



## **EASTON COLLEGE CORPORATION**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 7 March 2008**

**Present:** Mr M Andrews, Mr R Baines, Mrs F Baugh, Mrs V Bowyer, Mr J Burford, Mr J Burrage, Mr M Gamble (Chairman), Mr J Hunter, Mr D Lawrence (Principal), Mr M Livermore, Mr I Mawson, Mr B Miners, Mrs J Moss, Mr M Pant, Mr S Pearson, Mr D Ramsay, Mr G Rivers, Mrs J Strudwick.

**In Attendance:** Mrs P Bell (Deputy Principal), Mr T Cawkwell (Clerk), Mr G Lambert (Director of Finance) [part meeting], Mrs C Sadler (Assistant Principal).

#### **1 Apologies for Absence and welcome to new Members**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr B Grindrod. A welcome to their first full meetings of the Corporation was extended to Martyn Livermore, Mahesh Pant and Sean Pearson.

#### **2 Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 December 2007**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2007 were approved and signed as a true record by the Chairman.

#### **3 Matters Arising**

##### **(a) Links to UEA through membership of the Corporation**

The Principal reported that he had been unable to progress this through pressure of work.

##### **(b) Student Council Minutes**

The minutes of the Student Council meeting on 28 January 2008 were received. The Chairman expressed his pleasure at having sight of these. It was agreed not to circulate minutes of the Corporation to the Student Council since they were available on the intranet.

##### **(c) Linking Members to particular curriculum areas**

Prior to the meeting, Members had split into groups and attended classroom sessions round the College. This had proved particularly informative to Members and it was noted that interaction with the staff involved had been productive as well. The idea of linking Members to particular curriculum areas had been tried before without great success, but Mrs Bell felt that the position was different now insomuch as Members needed to understand the whole range of teaching activities. Mr Baines expressed the view that this could be asking too much of Members, and there was a continued requirement for Members to focus on specialist areas where they may be particularly knowledgeable. Mrs Bell was concerned about subjects such as sport and public services, where such links might be lacking. Mr

Andrews felt that, while Members should endeavour to become familiar with all areas of the College, it would be sensible to ask a Member with a particular specialism to focus on that area of teaching.

In conclusion, it was agreed that the Principal should write to Members inviting them to indicate their particular areas of interest. Mrs Bowyer added that if as a result of this exercise any areas were not picked up by Members this should be reported to the Corporation in case there was someone who might be willing to concentrate particularly on learning about such an area.

**Action: Principal**

**(d) Confidential minute from meeting of 10 March 2006**

It was agreed that the minute relating to land purchase should remain confidential, but that the rest of the minute could be placed in the public domain.

**(e) Local Government Boundary Review**

Mr Rivers reported on what the Boundary Committee for England was doing to take this forward. He circulated a letter from the Boundary Committee explaining that they would need to consider proposals for unitary authorities both in Norfolk and Suffolk at the same time, as a result of considerations of what to do with the district of Waveney in Suffolk and the borough of Great Yarmouth in Norfolk. A deadline of 31st of December 2008 had been set for completion of the review.

**4 Principal's Report**

*Capital bid* Despite the initial date for completing the capital applications having been deferred, the Principal reported that the 14 May deadline was now very important for submitting the application in principle (and in detail for tennis and equestrian) as each delay would now result in difficulties in accommodating anticipated growth in students. The involvement of design consultants was progressing well, and the next challenge would be consolidating the information and writing the bid and this had to be prepared by College staff. He added that realistically Jubilee 3, assuming it receives support, would not now be completed until Christmas 2009 at the very earliest. He had been encouraged by the support given to the proposals at the final meeting of the LSC Norfolk Committee. A special Corporation meeting would be needed in May to approve the full bid prior to submission.

*Funding discussions for 2008/9* The picture remained unclear. The Specialist College funding factor will be replaced much as predicted, and we would anticipate the College being placed in the 'least affected group'.

*Development Plan/Master planning* The Principal had worked to achieve an agreed position for all those with a particular stake in the future of Easton. He had been pleased that the plan had received support from the parish council, and noted the great deal of help he had received from South Norfolk Council. The challenge now was to find farmland to replace that being lost to building, but he was hopeful that this would be met.

*LSC competition in Thetford* The LSC had invited competitive bids to establish new 16 to 18 provision in Thetford. The bid in which the College was a partner was the only one submitted. Attempts had been made for many years to improve education in Thetford, and success in this initial bid might lead to involvement in a bid to create an academy there. The College would get a marginal amount of funding from this initiative, but the bigger benefit would be in moving things forward in Thetford, and in promoting the role of the College

there. The Corporation would need to supply a letter of support, and in agreeing to this, Members added the proviso that the College should not overstretch itself and its staff, and if opportunities for delay arose, they should be taken.

*Environmental, land-based and outdoor education* The Principal outlined the proposal to create a more integrated approach of this area of work as detailed in an attached paper. The Principal welcomed the chance to build a working relationship with Norfolk Children's Services and other local partners in this area of education. This gave the College a good opportunity to get into mainstream curriculum areas at all ages. There was a management capability in County Hall, and the possibility of funding to work and develop in this area. Mr Livermore added that the Field Studies Council was keen to see the partnership used as a model for other areas. NCS was keen to develop what could be delivered. He was hopeful that the project would get support in principle in May from the County Council.

Mr Baines asked about the timescale. The Principal replied that the project was progressing at the moment, but that it would reach a point where particular decisions would be needed. He noted that the decision about unitary authorities in Norfolk could have an impact on the programme. To a question from Mr Miners, he explained that the College would in effect be involved in an outreach programme on fixed sites and schools around the county and is likely to be the lead partner in this activity. North Norfolk in the past had been a challenge to the College, and he welcomed this initiative as giving it a presence in that area. Mrs Moss particularly supported this approach.

Mrs Sadler said that the programme had not been costed at this stage, and a budget for this activity would have to be considered by the Finance and Enterprises Committee. Mr Livermore proposed that where possible reports and proposals would be produced collectively and presented in the same format to governors and the County Council.

The proposal to further develop up proposals to move forward in this area was agreed.

## **5 Appointment of Vice Principals**

The Principal reported that there had been an intensive process over two days in carrying out shortlists of those to be interviewed. There was a long list of six for the Vice Principal (Curriculum) post, and there had been a long list of three for the Vice Principal (Finance). The sub committee was now in the process of undertaking the necessary short listing to move on to the final interview stage. He noted that a special meeting of the Corporation would be needed to confirm the appointments.

## **6 Deputy Principal's Report**

*Quality Improvement* Mrs Bell drew the attention of Members to the report on the 'teaching squares' initiative at Easton as reported in the Quality Improvement Journal. She noted also the involvement of LANDEX in peer review, and while welcoming this process expressed regret that reports from other colleges could not be shared. The Principal noted that this was because the LANDEX had powers to remove failing colleges under its peer review process, and this sensitivity was the reason why reports were not made public.

Mrs Bell added that Paston College and East Norfolk College were likely to be given grade 1 status; Easton and Great Yarmouth Colleges are grade 2; the result for City College was awaited. She felt that these results reflected well on Norfolk

*oEmployer Responsiveness* Mrs Bell welcomed the appointment of Sharif Sharif as Assistant Principal for Employer Responsiveness, and said that he had a lot of experience in this area.

*Contract with NCS* The ceremony to mark the completion of NVQ 2 in Horticulture by students had gone very well, and Norfolk Children's Services hoped to have more such events.

*Consortia with local schools* 25 students had been interviewed, and 20 signed up so far for the First Diploma in Public Services or in Countryside and Environment.

## **7 Curriculum and Standards Committee**

Draft minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2008 were tabled for Members. In the absence of any chairman of the Curriculum and Standards Committee, Mr Baines reported that Mr Grindrod was standing down as chairman, and covered various points reported in the minutes. Mrs Bell added that two new Members had brought a different dimension to the committee, which she welcomed, particularly the fact that Mr Pant was a statistician. The Chairman noted with regret the departure of Ian Revill, and asked that a letter of good wishes for the future be sent to him from the Corporation. **Action: Clerk**

## **8 Audit Committee**

Draft minutes of the meeting on 4 February 2008 were received. Mr Miners reported on various matters covered in the minutes, noting that most of the work on the internal audit would take place in the next two or three months. A progress report covering the internal audit on HR management would come to the meeting in June, and be reported to the Corporation in July. Mrs Moss pointed out that the Personnel Committee should be involved as well.

Mr Miners also reported that as a result of the discussion on health and safety arising from the internal audit, the responsible person named on the poster should be altered. This point related to the need for all staff to consider and act on points to do with health and safety. The Principal then explained that he takes personal responsibility for Health and Safety and chairs the H & S committee. Staff on high-risk activities were very aware of the dangers involved, and a lot of time was spent in ensuring that such risks were eliminated. In most cases health and safety was also a key element of teaching programmes. Outside inspections had not found any weaknesses in this process. Mr Nix was trained to the appropriate level of qualification to support the Principal in the management of Health and Safety risks, procedures were in place and were proportionate, and recording systems were thorough. He added that accidents occurring to ex-students of the College had been known to lead to scrutiny of the College's teaching. Mr Miners was anxious to point out that the internal audit had stressed the low level of risk involved in the way the College conducted itself in these matters.

## **9 Finance and Enterprises Committee**

The draft minutes of the meeting on 29 February 2008 were received, and reference was made to the tight deadline for producing these minutes of only a week. If possible, this should be avoided in the future.

Mr Mawson then reported on various items in the minutes. The necessary amendment to the Standing Orders in order to reflect the position with regard to the College companies would

be dealt with at the July meeting in order to give Members proper notice of the additions proposed.

The Finance and Enterprises Committee had considered the issue of the College's cash holdings and recommended that the minimum cash holding requirement be reduced from 80 days' to 30 days' for the duration of the next capital project. Mrs Sadler explained that this would be necessary to release funds for the next capital project, thereby minimising borrowing requirements. She added that one of the requirements of maintaining LSC Category A financial health status was that the College should maintain minimum cash balances equivalent to 25 days' income. The Corporation agreed to this recommendation.

## **10 Management accounts for the period to 31 January 2008**

Mr Lambert introduced this item. The mid-year position was given on page 3 and showed a surplus £75,000 better than budgeted, which was largely to do with the timing of income and expenditure.

*Cash flow statement ( page 6)* The timings were speculative at this stage but the cash flow forecast aimed to show the effect of reducing minimum cash holdings to 30 days.

*Mid-year forecast* The figures in section 10 showed forecast income and expenditure compared with the original budget. The enrolments for the year were now clearer, and curriculum elements of the forecast were based on the updated curriculum plan. The figures indicated an operating surplus of £26,000 for the financial year.

*The impact of phase 3* In the past, the College had been able to capitalise fees relating to construction of new buildings at an early stage, but the LSC accounting guidelines have changed and this is no longer permitted until there is a high degree of certainty that the capital project in question will proceed. Early indications from the External Auditors suggested that some fees may be capitalised once the College had received Approval in Principle for the capital project. This issue would be discussed in depth with the External Auditors at the audit planning meeting. Mrs Sadler said that a prudent approach was being taken with £360,000 being the maximum exposure for the College. Mr Miners asked whether this sum would be written off for ever, to which Mrs Sadler replied that this would need clarifying with the external auditors.

*Minor Capital* The Principal made a proposal to apply up to £500,000 of reserves to capital works during the current year with a strong focus on coping with the student number growth. A key element of the college's strategy to cope with growth prior to the completion of the new Jubilee 3 teaching building would be the continued use of the skills block. With reference to the skills block, the Principal explained that the planning condition on its demolition had now been removed, and that the building, if refurbished, could be put to good use in increasing the College's capacity. Full refurbishment would include an extensive check on the presence of asbestos, in improving the roof, and in changing windows and doors, while recognizing that the building was not energy-efficient, nor would it meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act in full. There would also be further projects within the capital sum largely focussed on enabling growth already in the pipeline.

It was agreed to approve the consolidated management accounts for the six months ending the 31 January 2008, including the mid-year forecasts of income & expenditure and the proposal to release a further £500,000 from reserves for minor capital development purposes related to student number growth.

## 11 Capital Statement

A written statement updating Members on the capital project, prepared by Mr Nix, was received and noted.

## 12 Personnel Committee

The minutes of the meeting on 17 January 2008 were received. Mrs Bowyer then spoke to various items in the minutes.

Mrs Bell referred to the idea of having a laptop available at meetings of the Personnel Committee being extended to other committees as well. This would give ready access to College procedures. It was noted also the value in giving Members access to the intranet. Mrs Bowyer referred to the undesirability of Members having to print out documents at home. The Chairman said he felt that Members should be entitled to one ink cartridge and printing paper per annum in order to allow such printing to go ahead. Mr Pant said that access to the intranet for Members would reduce the need for printing and photocopying, and would be environmentally beneficial. This emphasised the need to give Members access to the intranet.

**Action: Clerk**

Mr Pant then asked what the College policy on gender-sensitive language was, and whether the use of the word 'chairman' was appropriate. The Chairman commented that he had always understood the word to refer to *homo sapiens* without reference to gender, and that the practice was acceptable. Mrs Bell added that the College had an equality and diversity policy, which it took very seriously.

## 13 New Instruments and Articles of Government for FE Colleges 2008

The Clerk explained the main changes to the Instrument and Articles:

- Reference to categories in the composition of the Corporation had been removed.
- Minutes not only of Corporation meetings but of committees as well would have to be published on the College website.
- Periodic review of the College's educational character and mission, and of its quality strategy would be required.
- Publication of the rules of the Search and Governance Committee, and of the policy regarding attendance at committee meetings by non-Members would need to be placed on the website.
- The principal functions of the Clerk had been added.
- New rules had been made regarding the suspension and dismissal of staff.

Discussion took place on the best way of placing minutes on the web site, and it was agreed that this should only be done once they had been approved by the Corporation or by the relevant committee.

The Principal explained that the required review of the College's educational character and mission and its quality strategy were covered as part of the annual Development Plan discussions.

## 14 Potential personal liability of Corporation Members

A useful statement of the position by Eversheds was received. The Clerk referred to various points in the statement. Mrs Moss asked whether the College had indemnity insurance for

Members, to which the Principal replied that this cover was in place and he would circulate details of the insurance with the minutes. **Action: Principal**

**15 Calendar of meetings October to December 2007**

A list of dates was received and noted. It was agreed to change the date of the Audit Committee from 6 June to 13 June to allow Mr Miners to attend. With reference to the Corporation meeting on the 11 July, the Chairman stressed that this would in effect be starting at 11 a.m. to allow training of all Members prior to the meeting.

For 2009, it was noted that it might be advisable to alter the March meeting of the Corporation to the end of the second week rather than the first. This would allow a proper gap between the meeting of the F & E Committee and of the Corporation.

**16 Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Corporation would take place on Wednesday 19 March at 5.30 p.m. Thursday 8 May at 5.30 was provisionally fixed as the date of a Corporation meeting to approve the capital application.

**17 Confidential Minute**

There was a confidential item relating to the staff restructuring.