Minutes of the meeting of the Northampton College Corporation held at 1700 hours on 27th June 2024

Present: Helen Scott (Chair), Pat Brennan-Barrett (Principal), Steve Barker (Teams), Philip Hilton, Anne-Marie Kilday (Teams), Paul Nutter (Teams), Mark Robbins and Julie Teckman

In attendance: Geraldine Hulley (Temporary Clerk), Thomas Goodridge, Jan Hutt (Vice Principal, People and Organisational Development), Helen Janska, Jason Lancaster (Principal Elect), Patrick Leavey (Deputy Principal), Mark Owen, and Julian Wood (Deputy Principal, Finance and Corporate Affairs)

SECTION A – ROUTINE ITEMS:

55/24 Welcome and introductions (Agenda item 1)

a. This was the last Corporation meeting for a number of governors. The Chair of Corporation thanked the Principal for her commitment and loyalty to Northampton College for the last 11 years. She had made an incredible contribution to the success of the College and she would be missed. Presentations were also made to the Chair and Vice Chair of Corporation who were both stepping down at the end of July 2024. Helen Scott and Philip Hilton were both thanked for their contributions and dedication whilst on the Corporation.

b. Apologies for absence
Apologies for absence were received from David Bailey, Becky Bradshaw, Neus Garriock, Geraldine Schofield, David Smith, Mike Watkins and Rod Wood,

c. Eligibility, quorum, interest and hospitality disclosure
The meeting was quorate; no notice had been received of any member becoming ineligible to hold office; and, no interests were declared.

d. Requests for urgent business
There were no urgent items of business requested.

e. The Chair confirmed that two agenda items (7 and 8) would be moved to the start of the meeting. This would mean that staff could present their reports early in the meeting.

SECTION B – BUSINESS ITEMS (1):

56/25 SEND / High Needs (Agenda item 8, Paper 8)

A detailed presentation from the Academic and Vocational Support team confirmed that as of June 2024, the number of students who had received support from the team was 1,577; this was an increase on the previous year. Learning support retention was extremely high for different cohorts, for example, high needs – 96.5% and EHCP (education and health care plan) – 94.8%. A change to using online initial assessments had resulted in the team receiving results quickly and any issues being identified much earlier. There had been an increasing demand for exam access arrangements; 1,142 students had applied for this. During the year, the JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) inspection for 'compliance with regulations' was passed. Wellbeing and mental health (WBMH) provision was extensive in the College. Examples included: the College had signed up to the AoC (Association of Colleges) mental health charter; links had been strengthened with external providers resulting in the College hosting a number of charities and organisations at all three sites; and, both assistant principals were members of different steering groups which helped to continue to raise the profile of the College. Extensive SEN continuing professional development (CPD) was delivered throughout the year across-College including:

dyslexia/dyscalculia; neurodiversity in the classroom; and, assistive technology to support literacy skills.

The Corporation congratulated the team on the excellent work that had been achieved during the year. In response to a question about whether some students were choosing to study at the College due to the levels of support available; the team agreed with this assumption. There was evidence that parents chose the College due to the level of support available; the local authority relied on the College to help young people with support needs; and, feedback from prospective students from year 10 confirmed the support at the College was second to none. The Corporation welcomed this feedback but also acknowledged the additional pressure this would have on the team.

Resolved: To receive the SEND / High Needs report.

Helen Janska and Thomas Goodridge left the meeting.

57/26 Safeguarding and Prevent (Agenda item 7, Paper 7)

The report outlined details of the delivery of the Safeguarding agenda at the College during 2023-24. Key changes to the Keeping Children Safe in Education guidance that was due to be released in September 2024 were included. Governors had an opportunity to scrutinise data presented in tabular format in relation to: internal and external referrals; young people engaged in formal support through the local authority in partnership with the College; and, support provided for vulnerable students. A comprehensive programme of training for staff was delivered throughout the year during induction; via online modules; and, face to face. There was a 93% completion rate; the remaining 7% was due to a small number of people whose training had elapsed due to being absent from work due to sickness. This training would be completed within the next seven days. Training for 22 members of staff had just been completed for a level 4 safeguarding qualification; this would very much strengthen provision. A number of priorities were identified for 2024-25 including: policy updates; College-wide launch of a safeguarding monitoring system; further development of training; and, development of newsletter/information sharing to promote good practice.

The link governor for this priority area offered congratulations for the number of staff who had completed the level 4 training. He sought clarification about training for part-time staff and whether any changes to delivery had been achieved to offer a more flexible approach. Mark Owen confirmed that this training remained mandatory but a lot of work had been undertaken to offer flexibility: there were now more 1:1s; small groups; and, other delivery models as appropriate. The link governor also queried any actions that had been taken in the delivery of safeguarding to students in the tutorial programme to avoid duplication of content for students who progress to a second year. Mark Owen confirmed that this had been resolved. The training had now been differentiated by level and year on programme. Further changes were being taken to develop the training so that it responded to feedback gathered from students; this would have the advantage of bringing a new dimension to the topic as it would be much more responsive and thus, of greater interest to students. The Chair highlighted the increased number of vulnerable students who were in receipt of free school meals and the extent to which these students fell into any of the other groups. Members were informed that through the new CPOMS (child protection online monitoring system) it would be possible to see this pattern in a much clearer way next year.

Resolved: To receive the Safeguarding and Prevent Report.

Mark Owen left the meeting.

SECTION C – GOVERNANCE:

58/27 Minutes (Agenda item 2)

a. **Corporation (Paper 2a):** The minutes of the meeting held on the 2nd May 2024 had been circulated previously. With the exception of two typographical errors which would be corrected after the meeting, the minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.
b. **Governance Committee (Paper 2b):** The Corporation was informed that four papers from this Committee were recommended for approval; these would be discussed later in the meeting as part of agenda item 11. The minutes of the Governance Committee held on the 10th June 2024 were noted.
c. **Audit Committee (Paper 2c):** The minutes of the Audit Committee held on the 13th June 2024 were noted. The Chair of Audit highlighted the importance of this Committee and in view of vacancies, the urgent need to prioritise the recruitment of governors. The external auditors had raised the Committee's awareness to whether they should present their findings to the November Board meeting or if the Corporation did not think this was necessary, the decision should be recorded in the minutes; either decision was acceptable. In a wider discussion about different individuals' experience of this situation, there was a consensus that it depended on the financial health of the organisation. After some debate it was agreed a sensible approach would be to invite the external auditors if the Chair of Audit, Chair of Corporation or a member of the executive requested that it would be helpful for them to attend. It was important to remember that the auditors had direct access to the Chair of Audit or Corporation as required. The Audit Committee's annual report was another trigger for inviting the external auditors. The approach was agreed unanimously.
d. **Quality Committee (Paper 2d):** The minutes of the meeting of the Quality Committee held on the 17th June 2024 were noted. There had been a wide-ranging discussion around a range of items. There were no issues to highlight.
e. **Matters and/or actions from the minutes:** No matters or actions arising.

SECTION D – BUSINESS ITEMS (2):

59/24 Principal's Report (Agena item 3, Paper 3)

The Principal provided an update on progress with the achievement of each of the College's strategic objectives including a detailed narrative which complemented the RAG ratings. With the exception of English and maths (E&M), all areas were graded green. The Principal explained that where the current amber rating for E&M was concerned, this may need to be changed to red in the new academic year as outcomes were not yet known. Attendance rates for E&M summer examinations were very strong at 97% and 96% respectively. There was good progress on E&M but it was not good across College. When thinking of the national policy, there was acknowledgement that progress was not just about grade improvement but also whether reading ages had improved and had E&M helped a student to get their main qualification. The Corporation thanked the Principal for her comprehensive report which provided very good levels of assurance.

Resolved: To receive the Principal's report.

60/24 Finance (Agenda item 4)

a. **Management Accounts (Paper 4)**

The Management Accounts (P9) had been restated to show performance against the revised budget approved by the Corporation in February 2024. The report showed an increase of £181k in EBITDA (earnings before interest depreciation and tax) and £200k in projected operating surplus. EBITDA was forecasted at £2,296K (6.5%) compared to £2,115k (6%) in the revised budget. Operating surplus was projected to be £1,851k (5.3%) compared to £1,651k (4.7%) in the revised budget.

EBITDA was forecasted to be £164k higher than the original budget approved in June 2023 (subsequently reduced by £500k in August 2023 prior to the first Management Accounts) with operating surplus £646k higher primarily due to higher than forecast interest receipts on the College's cash balances. At 30th April, the College had a cash balance of £20,156k including remaining capital allocations. The was forecasted to reduce to £19,203k at the year end. The College's projected Financial Health rating remained Outstanding with headroom against the EBITDA measure increasing from the previous month. The DP, FCA confirmed that most of the KPIs (key performance indicators) were green with the exception of non-pay costs. This was comparable with the rest of the sector.

Resolved: To receive the Management Accounts.

61/24 Financial Regulations (Agenda item 5, Paper 5)

Following reclassification, the ESFA published the College Financial Handbook in March 2024. At the Audit Committee meeting on the 13th June, Members were invited to comment on the proposed changes to the Financial Regulations. The changes included: specific Corporation responsibility requirements in relation to the Accounting Officer, Chief Financial Officer and Governance Professional; specific wording to the financial responsibilities of the Corporation and Audit Committee; wording relating to Procurement requirements; reference to the Corporation having adopted the AoC Senior Post Holder Remuneration Code and compliance with Charity Commission guidance on expenses and payments for trustees; updated references to ESFA approvals, including for leases; and, specific wording to reflect the Handbook's requirement for the Board's responsibility for Risk Management and its review of the Risk Register. Other changes were included around: cyber-ransom payments; and, tax evasion or avoidance. A helpful summary table of specific freedoms and delegations drawn from the College Financial Handbook were included.

Feedback from the Audit Committee had been actioned. This related to paragraph 9.1.1 and approval of commitments to purchase certain assets included within the annual budget. This reference had been simplified and amended to state that such commitments in excess of £250,000 required Corporation approval in line with the broader schedule of delegations included in the Regulations (Schedule B). A brief explanation of the HM Treasury 'green book' had been included at 7.10.2.

Resolved: To approve the revised Financial Regulations.

62/24 Learning Data Monitoring (Agenda item 6, Paper 6)

Retention continued to be reasonably stable and tracking higher than the previous year. This illustrated a continued upward trend. Lots of qualifications had an external assessment; level 3 outcomes would be known on 15th August; and, level 2 including GCSEs on the 22nd August. Some areas of provision where there had been a focus on retention were in the 90% range which was encouraging. Although small numbers, challenges remained on T Levels where retention was just under 70% for both

pathways. For those students who continued onto their second year, the pass rate was 100%. Overall attendance rates mirrored the previous year's position. The attendance and punctuality strategy would be updated to target four or five key actions for implementation at the start of the new academic year in September. Where progress was concerned, students were RAG rated to monitor the extent to which they were on or below targets. The percentage of students who had been flagged as amber or red had reduced compared to the previous year.

In response to a question about the lower retention rate for T Levels, the Corporation was informed that where Education and Health was concerned, there was a significant amount of Science content which had caused concern for some students. This had been addressed in the syllabus following national feedback. The content was specifically broad and needed students who had an academic ability and practical drive to be successful on the course. Members were also informed that nationally, retention for T Levels was mostly 70%. It was not known what would happen to T Levels after the general election and depending on which political party was successful, whether there would be any further changes to BTECs.

Resolved: To receive the report on learner data and progression.

63/24 Overseas Trips Approval (Agenda item 9, Paper 9)

The report outlined a proposal for an overseas trip for a group of Travel and Tourism students in April 2025. Confirmation was received that the proposal had been subject to due diligence.

Resolved: To approve the overseas trip proposal.

64/24 Governance 2023-24 (Agenda item 10, Paper 10)

a. **End of Terms:** The Corporation was informed that Helen Scott and Philip Hilton's second term of office would end on the 31st July 2024. Becky Bradshaw and Mike Watkins had both resigned. David Smith had confirmed he wished to leave the Corporation on the 31st December 2024; this would be confirmed in writing. Rod Wood completed his first term of office.
b. **Business Plan:** It was agreed that Risk Management should be added to the Business Plan; Covid update could be removed; and, Pay Review needed to be reported on at the first meeting of the academic year.

Resolved: To receive the Governance 2023-24 report.

65/24 Governance 2024-25 (Agenda item 11)

a. **Governor' Expense Policy (Paper 11a):** The policy had been developed to help demonstrate compliance with the Charity Commission and Department for Education guidance. It would also provide clarity to governors and College staff on the arrangements for such expenses. The same policy for staff was being updated and/or reviewed and once approved, guidance on subsistence rates would be circulated to Governors separately subject to agreement of the Chair.

   Resolved: To approve the Governors' expense policy and delegate to the Chair agreement of the annual guidance rates on subsistence.

b. **AoC Code of Governance (Paper 11b):** Where Principle 1 was concerned, greater reference should be made to the way in which governors actively engaged in setting the direction of the Strategic Plan. Further evidence of

demonstrating a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion was from the work of the Curriculum and Quality group.

c. **External Governance Review and Governance Improvement Plan (Paper 11c):** A summary of the external governance review was outlined and governors were invited to send any further feedback to the Clerk to the Corporation within the next seven days. A Governance Improvement Plan (GIP) had been developed that reflected each of the recommendations from the external review. The Corporation welcomed the new section on succession planning as it was important to have an agreed plan for the short-, medium- and long-term. The Clerk was asked to review the GIP to ensure the short-term plans agreed to date were fully articulated. Templates to support some of the actions in the GIP would be developed over the summer period (**Action 7 – Clerk**).

d. **Meetings Calendar (Paper 11d):** The timing of the first Strategic Planning day was agreed for the 27th February starting late morning. Members agreed that for those who travelled some distance, it was preferable to maximise governors' time when they were already in the College.

e. **Governance Professional Development Plan and Link Governor Scheme (Paper 11e):** A comprehensive programme of professional development had been developed and included a robust induction for new governors. Allocations to the link governor scheme would take into account existing commitments of governors including those related to work.

Resolved: Based on recommendations from the Governance Committee to: approve the AoC Code of Governance (subject to minor changes); receive the Governance External Review; approve the Governance Improvement Plan (subject to minor changes); and, to approve the meeting calendar and Governance Professional Development Plan/Link Governor Scheme.

66/24 Items of Urgent Business (Agenda item 12)
There were no items of urgent business.

67/24 Date of Next Meeting (Agenda item 13)
Thursday, 17th October 2024.

Steve Bunker left the meeting.