



People Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 1 February 2024 at 5.30 pm, via Teams

Governors: Fabienne Bailey (Committee Chair), Stuart Blackett (FE Corporation Chair), Grant Glendinning (Chief Executive and Group Principal) and Mark Wilson

Apologies: Amanda Olvanhill

In attendance: David Watson (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Link Governor)

Officials: Phil Hastie (Chief Operating Officer), Fiona Sharp (Chief Financial Officer), Kay Taylor (Group Director of HR & People Development), Sarah Thompson (Group Director of Governance) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

Minutes of the previous meeting of the Search and Governance Committee, an action progress log and reports for all agenda items had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

P24/1 Agenda Item 1 – Welcome, apologies for absence, declarations of interest, notification of items of other business

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and **accepted** from Amanda Olvanhill. Amanda had provided questions and comments in advance of the meeting and governors agreed to consider these during the appropriate agenda items. There were no declarations of interest and no additional items of business notified for consideration.

P24/2 Agenda Item 2 – Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair

Governors **agreed** to appoint Fabienne Bailey as Chair and Mark Wilson as Vice Chair of the People Committee for 2023-24.

P24/3 Agenda Item 3 – Minutes of Search and Governance Committee meeting

Minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 4 October 2023 had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record of the meeting.

The action progress log had been circulated and was **noted**. The following action was discussed:

Ministry of Defence links for governor recruitment

It was noted that the group had contacts with the Ministry of Defence via the Armed Forces covenant and these could be utilised if this was a channel that governors wished to explore as part of governor recruitment activity.

Employment Items

P24/4 Agenda Item 4 – People Statistics

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented her circulated report providing a range of staffing data including headcount, absence and staff turnover relating to the period 1 August to 31 October 2023. Comparisons to the FE Workforce Survey 2021/22, published 31 August 2023, were also included.

Governors asked how the reduction in 'unknown' responses by 20% had been achieved. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that existing staff had been asked to review their data via the HR self service and new staff were now asked to provide information as part of onboarding. A governor noted that there were still [REDACTED] individuals that had 'not stated' their ethnic origin, equivalent to around [REDACTED]% of the staff population, and suggested this be explored further to ascertain whether staff had any concerns about sharing this information.

Members commented that the staffing body had a very large majority of white British individuals and asked what steps were being taken to ensure more ethnic diversity. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that, now the number of unknown responses had been reduced, it was possible to compare the staff composition to the student composition, and staffing subgroups would look at potential positive action. The Chief Executive highlighted that this issue had also been discussed by FE+ and it had been noted that almost all Tees Valley colleges had low proportions of staff from ethnic groups other than white British. FE+ would be considering the positive action that could be taken, working with Stockton Sixth Form College, who had had success in this area. Governors were pleased to note the collaborative approach. A governor suggested that the group could consider a 'day in the life of' exercise, to really understand the experience of staff or student members, for example, in relation to facilities available to support individual lifestyle choices or religious requirements, and any barriers faced. This could be via a staff subgroup. The Group Director of HR and People Development highlighted that the group was working to break down stereotypes [REDACTED].

A governor highlighted the importance of preparing students for employment at a national and even global level and suggested benchmarking staff and governor data against national data.

[REDACTED]

Members **noted** the circulated report and recognised that future work would be focussed on improving diversity of staffing and reducing the level of staff turnover.

P24/5 Agenda Item 5 – People Strategy Update

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented her circulated report outlining progress against the Etc. People Strategy. She highlighted: work to improve recruitment and retention, particularly in difficult to recruit areas; introduction of a new appraisal process focussed on behaviours and a new talent management process; and continuing work around employee health and well-being. In response to queries, the Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that progress against the Strategy was monitored by a People Strategy Action Plan and it was agreed that it would be helpful for the People Committee to monitor this.

A governor commented that the group structure could provide additional opportunities for employees, for example, secondments and best practice sharing, and suggested that the benefits of the group structure be promoted to potential employees. The Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that cross-group working was taking place, for example, in maths and English. As part of the talent management process, employees would also be given additional opportunities, for example, to attend a Senior Management Team meeting, take part in specific projects, and attend the group's bespoke leadership programme.

A member asked whether the group supported union representatives to attend union-specific training and development. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that she met with all new union representatives and paid time off for union duties was recorded and paid from the central HR budget. All union representatives were encouraged to participate fully in internal Etc. training and development activities. Governors supported the approach of engaging union representatives through a corporate approach.

Governors asked how high performance of employees was measured. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that this was based on a high quality appraisal and took account of feedback from budget holders. No specific measures were set at present, as a way of minimising bureaucracy.

Governors discussed recruitment incentives [REDACTED] The group was also promoting benefits other than pay, such as pension scheme access and flexible working hours. Governors noted that the group's high quality facilities would also be attractive to potential employees. Governors suggested older people/retirees could be targeted for upcoming positions and the Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that the group made use of associates and also utilised alumni, particularly for guest speaking at NETA. Pay levels could be a barrier for new entrants to the FE workforce from other sectors.

The update was **noted** and governors commended the engaging People Strategy. It was **agreed** to consider the People Strategy Action Plan at future meetings.

P24/6 Agenda Item 6 – Staff Survey

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented the staff survey results for 2023 and three year trends, as well as planned next steps. She asked governors to note the continuing trend of a high response rate (93%). [REDACTED] Fewer colleges were using the QDP survey which was reducing the value of benchmarking.

[REDACTED] Following recent staff training in relation to use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the group was looking at how this could support with reducing workload, for example, by supporting lesson planning.

[REDACTED] The Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that a range of communication activity was planned including Town Hall meetings, informal staff focus groups and team meetings. Governors suggested that more frequent reviews of staff views, particularly in the short term, would help evidence that progress was being achieved.

[REDACTED] Work would continue to promote and embed the group's key strategic objectives.

The report was **noted** and governors recognised that, [REDACTED] overall staff satisfaction remained high and well above benchmark measures with very positive responses against key priorities. Governors recognised the value of the Staff Survey as a tool to inform staff engagement.

P24/7 Agenda Item 7 – People development update

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented her circulated report outlining people development activity across the Etc. Members were asked to note, in particular, that the first cohort of the bespoke One Etc. Leadership programme was close to completion, with an impact finale scheduled for March. [REDACTED]

The update was **noted** and governors were pleased to note use of the apprenticeship levy to support new entrants to the workforce as well as upskilling of existing staff.

P24/8 Agenda Item 8 – Gender Pay Gap reporting

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented the mandatory Gender Pay Gap data for upload to the Government portal and confirmed that this would also be published on the Etc. website as part of a 'public facing' statement. Comparisons with other colleges were difficult due to the impact of, for example, outsourcing services such as cleaning and catering. The group recognised that further work was needed to identify actions and the data would be re-run in March to allow early identification of trends. The priority for the group remained to ensure fairness and equity.

Governors expressed disappointment that the gender pay gap had further declined and suggested that the EDI group explore potential action. Governors noted, in particular, high

numbers of female staff in the lowest quartile. Some positive data was also recognised, for example, the high number of female staff in the higher quartiles. The Group Director of HR and People Development reminded members that this was snapshot data and the group recognised the importance of more detailed analysis.

Governors **agreed** the data for upload and publication on the group website, recognising the importance of continuing to monitor this data. Governors also recommended that the EDI group support with analysis of this information.

P24/9 Agenda Item 9 – HR policies

The Group Director of HR and People Development asked governors to approve proposed updates to the Travel and Subsistence Policy and Procedure and to note the proposed extension to the review dates for a number of staffing policies, in light of the current industrial relations climate.

Governors suggested further amendments to the Travel and Subsistence Policy to provide a more realistic reimbursement of costs. In response to governors' queries, it was confirmed that college staff undertook international travel infrequently and any teaching staff involved in student visits would have access to a college mobile phone. It was also confirmed that relevant staff were required to undertake MiDAS (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme) vehicle training; the group had only a very small fleet of company vehicles.

It was **agreed** to:

- i) approve the revised Travel and Subsistence Policy subject to increasing the breakfast allowance to £10 and the evening meal allowance to £20;
- ii) extend the review dates for the Employee Relations Combined Policy, Redundancy Policy and Procedure, Pay and Pensions Policy and Procedure, Capability Policy and Procedure, Disciplinary Policy and Procedure and the Grievance Policy and Procedure

Governance Items

P24/10 Agenda Item 10 – Governor equality, diversity and skills data

The Group Director of Governance thanked the Governance Support Officer for collating the board composition data and added that a governor's earlier comment about comparing data against national as well as local datasets would also be incorporated into governor data. Following a committee member's comment about the lack of obvious diversity in Audit Committee membership, summary data had been provided for the People Committee as a possible example for adoption; the Group Director of Governance asked for feedback on whether this was felt to be helpful and, whilst bearing in mind the sensitivity of some data for such small cohorts, if any additional information would be useful. The Group Director of Governance also highlighted a governor's suggestion about engaging more with community groups directly or indirectly affected by Board decisions.

Governors agreed that the breakdown of skills and diversity by committee was helpful particularly as committees could be more susceptible to bias than the Board due to their smaller membership. [REDACTED]

A governor also commented that the data analysis enabled the People Committee to make better decisions and highlighted the mismatch between governors' skills and experience and the sectors served by the group, for example, the lack of governors with a performing arts or health and social care background.

Governors **noted** the diversity and skills information and **agreed** to take it into account when considering governor recruitment activity, particularly in relation to ethnic diversity and skills. Governors also supported the development of committee equality, diversity and skills data.

P24/11 Agenda Item 11 – Corporation and committee membership, recruitment and succession

The Clerk confirmed that, at its last meeting, the FE Corporation had agreed to increase its maximum composition to 20 members; since then, Anne Vickers had submitted her resignation with immediate effect and membership currently consisted of 18 governors. Governors **agreed** that, in the first instance, an approach should be made to the Sir William Turner Foundation (SWTF) to discuss a possible replacement for Anne. In addition, there was a longer standing vacancy resulting from Vanessa Housley's resignation and the committee had previously agreed to concentrate on knowledge and understanding of education and skills, with the aim of strengthening Standards Improvement Committee membership and succession planning for its leadership. Due to the high number of governors joining the Board in 2023, recruitment activity had been deferred to Spring 2024 and would now commence.

Governors discussed the availability of a suitable SWTF trustee, [REDACTED] In response to a governor's question, the Clerk confirmed that, whilst there had been a requirement for a SWTF representative on the Redcar & Cleveland College (RCC) Corporation, there was no such requirement for the Etc. Corporation though, as part of the merger, a place had been set aside. A governor asked if there were any property disposal rights implications and the Chief Operating Officer confirmed that this would only be relevant if RCC stopped being used for educational purposes.

It was **agreed** that, given the importance of the relationship with the SWTF, the Chief Executive and Group Principal, Corporation Chair and Clerk would discuss this further following the meeting.

The importance of recruiting a governor with education experience in a timely manner was noted, given that the group expected an Ofsted inspection before September 2025 and the value of having governors with experience of inspection as part of the Board's skills mix.

Governors then discussed whether there were any exceptional circumstances which might require Subhash Chaudhary to serve as a governor beyond his second term; it was **agreed**

that, although Subhash brought valuable skills experience and employer engagement links, there were no exceptional reasons for an extension and it would therefore be inappropriate for him to serve beyond his eight years. With his term of office ending in October 2024, it was deemed that there would be sufficient time to appoint a new independent governor.

At the suggestion of a governor, it was **agreed** that the People Committee should keep both committee members' and governors' retirement dates under review to aid succession planning and ensure staggered leaving dates.

A governor suggested accessing funded support from the DfE for governor recruitment as with the previous recruitment round; it was **agreed** to seek Corporation approval for an application. The Group Director of Governance noted that the costs of governor recruitment had been included in the Governance budget.

Governors:

- i) **noted** the membership and recruitment update;
- ii) **agreed** that the focus of future governor recruitment activities, should be:
 - education / quality skills and experience, with both governor and senior manager suggestions for possible candidates to be sought
 - an approach to the Sir William Turner Foundation
 - general board skills and experience, with a particular focus on increasing ethnic diversity
- iii) **agreed** to recommend to Corporation an application to the DfE governor recruitment service and to commence recruitment activity as soon as possible.

P24/12 Agenda Item 12 – Appraisal of Corporation Chair

The Group Director of Governance's report detailed some possible approaches to the Corporation Chair's appraisal and these were discussed by the committee.

Governors commented that the Education and Training Foundation (ETF) Competency Framework for Chairs was a useful resource on which to base the appraisal. A governor highlighted that the most important thing was to maximise governors' participation and suggested, as he had seen used successfully in other organisations, a simple questionnaire asking for between one and three things the Chair did well and some things that could be done better. The Corporation Chair supported this approach though stressed that he was always open to feedback from governors at any time, whilst realising that some people could find this awkward. He added that he would prefer feedback not to be anonymised.

Governors **agreed** to recommend the use of the ETF Chairs Competency Framework alongside a simple questionnaire for this year's appraisal of the Corporation Chair to the FE Corporation.

P24/13 Agenda Item 13 – Governance review and self assessment

The Clerk highlighted that her report outlined progress on the Governance Action Plan for 2023-24; it included suggestions for support for committee chairs, including development of a role description to provide guidance, particularly in relation to providing a clear conclusion to agenda items, and consideration of the introduction of regular meetings of committee chairs. The report also included some suggestions for Governance Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with committee members encouraged to suggest additional or alternative measures. To aid meeting effectiveness reviews, the introduction of a termly question to focus discussion was also proposed.

Governors discussed whether governors would be comfortable with an explicit question on whether all had contributed to the meeting and it was suggested that this would rather be something for chairs to be cognisant of. A governor commented that he did not feel participation to be a particular problem for this Board.

Governors **noted** the Governance Action Plan update and **agreed** to recommend to the FE Corporation:

- i) the suggested approach to support for Chairs;
- ii) the development of Governance Key Performance Indicators;
- iii) the introduction of termly meeting effectiveness review questions.

P24/14 Agenda Item 14 – Governor appointment and induction procedures

The Group Director of Governance apologised for the late circulation of this paper and the accompanying procedure; ongoing discussions were taking place with HR concerning some elements of the procedure, specifically around Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and further changes might be required following the outcome of these discussions. She highlighted that it was a requirement to publish the procedure on the Etc. website and that it was particularly important for this to reflect current arrangements as the group moved into a governor recruitment cycle. Any further changes would be brought to a future meeting.

A governor commented that greater involvement of governors in the induction process would help to combat barriers and help governors feel included more quickly; a suggestion from an independent governor to use mentors as part of the induction process was also supported.

A governor suggested that new governors should complete Safeguarding and Health and Safety training before receiving their governor lanyards.

Governors **agreed** to recommend the updated governor recruitment and induction procedures to the FE Corporation for approval and publication on the Etc. website.

Closing Items

P24/15 Agenda Item 15 – Any other business

There were no items of other business.

P24/16 Agenda Item 16 – Approval of documents for public inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents should be made available for public inspection, with the exception of reports under Employment Items (agenda items 4 to 9) deemed commercial in confidence. The public facing statement on 2023 Gender Pay Gap Reporting would be published on the Etc. website in accordance with statutory requirements and approved strategies and policies made available on the Etc. Staff Gateway; minutes of the meeting would be made available for public inspection following committee approval.

P24/17 Agenda Item 17 – Date, time and venue of next meeting

Thursday 23 May, 5.30 pm via Teams

P24/18 Agenda Item 18 – Key themes and meeting effectiveness

The following items were identified as key themes:

- Review of staffing data [REDACTED]
- Staff survey [REDACTED]
- Gender pay gap had further declined; further work would be undertaken to identify actions
- Other staffing items considered included: progress update against the People Strategy; people development update; extension to review dates for a number of staffing policies due to the industrial relations climate; and approval of the Travel and Subsistence Policy
- Governor equality, diversity and skills data: analysis to be used to support governor recruitment activity and selected data summaries to be developed for committees
- Governor vacancies considered including retention of links with the Sir William Turner Foundation following Anne Vicker's resignation, strengthening education experience on the Corporation, increasing diversity and succession planning
- Recommended Chair's appraisal process to the FE Corporation, supported by the ETF's Competency Framework for Chairs of FE College Corporations
- Update on Governance Action Plan and proposals for support for committee chairs
- Recommended Governor appointment, re-appointment and induction arrangements to the FE Corporation for publication on the Etc. website

Governors assessed the effectiveness of the meeting and noted:

- The high quality of papers
- High levels of engagement and discussion

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm

Approved at a meeting of the People Committee held on Monday 18 March 2024