
Minutes of the 336th COUNCIL meeting, Wednesday 14th June 2023 in Conference Meeting Room 1B and by videoconference

PRESENT: Dame Yve Buckland (Chair) Professor Aleks Subic
 Dr Sue Noffke Dr Jason Wouhra
 Dr Vij Randeniya Kathy Cooper
 Tim Pile Bobby Thandi
 Emmanuelle Labeau Atul Rana
 Dr Phil Popham Dr Matthew Crummack*
 Amardeep Gill Professor Gill Nicholls
 Shaid Parveen

APOLOGIES: Dr Jason Wouhra

IN ATTENDANCE: Liam Nevin

* Attendance by Teams

Governance Matters

22/75 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Dr Jason Wouhra.

22/76 Declarations of Interest

The Pro-Chancellor declared an interest in agenda item 5.4 and advised that she would leave the room for this discussion.

22/77 Minutes

The minutes of the 335th meeting of the Council were agreed as a true and accurate record.

22/78 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

Decisions Made by the Pro-Chancellor Under Delegated Authority

22/79 NOTED:

That in order to avoid a price rise of 9.5% that would take effect in April and in view of the significant lead in times being experienced, approval be given to orders of £2,150,000 comprised of:

- Phase 3 of AV refresh programme due to commence April 2024 £1,500,000
- Fit out of 8 additional teaching and learning rooms for September 2023 £260,000
- Fit out of 8 teaching and learning spaces in King Edward House (Spring 2024) £260,000

- Upgrade of APEC teaching rooms for September 2024 £130,000 • All orders to be placed in accordance with procurement awards or through framework suppliers.
- There was contingency within capital budgets to commit the expenditure

STANDING REPORTS FROM OFFICERS/MEMBERS

Vice-Chancellor's Report

22/80 RECEIVED:
Paper CO/23/14 being the Vice-Chancellor's report to Council.

- 22/81 NOTED:
- That the decision of Council concerning the Maths School, following the deliberations at the March meeting had been conveyed to the Department for Education. A compelling case had been made for the Maths School to be located in the building to be vacated by NCATI, and this would also allow for the expansion of the Aston University Engineering Academy.
 - The Medical School had been given full approval by the General Medical Council.

Actions:

- *A presentation on the International Strategy be delivered to a subsequent meeting of the Council.*

Pro-Chancellor's Report

22/83 RECEIVED:

An oral report from the Pro-Chancellor.

- 22/84 NOTED:
- The Pro-Chancellor thanked all involved in the design and delivery of Astonbury, which had proven to be a great success. The President of the Student Union was specifically thanked for his role in leading the arrangements for the event.
 - The Pro-Chancellor continued to receive positive feedback from partners in respect of the collaborative activity that was being undertaken.
 - That the annual review meetings between the Pro-Chancellor and the independent members were being scheduled over the summer and independent members were encouraged to consider how the University best maximised the benefit of their skills.

President of the Students' Union Report

22/85 RECEIVED:

- Paper CO/23/15 being an update from the President of the Students Union.

- 22/86 NOTED:
- That there had been a significant period of progress and achievement for the Aston Student's Union with student engagement including the successful return of the Graduate ball, and the Astonbury festival.
 - A fifth sabbatical officer had been added to the ASU team, the Vice-President Communities, with the role being created to foster a more connected, supportive and engaged student community.
 - Elections had been completed with voting turnout the highest in the ASU's history.

STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE

Draft 2030 Strategy

22/87 RECEIVED:

- A presentation from the Vice-Chancellor setting out an overview of the strategy, supplemented by paper CO/23/16 being the full strategy including the measures of success.

22/88 NOTED:

- That, subject to approval the draft strategy would be formally published in September, and in the interim the strategy would be issued to members of the Executive and Senior Management Group so that they could commence objective setting and the establishment of lead indicators.

22/89 DISCUSSED:

- Governance arrangements would need to be appropriate to support the delivery of the strategy and ensure that decision making was robust and at pace, making a clear distinction between the roles of Council and the Vice-Chancellor and Executive. It was noted that the external governance review would be concluded by the end the academic year and that it had been commissioned to address these issues.
- The measures of success were commended, it being noted that the absence of these was a limitation of the previous strategy.
- Independent members could contribute effectively by drawing on their skill sets to support the Executive outside of formal Council meetings, and this arrangement would be developed as an action arising from this agenda item.
- Over the period of the strategy, it would be necessary to respond to unforeseen events and the annual plan would facilitate a portfolio approach to performance and risk management that would provide the flexibility to address such contingencies.
- The importance of empowering staff to deliver and ensuring engagement and ownership of the targets was essential. It was noted that approximately one hundred and ten leaders had been engaged from the outset and other staff had also been engaged in working groups to develop specific aspects of the strategy

22/90 RESOLVED:

- **That the 2030 Strategy be approved**

Action:

- University Secretary, Pro-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor to develop buddying arrangements for Executive and independent members of Council.

Draft Estate Strategy

22/91 RECEIVED:

- Paper CO/23/17 being the draft estates strategy

22/92 NOTED:

The Estates Strategy would facilitate the delivery of a number of objectives:

- Expansion to accommodate growth
- Embedding Aston as an urban university within our City Centre
- Leveraging the estate for revenue resilience
- Developing an inclusive and sustainable campus environment
- Managing the long- term estate

22/94 RESOLVED:

- **That Council note the challenges in relation to the carbon reduction milestones and carbon neutral target.**
- **That the Estates Strategy be approved.**

Draft Digital Strategy

22/95 RECEIVED:

- Paper CO/23/18 being the draft Digital Enterprise Strategy.

22/96 NOTED:

- That the strategy would deliver the key digital objectives to ensure that the University adopted a digital first approach, developed and implemented a data enabled enterprise model, and enabled ubiquitous learning that leverages current and emerging digital technologies effectively.

22/97 DISCUSSED:

- That the vision to drive change through technology was commendable and would also require culture change in the University.
- A structured development programme underpinned the strategy and this would deliver data literacy training to five hundred staff over a five-year period.
- Adequate resourcing to deliver the strategy was essential and the development of organisational capacity would be supported by the commissioning of external support.

22/98 RESOLVED:

- **That the Digital Strategy be approved**

Annual Budget and Five-Year Financial Plan

22/99 RECEIVED:

- Paper CO/23/19 being the annual budget and five-year financial plan.

22/100 NOTED:

- That the paper summarised the budget and planning process for 2023/24 to 2027/28 and then presents the resulting budget and financial projections for approval.
- Following detailed discussion at the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, key activities in the Estates Strategy had been reassessed with a view to smoothing the profile of the plan and the associated impact on cash balances.

22/101: DISCUSSED:

- There had been a thorough review of the proposals at the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, noting that the strategy was strongly supported and that “do nothing” was not an option. The investment proposed would require the University to achieve its forecast revenue growth and the rationale for this had been provided.
- The re-profiling of capital expenditure as presented to Council was prudent.
- There was adequate information to support the recommendations presented to Council but by way of further assurance the Finance and Infrastructure Committee would meet with the Vice-Chancellor and members of the Executive to further consider the revenue projections and these would be reported back to Council.
- Revenue growth requirements would be included as a strategic risk in the risk register.

22/102: RESOLVED

- **The proposed revenue budget, including the target of a 3.1% surplus be approved.**
- **The proposed financial projections for 2024/25 to 2027/28 be approved, noting the implicit revenue growth and cost-efficiencies required to deliver a target 3% surplus and the risks to the assumptions used.**
- **The revised capital expenditure plan be approved noting that this does not give approval for capital projects but provides an expenditure framework for the Estates Strategy.**

Action:

- *Meeting of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee to be arranged to further consider revenue growth projections.*

- *Revenue growth risk to be included as a strategic risk in the risk register*

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

Referred by Audit and Risk Committee

22/103 RECEIVED:

Paper CO/23/20 being the upward report from the Audit and Risk Committee.

22/104 NOTED:

- The contents of the upwards report.

22/105 DISCUSSED:

- That the TRAC procedure was not currently compliant with reporting requirements. The process would be compliant once the new system with workforce modelling was introduced and in the interim the Finance Team would continue to apply reasonableness checks to the aggregated data.
- PwC had expressed some concerns about the capacity of the Digital Team noting that the majority of extensions to outstanding internal audit recommendations were attributable to the team. The Chief Operating Officer was monitoring this.
- The Committee had expressed some concerns about the number of medium risks and whether planned actions had been completed with appropriate assurance. This would be further reviewed by the Committee in subsequent meetings.

Referred by Finance and Infrastructure Committee

22/106 RECEIVED:

- Paper CO/23/21 being the upward report from the Finance and Infrastructure Committee.

22/107 NOTED:

- The contents of the upward report with the Chair noting that a substantial part of the meeting was given over to the consideration of the draft budget and that there had been constructive discussions leading to the budget proposals considered and approved by Council (minute 22/102)

Referred by Senate

22/108 RECEIVED AND NOTED:

- Paper CO/23/22 being the upward reports from the Senate meeting.

Referred by Remuneration and Workforce Strategy Committee

22/112 RECEIVED AND NOTED:

- Paper CO/23/34 being the upward report from the Remuneration and Workforce Strategy Committee

Date of Council's Next Meeting

22/113 The next Council meeting is the Evening Reception on the 26th September (18.00-21.30) followed by the Away Day on the 27th September (9.00 -15.45)