding performance rather than simply focusing on financial stability, which has been the goal for the last few years.

The finance director referred the committee to option A set out in the report, and he explained that this is what the curriculum plan would look like if the college permitted all of the resources required. This is based on student numbers of 3,592. He confirmed that the college has not allowed over-optimism within curriculum planning. Whilst recognising growth, the college has not been overly optimistic and, therefore, the position could be better than this.

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He drew the committee's attention to the detailed team breakdowns and confirmed that staff now have the time going into next year to really focus on this aspect.

In terms of the data provided, there are a number of areas of focus and these were summarised.

- 1) Foundation Studies – key points noted were:
 - The college does not think that the issues that exist relate to fundamentals.
 - The provision also brings in additional revenue which the college does not credit to this area and allocates to central services instead.
 - This area has a very special relationship with the local authority, which includes extra expectations and requirements, and it is not clear whether these are all being factored into the costs.
 - Contribution is 38%.
 - The college needs to better understand and may have to change the mode of operating. The college is going to go back to first principles and undertake a review so as to be able to agree clear methodology for calculation moving forward.

- 2) Catering and Relish – key matters noted were:
 - Services have really negatively been impacted by COVID and, therefore, a very cautious approach has to be taken in terms of revenue.
 - Contribution is 43% and, ideally, the college would like to see it at the 55% mark.
 - The college will look at key assumptions and the operating model: for example, the level of remitted non-teaching time.

- 3) Access Studies – key matters noted were:
 - There is a need to review this and, particularly, how technology is used. This may help to address some of the attendance concerns.
 - The college wants to add a blend of flexible learning to the offer.
 - That said, the contribution percentage won't ever go above the mid-40s because of the type of provision.

- 4) Music – key matters noted were:
 - There needs to be a deep-rooted review in this area.
 - Recruitment in terms of student numbers is down and the college is seeing a reducing market share.
 - Music is not a key priority area for development locally.

- 5) Business apprenticeships – key matters noted were:

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- The college is looking at the use of IT to give greater flexibility, particularly as it is a very high cost for the college to provide staff on a one-to-one basis in businesses.
- Whilst there are lower margins, this is an area that critically underpins a number of other areas of delivery.

The committee were advised that each manager has a profit and loss account and contribution statement and that the next step is to develop an understandable way of sensibly reporting this to governors. In terms of the information provided today, the committee all agreed that it was a useful tool and seemed to help to spark the right questions. The finance director confirmed that there is greater confidence regarding broader ownership of the numbers in the curriculum now.

The committee asked what the position was in relation to Mansfield Town Football Club provision. The finance director confirmed that it is not the highest margin of delivery and that the college is being extremely cautious regarding recruitment numbers. There is a potential conversation to be had regarding student numbers, and a worst-case situation has been taken at the moment. The committee acknowledged that these learners really do add credence to the reputation of the college's sports provision and there are extra benefits to the college, which are not just financial, to consider.

AGREED: to note the content of the report provided.

9 SPACE AVAILABILITY AND UTILISATION

The director: IT, estates and learning resources introduced this item and explained that, a couple of years ago, the college developed a new estates strategy and that part of this included consolidation:

- A move out of the Sheffield premises
- A move out of category C & D buildings, e.g. Thoresby Street
- Then invest sensibly in the buildings that are retained.

In relation to Thoresby Street, he advised that the sale position was still not 100% resolved but that there is an expectation to dispose of the site shortly. The committee were advised that the partnership with NTU has absorbed some space and has, therefore, squeezed college delivery into a smaller area. Over recent years, the footprint has been reduced by just under 18%.

In terms of the method of calculating utilisation, he explained that this relates to the frequency of use and counting the 'bodies in the classrooms'. He expressed a view that this was not a very accurate way to assess and, therefore, the focus needs to be on how frequently every room in the estate is used. He explained that the college was

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getting to theoretical maximums in a number of areas, e.g. because of staggered lunches and breaks, and that this does build in inefficiencies. He explained that the theoretical maximum is 87% and that engineering provision is getting close to this.

The committee were advised that construction provision at Station Park has some inherent inefficiencies because it is very specialist space. The site also now has problems with parking as it has lost 80 'unofficial parking areas'. This site has the lowest utilisation rates but is the busiest. He indicated that provision currently does not fit into the site and, because of potential growth, there is a need to look at creating contingencies. The college has been able to adapt and create four rooms and is building four more. Portacabins are also being used.

In Engineering, extra classrooms have also been created, with some smaller rooms extended to make more efficient areas for larger groups. At Chesterfield Road, the college has the option to move Access and community adult learning to create a further seven or eight classrooms.

In relation to Derby Road, a number of teams are working from home effectively and efficiently and it is likely that they will formally move to be 'home-workers'; however, there are some staff who need to return to site to improve efficiencies.

As a result of the space challenges, the team have been reviewing the options available in Mansfield and have identified a potential fourth site, which will provide additional office space and also additional facilities for construction provision.

The committee were advised that one site is the preferred option: this is what used to be Mansfield Brewery and is now owned by a charity, the Making It Centre. It is attractive in terms of the space and also the terms available. The committee were advised that there is the potential to meet the costs from the revenue agreed with NTU. It may not cover the full 100% costs in the first year but it will in the second year. The site has 12.5k square feet.

In relation to the occupation terms, the college has indicated that a condition would be that we are the only occupier, which could present a problem as one tenant does have a lease. However, this tenant has not paid for a period of six months and has broken the terms on numerous occasions.

The committee asked for a summary of financial implications, benefits, risks, etc. The committee were advised that the total expected cost per annum is £89k, including rent and utilities, and that revenue expected from NTU is £62k, which could offset. The committee were reminded that the college is committed to providing NTU with the space agreed;

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however, they have indicated that they would like it one year early as they have got higher student numbers earlier than their plan. The committee were advised that the space provided to NTU is not appropriate for construction provision and, therefore, it is not possible to consider this were it to be available. In addition, the college is demolishing some space at Chesterfield Road which is currently available as an interim measure for Construction. It was explained that the ultimate aim is to provide a better quality of student experience for all learners.

A challenge from the committee was to better understand the likely impact if construction provision is not given more space, e.g. delivery to current apprentices and growth.

The committee were advised that there is a five-year proposal regarding use of this site and that this timescale fits in with other future options in the Mansfield area, i.e. through the Mansfield and Ashfield Towns funding. It was confirmed that there is a strategy in place which would mean that the college would not need to utilise this site in the longer term. A challenge from the committee was to be clear in terms of what is driving the need for an additional site. They asked the finance director, director: IT, estates and learning resources, and the CEO to refine the proposals to go to board. What they would like to see is a business case which sets out the opportunity, risks, timescales, longer-term plans, etc.

FD/Dir/
CEO

July
2021

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

10 2021/22 DRAFT BUDGET AND 2-YEAR FINANCIAL FORECAST

The finance director introduced his detailed paper and described this as quite a dynamic budget this year, but he felt that it was now at a point where it is possible to recommend to board for approval. Key points highlighted were:

- Scenario planning
- The college cannot forecast for additional 16-18 revenue/growth funding as there is no guarantee from the ESFA.
- Whilst growth funding was provided in 2020/21, this was dependent upon ESFA budgets and contingency.
- 5% growth was the trigger for additional funding in 20/21; however, this was exceptional.
- The college has more cash than actual revenue and will have to repay some for 19-year-olds.
- The college was funded at a percentage and not for all of the growth.
- In terms of the budget scenarios, the college has confidence in relation to 'allocation B'.

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- In relation to 'allocation C', the college cannot recognise the revenue and growth, but this gives an indication of what would be funded if growth comes to fruition.
- The college needs to base its budget on capped allocation, which is 'allocation A'.
- Line 38 shows a substantial increase in pay costs. It was explained that, if the college does get in-year growth funding, there are likely to be some additional pay cost pressures.
- As an overall position, the team are taking a cautious approach.
- Variances show expected increased costs.
- This level of anticipated demand is very unusual within the sector.
- Staff pay costs as a percentage are up to 65%.
- Grants have distorted the position and, therefore, will be separated out going forward.
- Non-pay position reflects a lower level of franchised activity.
- In relation to some AEB and tuition fee areas, the college will have to work with some partners and has allowed for extra costs in relation to this.
- EBITDA proposal is £2.5 million. ESFA target is 8%. It envisaged that the college will be above this in 2020/21. The position is likely to be 7.2% next year but could be higher if the college gets full or part growth funding.

In terms of the information provided, the committee acknowledged that the columns represent a worst, best and expected position. They asked for a better understanding of the factors that would move the college from allocation A to B. The finance director indicated that the sector is receiving mixed messages between the ESFA and Treasury and simply does not know what the exact funding position will be. It was acknowledged that it is really difficult for the ESFA to set policy within the current circumstances. The committee were advised that it is likely that the college will receive more catch-up funding next year but that there is no guarantee. From 2022, there is a demographic increase expected, which will also impact on student numbers. The college is expecting student numbers to move from 2,900 to 3,500 over two years, which is unprecedented.

The committee asked for a summary of the staffing metrics, and these were explained as:

- Incremental increases at 0.6%
- Minimum wage pay and differentials
- Living wage
- Overall cost of 1.2% (which is circa £300k). Most of this relates to growth.

A question and challenge from one member of the committee was whether or not the contingency provided is too cautious. The

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committee also asked whether the budget should build in some growth funding: even though not guaranteed, they felt it was a likely probability; however, they acknowledged that a figure could not be determined. The finance director indicated that a cautious approach needs to be taken as the FE sector is not first choice politically to receive funds. The committee were advised that it is possible to take contingency out in relation to non-pay but, really, a cautious approach is being taken at this stage and the team believe that there is a strong narrative to be able to justify a contribution at 7.1%.

The committee's attention was then drawn to the sensitivity analysis and risks identified, and key matters noted were:

- 16-18 funding is very low risk
- The budget has included catch-up funding at the same level, and associated costs have been built into this. There is not a profit/margin in this area and for every pound in there will be an expectation of a pound out.
- Two variations in relation to AEB were considered. Worst case is missing by 10% but a more likely position is 5%. The franchise market is changing and is complex.
- Apprenticeship provision will see a big change, with this area moving from £3.8 million to £5.4 million. This is the most significant risk figure and links back to needing more space for Construction. The committee were advised that achieving the budget in this area is very much linked to numbers month by month and that, if there are any delays, it will have a negative impact on value. The college really needs to see early September sign-ups, and any delays in starts are a risk.
- There is a small risk in terms of tuition fees, particularly in relation to the partnership with JTL.
- Revenue risk is between £891k and £1.443 million
- There are some savings that the college could make if the apprenticeship numbers do not materialise, and speed of response is critical in this area. He explained that there was a degree of optimism in the revenue forecasts as staff are really committed and 'going for it', and there are some positive economic indicators in the area.

A challenge from the committee is that it is important to be clear in terms of the rationale for the budget when presenting this to the board, particularly in relation to risks, potential upsides and credibility. It was agreed that the finance director would provide a detailed narrative for the board.

In terms of increasing student numbers, all acknowledged that the college was in unchartered territory and that what was critically important was being able to give students a good experience, which means staff in front of them in the classroom or virtually.

Finance
Director

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2021

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One member of the committee asked whether, for 2020/21, it is possible to strip out the unfunded COVID financial costs to give clarity and ability to compare year-on-year. The finance director indicated that some costs can be stripped out, but with others there is no level of accuracy. He expressed the view that, comparing like with like, the college would be at 9.1% EBITDA (having received £1.2 million growth in 20/21); however, this has not been assumed for the next academic year at this stage.

The committee then went on to consider the 2022/23 budget, and the finance director explained that the college was maintaining a cautious approach but was anticipating growth.

(David Gillies left the meeting at 8pm)

The finance director then drew the committee's attention to the outline pay proposals for 2021/22 and confirmed that all aspects have been included within the 21/22 budget. Key matters noted were:

- The college is looking to build in pay proposals.
- This will mean that the annual increase decision is pushed back to December 2021.
- In recognition of the difference in leave entitlement between VBSS and WNC, the proposal is to offer an increase to the overall VBSS leave entitlement from 33 days to 37 days.
- To standardise the leave entitlement year across the WNC group as 1st September to 31st August.
- To review the VBSS occupational sick pay entitlements relating to the first three days of sickness, as these are currently unpaid.
- To provide life cover insurance to VBSS and WNC employees who are below the normal retirement age and not covered by LGPS or TPS life cover, with the provision of twice their annual salary with effect from 1st September 2021.

In relation to sick pay entitlement changes, the committee asked how the trial will be measured. The finance director confirmed that data will be compared month by month and analysis will be completed to see if there is a negative impact on trend. He confirmed that the pay review principles have been discussed with the Workforce Development Committee but that, at that time, the financial costs of the proposals were not certain. He confirmed again that the costings of the detailed proposal have been built into the budget.

The committee considered the budget proposals as a whole and, subject to provision of the more detailed narrative requested, agreed that they were in a form that they could recommend to the board.

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AGREED:

- a) To note the content of the update provided
- b) Recommend that the board approve the 2021/22 draft budget and 2-year financial forecast.

11 SUBCONTRACTOR FEES AND CHARGES POLICY 2021/22

The finance director introduced this item and confirmed that there were only minor changes, particularly in relation to the treatment of 16-18 funding and the partnership arrangements, particularly where the college will deliver some of the activity.

AGREED: to recommend that the board approve the Subcontractor Fees and Charges Policy for 2021/22 as presented.

12 LLOYDS – NEW FACILITIES AGREEMENT

The finance director indicated that the new facilities letter was received from Lloyds today, which is why the full content has not been shared with the committee. In essence, the bank is proposing a change from LIBOR to a base rate calculation of interest. He advised that LIBOR would only apply were the college to breach bank covenants and, therefore, risks in relation to this are very, very low.

The committee were happy with the rationale for the change and were content to recommend to board.

AGREED: to recommend that the board approve the change from LIBOR to bank base rate calculation.

13 BID UPDATES

The finance director provided a verbal update and confirmed that the college is still awaiting outcomes from two capital bids. Unfortunately, there is no feedback yet. In addition, nothing has been heard in relation to any of the Skills Accelerator bids.

In relation to the Futures bid, the principal indicated that the college submitted a bid in partnership with Futures and that it was for Nottingham County Council to build up and submit the larger bid by last week. Whilst no official feedback has been received, it is believed that the bid submitted was not as envisaged and the college is now trying to clarify the matter in relation to this.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

14 COMMITTEE REVIEW

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The director of governance introduced her report and explained that this was an opportunity to look back on the year and identify whether any changes needed to be made to bring about improvements. The committee were satisfied that they had achieved the objectives set in the terms of reference and that they remained fit for purpose. The committee felt that the workplan proposed and membership were appropriate and were happy to continue 'as is'.

15 **AOB**

There were no items of additional business.

16 **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

This was confirmed as 6th October 2021 at 5pm.

17 **CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS**

It was agreed that confidential items would be recorded on a separate basis.

(Gavin Peake left the meeting at 8.10pm)

Meeting closed at 8.15pm.

Signed : _____  _____ Chair

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