

**COUNCIL MINUTES: Open Business - 11.00 a.m., Monday 29 January 2024**  
A virtual meeting held at various locations via Zoom software

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***Council Open Business - minutes 1 to 11 inclusive.***

**1. Attendance and Apologies**

**Present:** John Graystone (in the Chair), Stephen Nicholls, Victory Ezeofor, Jenni Jones-Annetts, Tim Palazon, Jan Tiley, Cathy Clark, Judith Evans; Chris Franks (to end of minute 6).

**In Attendance:** Kathryn Robson (Chief Executive), Cath Hicks (Head of Learner Services & Resources), Mark Baines (Head of Curriculum and Performance), Stephen Thomas (Clerk); Iola Llwyd (interpreter).

**Apologies:** Sam Emmett, Salamatu Fada, Nicole Kinnaird, Dona Lewis, Siôn Aled Owen.

The meeting was quorate throughout. No new declarations of interest were made.

**2. Minutes of Open Business at the Council meeting of 28 November 2023 and matters arising**

The minutes of the Open Business proceedings of the previous hybrid Council meeting, held via Zoom, were approved as a correct record. All action points listed at the end of those minutes had been implemented: the Environmental Policy approved there was now on the ALW web-site's Sustainability page; and the flu vaccine charge to be paid for by ALW had been publicised, with 4 colleagues having taken up the offer thus far.

**3. Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting of 15 December 2023 and annual report of its Chair to the Welsh Government**

This had been a more than satisfactory meeting according to its Chair, Chris Franks, with both internal and external auditors present. The Annual Report and Financial Statements had a clean auditing report once more (minutes 2 and 3) from Baker Knoyle Accountants, and the 'in camera' item without staff representatives had once again been highly reassuring (minute 4). The 2022-23 figures relating to ESOL teaching were noted (minute 1) with the potential for greater balancing of the curriculum coming in the current academic year with expansion of the Multiply basic numeracy programme - though that was time limited to spring 2025.

As for internal audit work, the one uncompleted item from the previous year's recommendations by TIAA, regarding an updated branch handbook (minute 6), was being reviewed as a new branch had recently come into being. This year's reports had all received high assurance commentaries from TIAA other than the one on IT Strategy, which afforded 'reasonable' assurance only. The move to cloud-based systems now underway would strengthen systems in that realm and a revised strategy would follow. The Council noted the minutes and the attached annual report to the Welsh Government from the Committee's Chair.

#### **4. Risk Register for January 2024**

No risks had changed in their gross or net risk status since the Register of November 2023, reviewed by the Council and by Audit Committee. The Christmas/New Year holiday period meant that there had been comparatively little time for noteworthy progress or consequent changes to be made since that previous version. The number of risks listed (potentially too many, in the Council Chair's view) continued to find favour amongst Audit Committee members.

#### **5. Chief Executive's Report, January 2024**

Kathryn Robson reported that ALW was working with Wales TUC Cymru on potential employability courses, linked to the Tata Steel redundancies announcement connected to Port Talbot. In other news, the operational launch of CTER had been postponed to August 2024 while further appointments to the Board were pursued. This meant that HEFCW had a 'stay of execution' and changes to the regulation and funding of post-16 education and skills would be more evolutionary than originally planned. The note in the Report about possible Chwarae Teg legacy courses being partially taken on by ALW referred to subjects such as health and safety, the menopause, and female leadership. In the light of the demise of Chwarae Teg, ALW was putting continued efforts into its relationships with senior civil servants, while also raising its profile in the realm of the Welsh Government more broadly.

The Black Leadership Group had asked ALW to highlight its continuing professional development activities in the race field as good practice (especially the 'active upstander' session, co-written by ALW) at a conference. Developments in international partnerships, marketing initiatives and IT modernisation were also noted.

***[A confidential minute, relating to a discussion on a property matter conducted at this point, has been recorded separately.]***

The other major issue discussed was that of funding and financial security (section 5 of the Report). There remained some fluctuation in the scenarios that Welsh Government was putting forward, and no finalised sum had been confirmed. While positive that an increase of 0.57% in ALW's 2024-25 core grant from Welsh Government was potentially being proposed, this would leave the Organisation responsible for covering the rest of the cost of living increase of 3.5% for salaries for that year out of its own resources, so representing a cut in real terms. Internal resources would also be needed to cover inevitable reductions in Personal Learning Account, Mental Health and Well-being, and property maintenance payments which came from separate Welsh Government sources. The most difficult sector to plan for was trade union courses, as Wales TUC Cymru had received a 38% reduction in its governmental budget, which would have a knock-on effect for ALW. On the other hand, the good news was that almost £2.2 million of Multiply project funding would come through ALW's books, with a significant administration charge being levied as part of that total.

Some of the Organisation's cash reserves had been considered for investment in a building to be bought in Swansea, but a suitable property had not yet been identified. Many FE colleges had elevated levels of reserves, as did ALW. The view was expressed that this fact was not likely to be taken into consideration by the Welsh Government or CTER when determining ALW's future funding allocations. There remained no 3-year running budget from the Welsh Government to assist in financial planning; this was something that might be addressed by CTER when it was in place.

## **6. Key Performance Indicators for the Senior Management Team - revised format**

These indicators had previously been set out on an annual basis, per calendar year. This new format presented them differently, with fewer of them: three had annual targets while the others had a timescale to 2026, in line with the Strategic Plan's cycle. Kathryn Robson proposed that this be an item at May's strategic residential event, as she felt that some of the objectives could be more ambitious.

Steve Nicholls asked if there could be an additional indicator covering a growth in overall student numbers each year. Members of the SMT were not convinced about that as a measure, as they considered it to be susceptible to quite simple 'manipulation' through the laying on of more short-term courses. Rather than a quantitative measure such as that, a qualitative one would be more meaningful, and could be included by setting the progression made by learners as a measure. **It was agreed that that should be an addition made, and that further emendations would be discussed in May.**

## **7. Minutes of the joint Learner Experience and Resources Committee meeting of 12 December 2023**

Steve Nicholls picked out key points from the minutes, including the rise in learner numbers in the North region linked to more targeted marketing efforts, and the opening of the Port Talbot Repair Café and its branch status. On minute 9 it was explained that the awarding body NOCN was reducing its provision in Wales as there was less demand for its qualifications. ALW was therefore transferring some of its courses to Agored Cymru qualifications instead. It was still feasible that digital resources required for rolling out the Multiply programme could be covered by monies from the Tudor Bowen Jones endowment fund.

## **8. Draft audited Report and Financial Statements for year ended 31 July 2023**

This document had been thoroughly considered at the two committee meetings held in December 2023 and had been recommended for approval by the Council at both. An unqualified auditor's report, strong balance sheet and achievement of all financial objectives were commendable aspects of the Report. **Council approved the Report as it stood and authorised it for ratification at the AGM in April 2024.**

## **9. Financial Statements - Management Accounts for 1 August to 31 December 2023**

Much of the central content of this report had in effect been discussed under minute 5. Mark Baines referred to the reassuring fact that 65% of the year's educational delivery had been reached by the end of December. With a positive financial outcome forecast for the year's activities, the balance sheet too could be further strengthened by the year's end.

## **10. Self-assessment of meeting's proceedings by Council members**

The members of SMT felt that with a late November Council meeting and December committee gatherings, the position of the Christmas/New Year holidays meant that there were too few new data and developments to make a late January Council meeting such as this truly meaningful. It was also their belief that given the greater number of public events now organised by ALW and reinstated in the calendar there were alternative, and potentially more appropriate, events at which Council members could be present and make useful contributions. **It was agreed by Council members that the January meeting be kept in the calendar of dates for 2025, but 'in pencil' so to speak, as it could be cancelled at the say-so of the SMT should they consider that there was no urgent or important business to be covered in it.**

Victory Ezeofor proposed that the benefits and disadvantages of Artificial Intelligence was a subject of contemporary importance in the educational field that should be discussed by the governors. It was in its infancy in terms of the Organisation's use of it, but it was true that it did not constitute part of the strategic plan at present and it would be timely to consider its implications. **It was suggested and agreed that this should form one of the central issues at the May strategic planning event.**

#### 11. Dates for Council and associated meetings in the current academic year:

- Monday 11 March 2024
- Tuesday 9 April 2024: Annual Conference inc. our AGM: Theatr Soar, Merthyr Tydfil
- Wednesday 22 & Thursday 23 May 2024: Strategic Planning Event: Nant Gwrtheyrn, Gwynedd
- Friday 5 July 2024

#### ACTION POINTS

Reference	Minute name	Action agreed	Action by whom	Action by when
Minute 6	Key Performance Indicators for the Senior Management Team – revised format	It was agreed that an indicator measuring progression by learners should be an addition made, and that further emendations would be discussed at May's strategic planning event.	SMT	May 2024
Minute 8	Draft audited Report and Financial Statements for year ended 31 July 2023	Council approved the Report as it stood and authorised it for ratification at the AGM in April 2024.	MB / ST	April 2024
Minute 10	Self-assessment of meeting's proceedings by Council members	It was agreed by Council members that the January Council meeting be kept in the calendar of dates for 2025, but 'in pencil' so to speak, as it could be cancelled at the say-so of the SMT should they consider that there was no urgent or important business to be covered in it.	SMT / ST	July 2024
		It was suggested and agreed that the use of Artificial Intelligence in education should form one of the central issues at the May strategic planning event.	SMT / ST	May 2024