



## **CORPORATION BOARD Finance & General Purposes Committee**

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2025 at 6pm

### **Present**

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

### **In attendance**

Olivier Cognard, Vice Principal  
Mark Lay, Finance Director  
Kevin Wilkinson, Head of People Services  
Ben Rose, Health of Health and Safety  
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 welcomed Jessie Weavers-Medina who had returned as an external governor having previously been a student governor at the College. He also welcomed the new Head of Finance.

Apologies had been received from Kash Barlow, Michael Chiyasa and Lee Reszeter. The meeting was quorate.

There were no matters to be raised under AOB.

### **1.2 Declarations of interest**

There were no new declarations of interest.

## **2 Minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

### **2.1 Public Minutes**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2025 were reviewed and approved as an accurate reflection of the meeting, with one amendment for the date at the start of the document.

## **3 Matters Arising, Written Resolutions & Action Points**

### **3.1 Matters arising, written resolutions and action points**

There were no matters arising, written resolutions or actions points due or raised since the last meeting. The Committee noted the report.

## **4 Annual Reports**

### **4.1 Annual F&GP Committee Report to the Board**

The Clerk presented the Annual Committee Report, which summarised the committee's activities and key decisions over the past year. The report provided an overview of significant discussions, including those related to financial matters, estates, health and safety, and policies reviewed throughout the year.

The Committee agreed that the report accurately captured the year's activities and that no amendments were required.

The Committee recommended the report to the Board to note.

#### 4.2 Review of Committee Effectiveness and Self-assessment

The Clerk presented the results of the committee's self-assessment, highlighting that all members had agreed or strongly agreed on the committee's effectiveness, decision making and impact. One of the areas raised for development had already been actioned with an item on the agenda for this meeting being an Annual Report for IT.

The Chair noted that the review seemed fair and reasonable.

The Committee noted the report.

#### 4.3 People Services

The Head of People Services gave an overview of the report for 2024-25 summarising progress against the primary Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

There had been progress against the percentage of vacancies filled within 6 weeks of advertising albeit at 52% this fell short of the target of 71%. The recent changes to the Recruitment team were also covered. Short term absence had been achieved and has reduced to 3.5 days average absence which was encouraging and showed good work by managers. The People Services team are undertaking further work on the Performance Development Review (PDR) KPI as there was less confidence in the data for this measure. The KPIs for Staff Turnover, Work Related Stress and Progressors had not been achieved, although progress has been made against the staff turnover and work-related stress measures. The People Services plan is being reviewed to ensure the KPIs fully align with the People Strategy.

The Annual Staff Survey showed a step forward in participation with 56% of staff taking part which was an increase from 2023-24. Of the thirty-three questions, twenty-two showed improved responses from 2023-24. Highlights included leadership and management, that leaders and managers were considerate of wellbeing and staff felt that there were opportunities to progress. Areas for improvement included communication, resources for staff and staff workplaces.

The Head of People Services also gave an overview of the changes to pay and grading structure which were implemented in 2024-25.

- ***It would be useful to see the new structure of the People Services team as it has felt that a number of roles have been added over the past few committee meetings.*** The Principal reassured the Committee that, while the structure of the team had been amended, the wage bill was not much higher. The focus had been on fewer but higher quality roles, including two new posts of HR Business Partners. It was agreed that a structure chart could be included next time.
- ***What is the role of the new Recruitment Manager and Recruitment Advisor?*** The Head of People Services explained that the College had two people working in recruitment for an organisation of over 770 employees. The new Recruitment Manager would work to proactively source new talent in a more strategic way especially for hard-to-fill roles. The Recruitment Advisor would run the recruitment operation end to end from vacancy approved through to hired.
- ***Where do Recruitment Consultants fit in?*** The College does use some agencies but is looking to manage this down, and overall agency staff have reduced significantly. There is a partnership with one agency who also provide some advice as well as three other agencies used for hard-to-fill roles. The approach has however been on trying to use the in-house team which the Head of People Services expects to bear fruit over the next six to twelve months and to reduce recruitment costs.

The Committee discussed the absolute numbers of vacancies in the report in terms of new staff members, turnover, the mix of new roles versus replacements for staff who had left and queried how this compared with previous years. The discussion also covered the clarity of understanding of retention of existing staff and how many of the vacancies were attrition replacement as opposed to growth. It was clarified that People Services and SMT review open vacancies, of which there are forty to sixty at any one time, on a weekly basis to progress.

Action	By Whom	Deadline
Head of People Services to present data comparison for 2024-25 with previous year, and to make clear figures for attrition and growth.	Head of People Services	November 2025

- For leavers, how many did we not want to leave as opposed to those we accept needed to leave?*** The Head of People Services explained that most leavers were voluntary, i.e. left for personal reasons, but a few were managed out after unsuccessful probationary periods for example. Probation reviews happen at the one-, three- and five-month marks and so a number of people are let go at six months. In some cases, probation is extended. The College is active in managing the probationary period. The personal reasons cited for employees leaving are new jobs, career progression, and family reasons. The College's salary and benefits were less often cited as the main reason for someone leaving.
- When people leave, what is the process for exit interviews?*** It was explained that the approach is a mix of online and face to face. The standard approach is an online questionnaire which leavers are invited to fill in although not everyone does complete this. For senior or hard to fill roles, face to face exit interviews are conducted of which the Head of People Services has carried out personally.
- In terms of the staff survey, what does missing resources or better facilities mean?*** It was explained that a detailed report would come to the next Committee meeting which would cover these questions in more detail. The timing of the staff survey meant that only highlights were made available in the Annual Report and a more detailed report on the staff survey would follow. Resources can mean a lot of things. Regarding facilities, the increase in Learning Support Assistants (LSA) positions had meant that there had been complaints about a lack of space for them to hang their coats. Over the summer, a new higher quality space for LSAs has been created.
- How are the staff survey results reported back to staff?*** The detailed results are split by department and sent to Heads of Faculty and Heads of Business for them to review and compile action plans. People Services work with the Heads of Faculty and Business to see where to improve but also where to continue or share good practice. The results are fed back to their teams and the Principal feeds back to the whole college in terms of 'you said, we did' showing the issues raised and how the issues are being tackled. SMT also have open door sessions to investigate some issues further.
- In terms of work-related stress, the actual numbers for 24-25 are three times the target. Are there any trends for these individuals and does the People Strategy address work-related stress?*** There are no detectable trends in terms of area, teaching or business support, campus etc. The time off ranges from small numbers of days to some quite large numbers. Appropriate action has been taken. The actual numbers can skew dramatically due to the small numbers and the range of time taken. The Head of People Services feels that the key is fostering wellbeing which the team are doing by running activities to improve wellbeing or putting in steps to address.

- ***Was there a question in the survey about whether people felt comfortable being themselves at work?*** There are several questions in the survey on this theme, and the results are also compared to national results from colleges.
- ***Regarding the increase in staff responses, was this down to the foodbank idea as the main driver?*** The donations to the local food banks had also taken place in the previous academic year, but this year there had been increased management focus and more reminders to staff to encourage participation.

The staff governor noted that, as a hiring manager, he had noted the difference in timeliness and quality of the recruitment process.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **4.4 Estates and Capital Development**

The Finance Director provided an overview of the Estates and Capital Development Annual Report. The Executive Summary of the report explained the main issues. The overall estate is gradually deteriorating which can be hard to see but is based on the DfE calculation of the buildings' classifications. A lot of the building work happened over ten years ago.

The Finance Director also covered the major projects, effectiveness of the planned preventative and reactive maintenance, and the maintenance of service levels despite the increase in calls to the Helpdesk. The staff satisfaction results for the department had increased. Catering Income had increased by seventeen per cent due to more students using the facilities.

- ***What is non-net balance?*** This is a measure of empty space, for example corridors. It is higher for Witney campus due to the number of buildings which all have their own entrance areas as well as further corridors. Making best use of space is one of the benchmarks.
- ***Does the building condition classification work in the College's favour when applying for any new funding [if have a higher proportion of lower classified buildings]?*** There are no guarantees of this. The recent capital grant was £1M to cover the period from now until March 2028, but the condition survey was only held this year after the grant was awarded
- ***In terms of space by type, at Common Leys there is 37% Teaching and 40% support areas. What is the latter?*** This relates to animal storage and barns for example which are necessarily larger due to being land-based. Other land-based colleges have similar proportions.

The Finance Director also covered capital development, some of which is funded from grants and some from reserves. The RAAC project has identified some further issues, but scope change requests are ongoing for these and are expected to be funded. There is an impact to the timeline with an expected delay of three weeks, but the impact is not considered serious. One other project is still ongoing and waiting for a determination from the Council which is expected by the end of October.

The College has employed a new Sustainability and Environmental Advisor to take forward the Sustainability strategy and the carbon footprint calculation and related action plan work. This will be discussed in more depth at a future meeting.

- ***For Common Leys, is bike parking part of the planned work?*** Electrical vehicle parking has been introduced, and the Finance Director explained that it would be likely that further additional bike parking would be required as part of the current planning application for additional car parking spaces.

- ***In Appendix B Estate KPIs, what is behind the 25% variance in Percentage of buildings with M&E services control systems linked to digital sensors?*** The Finance Director will confirm this once the Estates and Capital Development Director has returned, who advises the target of improving to 80% in year was not achieved, but 55% is an improvement on 2023/24.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **4.5 Health and Safety**

The Head of Health and Safety gave an overview of the key points from the annual report including the improvement in safety culture and the increase in reporting of Accidents, Incidents and Near Misses which was felt to be positive progress with no real areas of concern. Training for First Aiders has been carried out in-house and was being rolled out to students as well this year. An additional twenty evacuation chairs have been added and training carried out so that these can be used in emergencies. There is now one in every stairwell and LSAs in particular are all trained to use them.

A number of areas were audited and some actions allocated which the departments have now scheduled. The Health and Safety Helpdesk has now launched, and the new Health and Safety Advisor has started, and this is already making a difference.

The Committee discussed the responsibilities between the Head of Health and Safety and the Estates and Capital Development Director regarding construction projects. These are overseen by the Estates Director in terms of health and safety. It was raised that the barriers in one of the photographs of work in the Estates report do not look robust and it was agreed that the Head of Health and Safety and the Estates Director would meet to ensure that this was reviewed by the latter, and raised with the construction firm if necessary.

- ***The DSE numbers look low, is this really the case?*** Every staff member undertakes a DSE, but these numbers relate to the personal DSE assessments done when an issue is identified in the initial assessment.
- ***What is a behavioural near miss?*** This may be where student behaviour could have caused harm to a member of staff for example, and it can be a balancing act as to how to categorise.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **4.6 IT including Cyber Security**

The Finance Director gave an overview of the report on behalf of the IT director. The Committee had requested the report to give it better insight into this area given the IT budget for the College and the threat posed by cyber-attacks.

The overview included an explanation of the College's significant hardware estate and the actions taken by the IT team to improve cyber security which included conducting phishing campaigns, staff training, maintaining Cyber Essentials accreditation, NCSC membership, and annual penetration testing. The Finance Director agreed to review if there were any upcoming changes to Microsoft business agreements in relation to storage. The number and breakdown of calls to the Helpdesk were also highlighted as well as the significant security estate.

- ***What is on the IT Director's wish list and what areas is he wary of?*** The challenge is the cost of IT kit replacement as more people need laptops instead of desktop computers. Much of the estate is relatively new but there is the need to continually update. He is as comfortable with cyber risk as he can be and feels the College is well protected.

- ***Are the phishing campaigns successful against any particular staff groups?*** Emails opened on phones often catch people out. The recent phishing campaigns around pay awards that had generated some ill feeling were discussed and the fact that the IT team had had SMT's backing because cyber criminals also employ these kind of bait in their phishing emails.
- ***Does the College have cyber insurance?*** The Finance Director confirmed that it does.

The Committee agreed that this was the kind of report that was useful to receive. There was a discussion about how IT might be linked with artificial intelligence (AI) for the future, and the Principal explained that AI had been a topic covered at the Digital Strategy launch in April and training and support for this is ongoing.

The Committee noted the report.

#### **4.7 Business Continuity**

The Principal gave the overview of the annual report on Business Continuity. The College has a business continuity policy which is due for review in 2026. It also has a Disaster Recovery Plan which includes crisis management. There are local business continuity plans in key departments such as IT and Estates. If an issue occurs, then the crisis management group is convened. Internal Audit reviewed business continuity this year and gave reasonable assurance with three routine observations.

- ***Are Board included in the event of an emergency?*** The Principal explained that she would contact the Chair in the first instance and then the rest of the Board as appropriate to advise on what had happened.
- ***Regarding the implementation of Run Hide Tell, how do you test this?*** This has not been implemented yet, but team meetings will include consideration of scenarios. It was accepted that all scenarios cannot be role-played or planned for and testing for students could be tricky as they could be frightening for students. Controlled exercises planned well in advance might be considered and the Principal was giving thought to how else this might be implemented.

The Committee noted the report.

### **5 Finance Matters**

#### **5.1 Management Accounts to P12 2024-25**

The new Head of Finance gave an overview of the Management Accounts to the end of 2024-25. The year end audit is happening now, but it is not believed that there will be significant changes. The College has made an operating surplus of £396k, and income has increased due to higher needs students. Pay costs were ahead of budget due to agency staff spend and the mix of vacancies being slightly different with higher paid vacancies. However, the budget had still been met overall. Cash holdings were on budget and money due from Oxfordshire County Council had been received shortly after year end.

The College's health grade had been 'Good' but DfE have reclassified how some cash elements are treated which has reduced the College's ratio and taken it down to 'Requires Improvement'.

- ***What is the impact of the change in grade?*** It is not known if the change impacts success in applying for grants. It was discussed that banks usually look at other measures when considering clients' financial health and the Finance Director confirmed that the College had still met its bank covenants.

- ***What is the reason for the increase in funding to Yellow Submarine?*** This is due to the high needs claims where some students had had higher than expected needs and so this money had flowed through to the sub-contractor.
- ***Under non-pay costs, the governance costs had gone from nine to two to three thousand over three years, what is behind this?*** This is down to the external governance review costs in 2023-24.

The Finance Director explained that there were a couple of areas that were not yet reflected in the accounts such as the LGPS value which is being confirmed.

The Committee agreed to recommend the Management Accounts to the Board to approve.

## 5.2 Enrolment Update

The Vice Principal Funding, Planning and Systems Improvement briefed the Committee on enrolments for 2025-26. Ninety percent of the College's income is from funding driven by student numbers. So far there are 2300 enrolments in 16-19 students, and the numbers will be finalised in November. Some areas have grown such as carpentry, motor vehicle, and land-based. Some areas have reduced such as art and design, beauty and performing arts. Each area has a target. Higher Education is slightly lower than target and has gradually decreased over time.

- ***Do we need to look at whether we provide Higher Education? Is there a trigger point at which this should occur?*** The Principal felt that if HE apprenticeships and Level 4 courses are included in the definition then the HE provision looks larger and the College needs to take a broader strategic view. The new Vice Principal will look at what the College offers. Apprenticeships do not count as HE in the definitions here even though these students may be on the same course as students who are doing the course as a standalone item.
- ***Is this in line with other Colleges?*** Yes, traditional HE degrees undertaken in Colleges are declining partly as HE institutions take on more students driven by their finances. The dynamic is changing. At some point soon a paper will be brought to CQS on the Lifelong Learning Entitlement and what this means.
- ***Are there any [apprenticeship] courses we should be doing that we are not?*** There are over eight hundred standard offers, and the College offers thirty-one. Some of the eight hundred are very niche, for example for abattoir workers. The College is looking at corporate responsibility, digital marketing and learning and skills apprenticeships for its own staff. The offer will be kept under review.
- ***Are the Technical Excellence Colleges known yet? Are there further opportunities there?*** The Construction colleges have been announced, and the next tranche of defence and advanced engineering will be shortly. The criteria were very specific in the case of Construction, and the College did not meet the criteria.

The apprenticeship target for the year is expected to be met.

The College noted the report.

## 5.3 Update on 2025-26 Budget

The Finance Director updated the Committee that there was overall little change to the forecast budget taking into account the latest forecast enrolments. Some opportunities were not yet included until there is more certainty, for example further in-year funding for 16-18. The College may also get additional funding for having over delivered on the Adult Skills budget during 2024-25. Income appears to be strong, and pay is now further under control with less anticipated use of agency staff. The Finance Director feels that the budget is in a positive position and that EBITDA of five percent can be achieved which helps with the

financial grade. There are no material changes to the twelve-month cashflow profile, and the College is expected to remain solvent.

- **Regarding cashflow, should we be more wary of certain funders being slow in paying?** The Finance Director noted that all the monies referred to had been received shortly after the end of the financial year and as high needs is a very complicated and mobile area, the administration of this is challenging. He was not unduly concerned.
- **Are the figures for one of the capital development projects still in the budget?** Yes, and the College expects to hear by the end of October. If the work goes ahead the leaseholder will do their work in the first half of 2026 and the College plan to do their work over the summer ahead of the next academic year. The same overall cost is expected but some cost may slip to next financial year due to the delay.

The Committee noted the report.

## 6. Policies

### 6.0 Policies Cover Paper

The Clerk gave an overview of the policies for discussion at the meeting. In general, the policies presented were refreshes with minor amendments.

#### 6.1 Tuition Fee Policy 2025-26

There were no comments on the policy, and it was recommended to the Board for approval by the Committee per the policy framework.

#### 6.2 Relationships at Work Policy

This policy had had an Equalities Impact Assessment completed and there was one minor change. The Committee approved the policy.

## 7. General Purposes

### 7.1 Update on Progress Towards Delivering the Underpinning Strategies

The Principal updated that SMT had agreed to change and streamline strategies in support of the overall strategic plan, and this work had nearly completed. The Curriculum, People, Estates, Sustainability and Marketing strategies would soon be finalised. Reports would come to F&GP Committee regarding progress against these strategies. Progress towards the Digital Strategy which was launched in April has been positive.

**Are there any challenging areas in digital?** There is a lot of excitement around AI but also a lot to consider as an organisation and its use in education.

The Committee noted the report.

### 7.2 Freedom of Information Requests Update

The Clerk provided an update on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests outlining the general nature of the requests. The support of the Finance and People Services teams in providing the necessary information was acknowledged.

The Committee noted the report.



### 7.3 EDI Charter – Chair’s Public Signature

The Clerk gave an overview of this item where the answers to some questions had been sought from the AOC when the Board discussed the matter in July. The AOC’s answers were reviewed, and it was felt that the questions had been answered.

The Committee discussed the way some of the protected characteristics had been listed in the pledge paper. It was agreed that this could be reviewed in future but had been done in this way to be consistent with the wording in the College’s equalities policy.

The Committee recommended the Chair’s signature to this document to the Board for approval.

### 8. Any Other Business

The Principal was asked if the College had a position on the plans for the unitary authority and it was explained that the College will need to work with whatever organisation emerges through this process. The Principal is part of a Thames Valley college principals’ group working together to understand the implications of devolution.


### 9. Future Business

The Clerk noted that the FE Benchmarking item discussed in June as well as the Annual Report for Marketing would be brought to the November meeting of F&GP.

The meeting closed at 8.04pm.

The next meeting will be held in Abingdon on Monday 24th November 2025.

A Bark

Signature ..... 

10/12/2025



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