

MINUTES OF CORPORATION MEETING HELD ON 26TH MARCH 2026

PART ONE

Members:	In Attendance:
Paul Averis	Kirsti Lord, Deputy Principal Curriculum, Innovation & Student Success
Adam Comery	Maria Turnbull-Kemp, Chief Finance Officer – minutes 262 to 291
Barbara Van Der Eecken (Vice-Chair)	Lesley Venables, Head of Governance
Sasha James	Charlotte Wood, Head of Safeguarding – minutes 252 to 261
Heather Lodge	
Mary Mahoney	
Stuart Pedley-Smith	
Jat Sharma (Principal)	
Nelson Tanyanyiwa	
Helen Troalen	
Graham Ward (Vice-Chair)	
David Wheeler (Chair)	

APOLOGIES		
238	Apologies for absence were received from Edward Ng, Tony Sadla and Andrew Chiduku. The non-attendance of the two student governors was noted.	
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST		
239	There were no declarations of interest in any specific agenda items.	
APPOINTMENT OF SECOND VICE-CHAIR		
240	The Head of Governance reported that, following a nomination process, Barbara Van Der Eecken had been nominated by several governors for the role of Vice-Chair of the Corporation.	
241	Resolved – That Barbara Van Der Eecken be appointed as Vice-Chair of the Corporation for a 2year term of office, commencing on 1 st April 2026	
MINUTES		
242	Resolved – That the minutes of the meetings held on 11 th December 2025 (Parts 1 & 2) and 9 th February 2026 (special meeting – Part 2) be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	
MATTERS ARISING		
243	<p>Governors received a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting and the Corporation noted that the majority of these had been completed or were in train, with the following updates:</p> <p>Minute 109 – it was agreed that the next scheduled Corporation meeting would be held at the Green Lane Campus and that student-centred activity would take place prior to this.</p> <p>Minute 11 – governors agreed that a representative from Walsall Council would be invited to present a session on the local strategy once the ALC project had been formally approved by the Corporation.</p> <p>Minute 560 – the Principal reported that a draft version of the Compact agreement had been received from the Combined Authority, which had outlined ways for local colleges to collaborate and</p>	JS/LV

	<p>possibly apply for Government funding. However, there had been concerns about the governance aspects of the Compact on which further work would be undertaken to ensure that the integrity of each college's Instrument & Articles were not overridden by any collective agreement. The final version of the Compact was due to be launched in September 2026 and a copy would be circulated to governors.</p> <p>The Combined Authority was highly involved in the strategy to address the level of NEETs in the region. It was also noted that there had been a substantial amount of leadership changes amongst local colleges, which could impact on the Compact.</p> <p>The Principal felt that some form of college specialisation was likely in the future under this arrangement, however, there was evidence that students did not wish to travel across the region to take up such opportunities. The role of the Compact was to advocate for colleges to central Government, but the aims of the Combined Authority's elected mayor may not always be in the best interests of students and individual colleges.</p> <p>Governors commented that supporting students in terms of health, well-being, digital poverty and other forms of disadvantage was a critical part of the College's role. Any such agreement did not value the place of colleges within their local communities and the level of diversity across the region.</p> <p>The Corporation was confident that the Executive Leadership Team would be an integral part of the conversation on regional education policy and recognised the limitations of the College's involvement.</p> <p>The Chair reported that a significant period of time had elapsed since the Mayor had met with college chairs across the region. The Principal was asked whether there was an intention for the Compact to be reviewed by college corporations and advised that the Compact agreement included ensuring that principals were held to account for its delivery, which could be achieved through regular meetings of chairs.</p> <p>A governor enquired about the role of the Combined Authority in delivering the Lifelong Learning Entitlement, particularly as colleges were likely to be inundated with requests to form partnerships with Higher Education Institutes. The Deputy Principal reported that positive discussions had already taken place on the modularisation of the curriculum and flexibility of funding.</p>	
<p>LINK GOVERNOR ACTIVITIES</p>		
<p>244</p>	<p>Individual governors provided the following updates on recent link activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Wheeler – session with staff on participation and development, including safeguarding, enrichment and employability skills. • David Wheeler & Barbara Van Der Eecken – participated in the FE Commissioner Team's healthcheck of apprenticeship provision. 	

245	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barbara Van Der Eecken – attended a number of unseen teaching observations with staff from the Quality Team. • Graham Ward and Tony Sadla – met with Head of Operational Services and his team on sustainability. It had been noted that, although there was a high level of progress in this area, governors and students were not necessarily aware of these activities. • Helen Troalen – IT and MIS – discussions on the restructure, systems changes and AI. The imminent changeover of the Payroll and MIS systems were a high priority for the team, noting the importance of managing staff expectations against the need for the IT software to deliver the required outcomes for the College. • Mary Mahoney – attended Quality Reviews on Essential/Functional Skills/English & Maths and Access to HE & Teacher Training. Programmes were found to be operating consistently and there was potential for them to be graded as ‘strong’ at the next inspection. <p>A number of link visits had been planned for the next few weeks including Green Lane (Nelson Tanyanyiwa), maths & English (Paul Averis) and would be reported at the May 2026 Corporation.</p>	
STUDENT UPDATE		
246	<p>The Chair reported that a small group of governors had participated in a Student Voice event earlier in the day, which included informal discussions with students, engagement with students in tutorial sessions and a presentation on student enrichment activities.</p>	
247	<p>Governors had noted that overall students considered the College’s brand to be positive, however there was a poorer perception of Walsall Town. Safety outside the College campuses and on public transport was a concern for many students.</p>	
248	<p>Some learners had commented that the College was only widely known for undertaking vocational programmes, with less visibility of its other areas of activity. Possible destinations at the end of their studies were now always clearly set out and communicated. The Deputy Principal reported that staff were currently reviewing career pathways, the College website and branding as a mean of attracting higher numbers of students.</p>	
249	<p>The high-quality resources were welcomed but the lack of sports facilities close to the main campus was identified as an area for improvement.</p>	
250	<p>Students gave positive feedback on the level of support received from the College and the opportunity to grow as individuals making them more self-reliant than in a school or sixth form environment. The College was felt to be more responsive to the needs of learners compared to their experience at school.</p>	
251	<p>The Chair asked the Principal to formally pass on governors’ gratitude to staff and students involved in this event. Further termly sessions would be held which would focus on different areas of provision and locations.</p>	

SAFEGUARDING UPDATE		
252	The Head of Safeguarding presented an update on safeguarding activities since September 2025.	
253	The high demand for safeguarding support continued, with 941 cases recorded to date in Term 2, which equated to 75% of last year's total. There were 332 open cases, which it was felt reflected the sustained and complex needs of the College's students.	
254	Mental health, online safety and contextual safeguarding remained the most prevalent and complex risk areas, which aligned to data from the borough and the priorities of the local safeguarding partnership.	
255	Following the introduction of the new Ofsted Framework, expectations of education providers continued to evolve. There was now a stronger focus on case sampling, vulnerability, the early identification and evidencing of the impact of the College's safeguarding arrangements, rather than the implementation of its policies. The Framework aligned to the Government's proposed reforms to SEND provision.	
256	Governors were advised of staffing issues within the safeguarding team resulting from the resignation of one Deputy DSL. Assurance was provided that this gap had now been filled on an interim basis to ensure that there was an appropriate level of cover for all campuses.	
257	A consultation on the revised version of Keeping Children Safe in Education had been issued by the Department for Education. The proposed changes reflected the need to respond to concerns on exploitation, online harm, information sharing and identifying vulnerable cohorts.	
258	The work on the Millburn Review would focus on youth inactivity and the unmet needs of young people; further guidance on the implementation of any recommendations would be issued by the Government as appropriate.	
259	A governor asked how the College was improving the curriculum to enable it to deal with the increased vulnerability of learners and the challenges of artificial intelligence. The Deputy Principal responded that the Curriculum Managers were working to ensure that delivery contributed to building student confidence and resilience. Many students had literacy needs to support them in undertaking course assignments and it was important to encourage these traits throughout every area of delivery, not just within tutorials.	
260	In response to queries about the possibility of students with high levels of technical ability supporting their peers the Deputy Principal advised that this was achieved through a mix of student support and learning from other colleges, including the use of a "student-adviser" model.	
261	Governors commented on the relatively high number of open safeguarding cases. The Head of Safeguarding reported that this would continue to be monitored through the Student Support Working Group. Some students required a substantial level of support over the full academic year, in line with national trends. The College would not be penalised by Ofsted for having such a high number, as this reflected student needs. It was agreed	CW

	that information on the length of time that cases had been open would be included in future reports.	
STRATEGIC UPDATE		
262	The Corporation received a report from the Executive Team on current sector and local developments.	
263	Admissions and recruitment for 2026/2027 were broadly in line with the current academic year with an increased number of acceptances (4800 against a contract target of 4400 16-18s). The process for adult enrolments had been updated and included an online portal for Distance Learning courses, which had strengthened the applicant experience and improved conversion rates.	
264	The high level of engagement in target schools continued, with a good level of enquiries resulting in applications. Apprenticeship recruitment remained behind the agreed profile, mainly due to staff vacancies which were being addressed.	
265	A recent audit of bursary funding by the DfE had identified some deficiencies in terms of evidence to support expenditure and it was likely that there would be a clawback of between £20K and £30K from the total budget of £1.2m. The Principal outlined the importance of the College supporting its most vulnerable learners whilst also upholding high standards of compliance with the funding guidelines.	
266	Governors were advised that the gaps in maths and English staffing that had been reported previously had now been largely filled. Catchup sessions had been arranged for students affected by staff shortages earlier in the year. A 10% growth in learner numbers had been built into the schedule for 2026/2027 and the College was considering centralised hubs for delivery in English and maths.	
267	It was noted that there was a 6-7% increase in the proportion of student enrolling without a grade 3 in English and/or maths, meaning that fewer students would achieve high grades in 2026 exams, an analysis of moving up one grade will be completed shortly after exam results to track positive progress.	
268	Course Review meetings had either been completed or were due to be undertaken for all curriculum areas in Term 2.	
269	As reported at the recent People & Remuneration Committee meeting, sickness absence levels were currently 4.66% against the target of 3.86. The majority of these absences were long-term illnesses, with mental health the most prominent reason. Employee engagement rates had fallen in comparison to previous years, which had been attributed to the recent restructuring exercise.	
270	Developments within the FE landscape included a renewed focus on reducing the number of NEETs, reforms to Special Educational Needs provision which may mean that funding would be reduced and the increasing pay gap between teaching staff in schools compared to FE colleges.	

271	The latter was of particular concern due to the relatively low increase in the funding base rate (0.55%) and was likely to exacerbate difficulties in recruiting high quality staff in some trades areas, especially as levels of pay in industry were generally much more lucrative.	
272	The Deputy Principal commented that the College was reviewing its approach to attracting individuals to lecturing jobs, including the type of advertising media used, flexibility of working hours and whether a salary uplift could be given for scarce trade skills (however, this would be expensive and would not necessarily be offset by increases to student recruitment).	
273	The Executive Team would be evaluating efficiency levels across the organisation to ensure that delivery was appropriate and well-resourced to meet student needs.	
274	Governors were advised of the significant curriculum reforms being considered by the DfE. V Levels would be introduced incrementally from Autumn 2027 and would be of similar size to A Levels with 18 pathways. These would be 2-year Level 2 occupational standards similar to T Levels, but detailed information had not yet been published, which made planning difficult.	
275	The recent Apprenticeship Healthcheck exercise in which the College had participated had been successful overall. Actual achievement levels were noted as being higher than the projections and were close to the national benchmark of 65.4%.	
FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2025/2030		
276	The CFO presented a draft Financial Strategy for 2025/2030 which had been recommended for approval by the Finance Committee. This aligned with the College's Vision, Purpose and Values. The Strategy aimed to set out an approach to address key areas such as financial sustainability, supporting growth in provision, addressing sector challenges, modernising and innovating financial practices, strong financial governance and improving financial literacy for all staff.	
277	Objectives had been set against the Corporate Priorities, for example streamlining the bursary distribution process to improve the student experience. A number of annual headline targets and key performance indicators had been included for 2025/2026 and the next 4 years.	
278	A governor commented that in Year 3 of the Strategy there would be a significant amount of curriculum changes nationally together with the proposed replacement of the Finance system. The CFO was asked whether there was a contingency plan to deal with any implementation difficulties.	
279	It was also felt that some of the targets, such as a 5% increase in staff utilisation, were aspirational and it was suggested that a 'transition plan' should be devised and presented at the June governor training session. The CFO gave an assurance that the plan was suitably robust and would minimise any adverse impact on learners.	MTK
280	The projected increase in commercial income (12%) would offset any under-performance in other areas of provision. Governors were reminded that the	

	DfE's curriculum reforms had only just been published and that the final version may be subject to change following sector consultations.	
281	It was agreed that the annual KPIs in the Financial Strategy would align to those in the Corporate Plan. Reference would also be made to developments that had occurred since the February Finance Committee meeting. Governors requested that the Strategy should document the impact of actions to achieve the financial goals, ie by undertaking X action, the volume of students would increase by Y.	MTK
282	At the Student Voice event held earlier in the day learners had raised the issue of the lack of stability of the curriculum due to national policy changes. The Deputy Principal responded that the College needed to maximise its student cohort, but this was not necessarily by recruiting new students but ensuring that progression routes were available for existing learners. In future it was unlikely that there would be a massive increase in the number of de-funded programmes.	
283	A governor asked whether any additional costs would arise from implementation of the Financial Strategy. The CFO reported that all current digital projects had been accounted for and sustainability measures would be supported through grant funding. Any further capital projects would be submitted to the Corporation for approval. The proposals set out in the Strategy should have a positive impact on the College's financial position.	
284	The Deputy Principal reported that the College was currently undertaking its curriculum planning process for 2026/2027. The level of delivery would be similar to 2025/2026, however, the size of the staffing cohort would reduce mainly due to natural wastage.	
285	A review of adults and apprenticeship provision was underway which may also lead to a realignment of staffing requirements. Efficiencies were being examined in relation to support staff teams and class sizes.	
286	In response to a question about the cost of the 'zoning' initiative, the Deputy Principal reported that provision was being moved and rooms repurposed at a minimal cost, which should be covered by the regular capital investment the college makes on an annual basis.	
287	Governors requested that a forecast should be included in the Strategy together with draft KPIs and that it needed to align with the Corporate Plan. Proposals on financial decisions should refer to the appropriate section in the Strategy and include projections.	MTK
288	Resolved – That the Financial Strategy be noted and that further work be undertaken	
FINANCE REPORT & MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS		
289	Governors received for information the Management Accounts for February 2026.	
RISK MANAGEMENT		
290	The CFO presented an update on Risk Management. It was noted that the scores for the strategic risks had changed since the last report, with 3 risks reducing, 2 increasing and one new risk introduced.	

291	A more detailed analysis would be provided at the next Audit Committee meeting in April 2026.	
FINANCE COMMITTEE		
292	The Chair of the Finance Committee presented for information the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 10 th February 2026. Governors noted that the majority of the items that had been considered had featured earlier on this agenda.	
293	The Committee had recommended approval of management’s proposal for Higher Education fees in 2027/2028 to be maintained at the current level of £6k per student.	
294	Resolved - That the Higher Education Fees Policy for 2027/2028 be approved	
PEOPLE & REMUNERATION COMMITTEE		
295	The Chair of the People & Remuneration Committee presented for information the unconfirmed minutes (Part 1) of the meeting held on 12 th February 2026	
296	The newly-constituted Committee had considered a number of reports including performance against human resources KPIs, CPD activities (incorporating industry upskilling) and EDIB matters in relation to staff.	
297	Draft Terms of Reference were recommended for approval by the Corporation, together with the Gender Pay Gap Report for 2025 (which was a statutory requirement). The College’s Ethnicity Pay Gap Report for 2025 had been considered and was provided for information.	
298	Resolved - 1 That the Committee’s Terms of Reference be approved 2 That the College’s Gender Pay Gap Report for 2025 be approved	
SEARCH & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE		
299	The Head of Governance presented for information the unconfirmed minutes of the Search & Governance Committee meeting held on 12 th February 2026.	
300	Governor attendance for the current year was 79% overall, against the target of 80%. Levels for the Audit & Risk and Learning & Quality Committees were a concern and would continue to be carefully monitored for the rest of the academic year. Most absences were due to work or other commitments and contextual information was recorded against individual performance levels.	
301	Currently there was one vacancy for an external governor following the resignation of Charlotte Bosworth. Skills gaps in Human Resources, Environmental Sustainability, Artificial Intelligence and Legal Services had been identified and these areas had been used to shape the scope of a governor recruitment process, supported through the FE Commissioner’s Office.	

302	A number of applications had been received as a result and the Committee had recommended two individuals for appointment as co-opted members of the Audit & Risk and Resources Committees respectively.	
303	Further recruitment activity would be undertaken shortly to fill the one existing vacancy and to replace any governors whose terms of office would reach the maximum over the next few months.	
304	The Committee had considered the contributions, attendance and performance of Mary Mahoney and Nelson Tanyanyiwa for a further 3-year term of office.	
305	Paul Averis had recently announced his intention to step down as an external governor in July 2026, which would create a further vacancy to be filled.	
306	Graham Ward's third term of office was due to expire in October 2026 and it was recommended that this should be extended for a further year to October 2027 to provide continuity in a period of substantial change in the membership of the Corporation. This was particularly important given the amount of turnover of governors over the next year and due to his position as Chair of the Audit & Risk and People & Remuneration Committees and as a Vice-Chair of the Corporation.	
307	The Committee had discussed the proposed succession plan and approved a detailed schedule of activities over the next 18 months.	
308	The Head of Governance advised that the annual performance review process would commence in May this year, including exploring the future aspirations of all governors, which would then inform the forward plan.	
309	The Chair reported that he would not be seeking re-election to this role when his current term of office expires in July 2027. Options for the recruitment of a new chair will be discussed early in 2026/2027 and may involve an external process.	
310	Governors were reminded that all colleges were required to commission an External Governance Review once every 3 years. The deadline for this College to complete the process was March 2027 and the Committee had agreed that this should be scheduled for the Autumn Term of 2026. Proposals were being sought from a number of potential suppliers, with the preferred option to be approved by the Committee at its May meeting.	
311	The Chair emphasised the importance of the review in providing assurance over the robustness of the governance framework. Under the new arrangements any future Ofsted would focus on the Corporation's role in setting the educational character and mission, providing an appropriate level of support and challenge to the management team and staff well-being.	
312	Following the recent changes to the Corporation, the schedule of Committee Memberships had been updated and was recommended for approval.	
313	Resolved – That the following items be approved:	

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 The appointment of Liz Walls and Chris Mells as co-opted members of the Resources Committee and the Audit & Risk Committee for a one-year term of office commencing on 1st April 2026 2 The reappointment of Mary Mahoney and Nelson Tanyanyiwa as external governors for a further 3-year term of office 3 The re-appointment of Graham Ward as an external governor for a further one year term of office from October 2026 to October 2027 4 The revised schedule of committee memberships 	
SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2026/2027		
314	Resolved – That the schedule of meetings for 2026/2027 be approved, subject to any further amendments	
DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS		
	April 2026 Special Corporation to approve the ALC project (Part 2) 13 th May 2026 Finance Committee 13 th May 2026 Search & Governance Committee 21 st May 2026 Corporation	