

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
held on 4 March 2022 at 15:00
via videoconference

¹PRESENT: G Davies (E); J Emm (SCS); T Floyd (E); N Hopkins (E, Chair); J Lander (E); M Lauder (E, Co-Vice Chair); J Milburn (P); S Morgan (E); A Neal (E) (until minute 15); H Perry (S); C Wilson (E, Co-Vice Chair).

In attendance: S Grant – Deputy Principal
N Heslop - Director of Finance
B Stokes – Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
M Treagust – Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
S Willson – Head of Corporate Governance (Clerk to the Corporation)

APOLOGIES

1. Apologies were received from Z Carter, N Moody and J Plenderleith.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2. There were no interests to declare.

T LEVEL CAPITAL FUND

3. The Board had received the report of the Principal proposing submissions to the Department for Education (DfE) T Level Capital Fund (TLCF) Wave 4 for Buildings and Facilities Improvement Grants (BFIG) to support the delivery of T Levels. The proposals followed discussion at the Governors' Seminar in January and summarised the objectives, scope and indicative costs for four applications to be submitted by the deadline of 11 March 2022, with the detailed floor plans for each project provided.
4. The Principal explained the reasons for the SLT's proposal to submit 4 separate bids, including the factors for resubmitting a revised bid for Construction.
5. The Board carefully considered the proposals, seeking clarifications and additional information in a number of areas, including in relation to student enrolment forecasts for T Levels, the impact on the wider curriculum offer and the College's ability to meet local skills needs, and the impact if any of the bids was not successful.
6. It was noted that recruitment to the Construction T Level was healthy, with no other offer at Level 3, and applications for Health & Science (Adult Nursing) were increasing as the College worked with local schools to increase their understanding of the pathway. Introducing the Digital Production, Design and Development T Level was also integral to the curriculum plan for meeting digital skills needs. Recruitment of Agriculture students was on an upward trend, with increased interest from those who were not from a farming background.

¹ (E) = External; (P) = Principal; (S) = Staff; (SCS) = Sparsholt College Services Staff Governor; (St) = Student

7. The Board discussed the new plans for the redevelopment of the beef barn to provide an upgraded dairy to deliver the Land-Based T Level and the Principal explained the advantages of the change in location for the operation of the farm and land-based curriculum. It was noted that continuing to maintain a dairy herd and the inclusion of both robotic and manual milking facilities responded to the skills needs of the local farming employers and this was endorsed by governors with knowledge of the farming sector. The Principal also confirmed that improved slurry handling was included in the design.
8. The Principal summarised the SLT's provisional plans for other farm buildings and the layout of the farm site and assured the Board about the deliverability of a replacement beef barn through College capital expenditure in 2022/23 and in terms of planning requirements. Governors endorsed the intention to upgrade the farm to strengthen the land-based offer and support animal welfare and requested a site map to show the proposed changes when this was available.
9. In relation to the anticipated costs of each project, the Principal explained that, subsequent to the circulation of the report, the cost consultants had confirmed that the Construction project costs had increased to £1.94m, with a resulting increase in the College's proposed match funding of £40k. The new design also included some additional demolition costs which had not yet been confirmed.
[Addendum: subsequent to the meeting and prior to the applications being submitted the indicative costs for the Construction project were confirmed to be £2.05m]
10. The indicative project costs for the Digital and Health & Science projects were each £200k.
11. The indicative total costs for the Land-based project were £2m but would be confirmed now that the revised design of the Land-Based project had been received. The Principal noted that some design elements might need adjusting depending on the level of anticipated costs.
12. The Board discussed the project costs and the recommendation that bids with less than 50% match funding from College cash reserves would be unlikely to be successful given the College's ESFA financial health rating. The Board was satisfied that the financial assessments which had been undertaken by the Director of Finance provided assurance that key financial performance indicators could still be achieved, including cash days in hand and an acceptable ESFA financial health grade.
13. Given the increase in the Construction project costs and ensuring the budget included tolerance for other factors as the projects were finalised, the SLT proposed an increased upper limit of £2.75m funding from cash reserves and the Board agreed that this was acceptable, given the strategic investment priorities for the College.
14. The Board discussed the risk of cost inflation, with the unstable world economic situation, and noted that the DfE set fixed levels for contingency costs for the TLCF bids. The SLT advised that the projects had been carefully costed and that increased costs outside of the College's control would need to be first controlled through measures such as redesign and value engineering, where this was possible and within DfE criteria.
15. Additionally, the Director of Finance noted that the financial projections produced as part of the bids indicated a low level of financial risk given the positive trend in enrolments and the confirmation of ESFA funding for 2022-23.

16. **Resolved** – that the College submit the four proposed applications for Buildings and Facilities Improved Grants to the T Level Capital Fund for the Digital, Health & Science, Construction and Land-Based capital projects, requesting match funding in line with the published DfE guidance, with the balance funded by a contribution from the College cash reserves.
17. **Resolved** - that the College funding from its cash reserves up to a total upper limit of £2.75m to enable delivery of the four T Level projects.

CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

18. The Chair of Governors noted the terrible conflict occurring in Ukraine and invited the Principal to report on any related matters.
19. The Principal confirmed that the College did not have any Russian or Belarus suppliers. It was possible that the College's energy suppliers bought gas from Russia, as one of several countries providing gas to the companies, but the College was not able to quantify how much. No action was recommended at this point.
20. The Principal reported that the College Group had no known Ukrainian staff or students, but a number of students and staff were Polish, or had Polish families, and wellbeing support was being offered. These included employees of the College's catering supplier. In addition, a tutorial unit looking at the issues raised by the conflict, including concerns such as identifying reliable news sources and ways of giving, had been prepared to be delivered to students the following week.
21. The Principal explained that it was understood that one (over 18) student had left their studies as a result of being contacted by a military contractor. This was not known in advance and there had been no further communications from the student at that time.
22. The Principal also reported that management were seeking to identify staff with family in the military who might be affected. The Chair of Governors suggested that this be extended to seeing whether students from military service families who were affected needed any specific support.
23. The Deputy Principal additionally explained that the College would check that students from Russian families (2 students) were not experiencing any issues in terms of their safety or wellbeing while at College.
24. The Chair of Governors highlighted the raised cyber security alert level by the National Cyber Security Centre in response to malicious cyber incidents in and around Ukraine and sought assurance about the College's position.
25. The Principal confirmed that the College had acted on the latest advice and that cyber security remained an ongoing priority and would continue to be communicated to staff and students.

BUSINESS CONTINUITY

26. The Chair of Governors congratulated College management and members of staff on their outstanding actions to manage the impact of Storm Eunice which had caused a lengthy power outage and loss of mains water supply. Crisis management actions taken had ensured the safety of residential students, staff on campus and animals.
27. The Principal commended the leadership provided by the Deputy Principal on campus.

28. The meeting ended at 16:15.