

CORPORATION BOARD

Finance & General Purposes Committee



Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 24th November 2025 at 6pm

Present

Alan Bark (Chair)
Jacqui Canton, Principal
David Walker
Edward Collett
Jessie Weavers-Medina

In attendance

Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal
Kevin Wilkinson, Head of People Services
Alan Muza, Head of Finance
Jude Brown, Clerk and Governance Advisor

Governor questions are represented with bullet points in bold italics and Management responses follow.

1. Opening Comments

1.1 Apologies and matters to be raised under AOB.

The Chair of the Committee opened the meeting. Apologies had been received from Kash Barlow, Michael Chiyasa, Mark Lay, and Ben Rose. The meeting was quorate.

There was one matter requested by the Finance Director to be raised under AOB about Warren Farm.

1.2 Declarations of interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 9th October 2025

2.1 Public Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9th October 2025 were reviewed and approved as an accurate reflection of that meeting.

3 Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points

3.1 Matters arising, written resolutions and action points

There were no matters arising or written resolutions raised since the last meeting. The completed action related to the paper given under item 4.3 of the agenda. The Committee noted the report.

4 Term 1 Update Reports

4.1 Health and Safety

The Principal gave an overview of the report. There were no concerns in relation to health and safety. The team were pleased with the continued increase in reporting of Near Misses which is fundamental to positive health and safety culture and shows staff becoming more proactive. There had been no RIDDOR in the period.

The Principal highlighted a new initiative of termly meetings with students to obtain student feedback about health and safety at the College. Ongoing project and systems improvements to migrate risk assessments from Smartlog to a new system were also mentioned.

- **How do you decide which staff need to conduct an individual risk assessment?** Every member of staff undertakes a risk assessment when they join the College and annually thereafter. If the risk assessment highlights an issue, then there is a follow up by the manager to understand any specific interventions required. The process and the risk assessment are easy to complete and gives an opportunity for staff to inform the College of specific needs. The annual prompt allows staff to raise if anything has changed and provides a useful prompt to line managers to have a conversation about this area.
- **Has vaping been mentioned during the student engagement sessions?** This is a multi-faceted issue where some students want to vape in the toilets for example or want to go to an area other than the designated 'Smoking area'. Some students feel they should be allowed to vape anywhere. The team has researched the issue which showed that the College should not encourage vaping and this is the College's position.

The Committee noted the report.

4.2 Estates and Capital Development

The Principal covered the report, and it was agreed that answers to any questions that she could not cover would be followed up after the meeting. It was agreed that in future reports significant variations in utilities or other measures should include some explanatory narrative. The colours in the graphs in the Appendix should also be made easier to read.

- **The consumption of water at Witney in April has spiked, what was behind this?**
- **There has also been a spike across campuses in January compared to last year for electricity. Can you elaborate on the reason?**

The Principal highlighted some of the capital projects that are ongoing. While there are some delays to the RAAC Removal project, the team are not concerned as the plan had always allowed for the building to be out of commission during 2025-26. The team will continue to monitor closely, however.

- **Regarding the Early building's structural cracks, what is the cost to address?** The Insurers have assessed the building and felt that this was not an issue. The potential costs will be reviewed at the right time.
- **Is there any update regarding Thames Water?** There has been progress, but the issue is not yet resolved so Management continue to keep a watching brief.
- **Regarding the list of funded minor capital projects listed in Appendix C, is there anything not on the list that is of concern?** The Estates Director has a thorough list which is continually prioritised, however there are no other specific items of particular concern.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Estates Director to respond to the queries on the spike in water consumption at Witney in April 2025, and electricity consumption in January across all campuses.	Estates Director	March 2026.

The Committee noted the report.

4.3 People Services

The Head of People Services gave an overview of the report which included the detailed results of the Staff Survey, the highlights of which had been provided to the Committee in October.

The participation rate at 56% was significantly higher than the previous year. The survey consisted of thirty-three questions in six categories. Twenty-two questions saw an improvement but in eleven questions the score had regressed. The action plans were included in the report along with the priorities.

The Head of People Services explained that the action plans had been put together following sessions at the College Development Day where the Heads of Business (HoBs) and Heads of Faculty (HoFs) reviewed the survey feedback with their teams to understand the issues and then created actions plans to address. At a higher level, the Principal and the Head of People Services review to create the cross-college action plan and consider how to prioritise and invest appropriately.

- **Regarding the question containing the wording ‘Staff are not afraid to say’ do the results mean that thirty percent of staff are afraid to say something? Does the question need to be refined to something like ‘Are you able to openly discuss?’** The Head of People Services explained that the College is part of a wider group of colleges using the same survey so the questions need to be consistent, however feedback will be provided to the organizers. The questions allow comparison going back five years.
- **The use of ‘don’t know’ in the response options is frustrating, were staff encouraged to give more of an opinion in answers?** The messaging to staff was focussed on encouraging participation rather than the content of the questions and their responses. It was agreed that this would also be fed back to the survey organizers.
- **Overall, the participation rate is quite low.** The College has a lot of hourly paid lecturers (HPLs) who may not have felt strongly about completing the survey. In future the College may look to see if the answers can be disaggregated by HPLs and permanent staff. The Head of People Services noted that in the ‘Great Places to Work’ surveys, a response rate of seventy-five percent would be seen as outstanding, and he felt that fifty-six percent for the public sector/further education sector was a good response.
- **There was a discussion at the October meeting as to whether a question on whether staff felt comfortable to be themselves at work was included, but none of the questions cover this explicitly.** The Head of People Services had reflected and agreed that this area was not as clear as it could have been and that the wording needs to be right from an inclusion perspective. This will be reviewed for future surveys to tie in more strongly with the College’s value of being authentic.
- **Is the data skewed by fractional staff, do they have lower engagement?** The team do not have the data to investigate this but will review next time how demographic data can be appropriately included. Staff in small teams can get concerned about anonymity so questions about demographics need to be carefully handled.
- **‘Resources to back up staff’ and what resources seem hard to identify?** This is explored in the department level discussions led by the HoBs and HoFs.
- **Do you have data mapped against EDI?** No but some aspects are covered in the Equalities Report. The two areas are not inter-linked from a staff survey data perspective. The staff survey data can be filtered by department but there is more to do.

The Head of People Services also covered the People Services organogram and follow-up actions from the October meeting of the F&GP Committee. There are twelve roles in People Services across three areas of Operations, Recruitment and Payroll. A comparison of the team changes between January 2025 and November 2025 was given, noting the move to make Recruitment more strategic, the continued focus on improving quality and the

recruitment of HR Business Partners which was in progress. The priorities for the team for 2025-26 were highlighted.

- **Do none of the roles have a focus on EDI? Is that typical for FE?** While there are no roles focussed solely on EDI, it is embedded in everyone’s role. From a staff perspective, it is led by the Vice Principal, People and Culture, and from a student perspective, it is led by the Deputy Principal. The focus in the past year has been to stabilise the team and move onto more strategic items.

The Head of People Services talked through the numbers for attrition and growth and clarified for the Committee.

- **Outside of LSAs and HPLs, what is the FTE growth?** The Head of People Services will take this as an action as the College does have a lot of part-time staff.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Head of People Service to feedback to Staff Survey organizers regarding the language of some of the questions, the inclusion of ‘don’t know’ as a response option, and proposed inclusion of a question on whether staff feel comfortable being themselves at work.	Head of People Services	March 2026
Head of People Services to review if questions to assist in the disaggregation of data can be included in the next survey e.g. to distinguish between HPLs and permanent staff.	Head of People Services	March 2026

The Committee noted the report.

4.4 Marketing – Annual Report

The Commercial Director gave an overview of the Annual Marketing Report highlighting the increase in student enrolments to 2,221 in 16-19 student numbers.

There has been an uplift in the College’s social media impact and improvements made to the website in terms of its search functionality and traffic. Search is the website’s second most visited page, and it needed to allow effective course search navigation especially with the high number of courses run by the College.

- **How does this compare with other FE colleges?** This report can only really compare with the College’s own previous performance as colleges can differ significantly.
- **Does the College pay for sponsored content or ads?** Yes, for example, promoting the Open Day through the Oxford Mail. The College does not pay for content on LinkedIn as it is expensive. The team does however do regular promoted posts on other relevant platforms and tries to track journeys from social media to the website to review their efficacy.

The Chair noted that he felt the report was useful regarding understanding the College’s marketing performance and future plans. The marketing team are looking at redesigning and optimising the website for mobile as that is now the predominant method through which users access the site. The Commercial Director also explained that team were working on a new underpinning strategy through to 2030 as well as aspiring to a more retail-style customer experience on the website given the College now offers much more than just 16-18.

- **Did the previous marketing strategy meet its goals?** This was reported on in last year's annual report.
- **Do the team check if staff have 'Open to Work' on their LinkedIn profiles?** The People services team are focussed on recruiting rather than checking this, but if it is spotted it can open a conversation. Sometimes it may be that individuals have simply not updated their profile for some time.
- **Is there anything you are not doing that you would like to do due to a lack of skills internally or due to the costs of using a design agency?** The Commercial Director acknowledged that the team must work within existing resources and budgets but as they go forward, he would like to add more detail to part-time courses.

The Committee noted the report.

5 Finance Matters

5.1 Revised Management Accounts for 2024-25

The Principal gave an overview of the revised Management Accounts for 2024-25. There had been two changes. The first was in relation to recognition of income which had been discussed and agreed with the external auditors. The net effect of this change had been to increase the EBITDA and therefore the Financial Health grade was now 'Good' rather than 'Requires Improvement' which was pleasing. The bank covenant issue had also been resolved and had been found to be due to a rounding error. The bank and the external auditors were also content with this resolution.

The Committee agreed to recommend the revised Management Accounts for 2024-25 to the Board to approve.

5.2 Management Accounts to 30 September 2025

The Head of Finance gave an overview of the management accounts to the end of September 2025. The College was just ahead of budget partly due to the phasing of pay and non-pay costs. The forecast for the College's Financial Health for 2025-26 was 'Good' and cash in the bank was healthy.

- **Regarding the potential £200k expectation on pay, what is the College's vacancy management approach?** The Principal explained that SMT sign off every vacancy and the Finance Director builds in a certain amount of waiting time for vacancies. The College does not intentionally hold posts vacant but there is also no automatic assumption regarding replacement of a member of staff.

The Committee recommended the Management Accounts to the end of September to the Board to approve.

5.3 DfE Letter on Financial Health

The Principal explained that the DfE's dashboard shows no surprises and highlighted matters often discussed at Committee including the EBITDA and staff percentage costs. This needs to be monitored and the background to the scores understood so that governors are content with the explanations.

The Chair felt that the dashboard provided a relatively balanced scorecard which was useful for awareness and understanding.

- **Regarding EBITDA being lower than benchmark, how does that affect the financial health grade?** The College scores generate a certain number of points in

relation to position with regard to benchmark, and the sum of these dictates the Financial Health Score.

- ***Would you like it to be higher?*** The College has to balance cash surplus and the need to invest as a growing business. In relation to staff costs as a percentage, the Committee and management need to continue to keep under review and understand the reasons for this and be content with the reasoning. For example, the College employs its cleaning and catering staff rather than outsourcing as a number of other Colleges do, and this affects the score.

The Committee agreed that the College remains in a strong position.

The Committee noted the report.

5.4 FE Benchmarking Measure Updates

The discussion of this item was partly incorporated in the discussion of item 5.3. The Chair observed that the bottom line was still key in terms of dealing with the bank and the DfE, and the explanations for any variances are understood in terms of the mix of SEND funding in and out, land-based provision and multiple sites. It was agreed that this will continue to form part of discussions at F&GP as well as at the Annual Board Strategy Day.

- ***Do you get much challenge on these figures from the DfE?*** The Principal meets the DfE account manager three times a year and reviews financial performance as part of these meetings. To date there have been no issues with the College's explanation and the conversations have been focussed on understanding.

It was agreed to revisit this as part of the forthcoming strategy discussions to review if the Board continues to be content.

The Committee noted the report.

6. Financial Statements

6.1 Financial Statements including

- **Strategic Report**
- **Governance and members' report**
- **Financial Statements and supporting notes to the accounts**
- **Independent Auditors' report**
- **Independent Auditors' report on regularity**

6.2 Accounting Estimates Overview

6.3 Self-Assessment of Financial Propriety and Regularity

The Chair explained the Committee's role in signing off the financial statements, ensuring that the annual statements reflect the narrative that has been reported to the Committee during the year. He felt that the financial statements should be recommended as there were no surprises, and the recent changes had been reviewed and agreed with the auditors.

The Committee also reviewed the Accounting Estimates Overview, which detailed assumptions underpinning key financial figures, including pension liabilities, and depreciation methods, as well as the Self-assessment questionnaire regarding financial propriety and regularity.

The Committee agreed that the financial statements provided a clear and accurate reflection of the college's financial health and were consistent with the information reported throughout the year.

The Chair explained that he would write to the Chair of Audit setting out the F&GP Committee's view of the financial statements following this meeting as he could not attend the Audit meeting.

The Committee agreed to recommend the Financial Statements, the Accounting Estimates Overview, and the Self-Assessment of Financial Propriety and Regularity to the Board for approval.

7. Policies

7.0 Policies Cover Paper

The Clerk gave an overview of the policies for discussion at the meeting.

7.1 IT Policy

The IT Policy had had a light refresh to extend its cover with the intention to update the policy more substantially by the end of the academic year.

The Committee recommended the policy to the Board for approval.

7.2 Staff Disciplinary Policy

The Staff Disciplinary Policy had been revised to account for creation of separate Managing Allegations Policy and to improve flow and clarity.

The Committee recommended the policy to the Board for approval.

7.3 Managing Allegations Against Staff Policy

Managing Allegations Against Staff was a new policy split out from Staff Disciplinary Policy to cover in more detail provisions within Keeping Children Safe in Education, and to more clearly distinguish the process for the LADO and internal disciplinary process.

The Committee recommended the policy to the Board for approval.

7.4 Tuition Fees 2026-27

The Tuition Fees Policy had been refreshed with the details for the following academic year. It was noted that the in Section 3 of the policy, the BSc Equine figure was TBA and should be updated.

The Committee recommended the policy to the Board for approval.

7.5 Modern Slavery Statement

As the College's turnover exceeded £36m in 2024/25, it is now required to publish a Modern Slavery Transparency Statement. This is the College's first such statement.

- ***In terms of due diligence, do you require this for all new suppliers?*** The Finance Director will look at what is reasonable and take a risk-based approach.

The Committee recommended the statement to the Board for approval.

7.6 LGPS Discretions

The LGPS Discretions Policy had been revised to expand upon the detail of the discretions employed by the College, as requested by Oxfordshire Pension Fund.

The Committee recommended the policy to the Board for approval.

8. General Purposes

8.1 Freedom of Information Requests Update

The Clerk provided an update on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests outlining the general nature of the one request in the period. The support of the Head of People Services in providing the necessary information was acknowledged.

The Committee noted the report.

8.2 Annual Report on Equality Objectives

The Principal explained the background to the equality objectives which had been set four years ago and which the College was still required to report against albeit the objectives may seem out of date given the significant changes in the external environment in the period. The College is now at the end of the four-year cycle of reporting on these objectives and it is now intended to set new objectives through a more comprehensive approach involving a working group.

The timeline for the working group was discussed and external governor Jessie Weavers-Medina expressed interest in joining the group. It is also intended to involve others and gain a broad range of perspectives.

The role of F&GP Committee is to review the staff elements of the report and CQS Committee will review the student elements.

The Committee recommended the report to the Board to approve.

9. Any Other Business

The Finance Director had requested that the Committee consider the matter of Warren Farm, which was the farm formerly owned by the College prior to the acquisition of Common Leys. The College retains a covenant regarding the sale of any land for the twenty years following the sale. The owner has requested the College's agreement to some borrowing against one of the houses. This does not trigger the covenant that the College retains over the land. The current owner has paid for such legal fees in the past.

The Committee agreed to the Finance Director using the College's solicitors SHMA to do this.

9. Future Business

The Committee discussed having an update regarding sustainability at the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 19.40.

The next meeting will be held in Abingdon on Thursday 12th March 2026.

Signature