

## Corporation Meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025 4.00pm – 7.00pm at Blossomfield Campus

**Present**

Paul Assinder – Chair of Corporation  
Tony Lucas – Vice Chair of Corporation  
Christine Abbott  
Megan Bacalla – FE Student Governor  
Rebecca Gater – Principal and CEO  
Sarah Horton-Walsh  
Sue Hopewell  
Helen Kinghorn  
Ravi Kumar  
Mehreen Mirza  
Dave Nanda  
Kelvin Nash  
Amirun Nehar  
Cheryl Pidler  
Donna Poole – Staff Governor  
Sharmin Rima – HE Student Governor

**In Attendance**

Sam Bromwich – Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance, Nancy Buckley – Vice Principal Business Growth, Skills and Partnerships, Pete Haynes – Vice Principal HR and Student Services, Heather Hunt – Deputy Principal and CFO, Linda McLaughlin – Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum, Gita Gorman – Director of Finance, Tina Taylor – Senior Governance Officer,

**Apologies**

Graham McKean, Susie Ankrett, Harrison Thompson

### 1. Welcome and Announcements

The Chair extended a welcome to all attendees, particularly Sue Hopewell and Kelvin Nash, who were attending their first meeting. The Chair invited the newly appointed governors to provide an update regarding their background and experiences. The Chair noted that Donna Poole was attending her final corporation meeting.

#### 1. Re-election of Chair and Vice Chair of Corporation 2025/26

The Chair withdrew from the meeting during the discussion of this item. The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance presented the item and outlined the process for re-electing the Chair of the Corporation. It was confirmed that the term of office is limited to a maximum of two terms. Governors were informed that they may nominate themselves for the role of Chair if they wish. Following unanimous agreement, it was resolved that Paul Assinder be re-elected as Chair of the Corporation for the forthcoming academic year.

The Vice-Chair withdrew from the meeting. The Corporation unanimously agreed to re-elect Tony Lucas as Vice-Chair of the Corporation for the forthcoming academic year.

The Chair was questioned regarding whether he intended to appoint two Vice-Chairs. The Chair confirmed a desire to appoint a second Vice-Chair in due course.

## **2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received and accepted from Susie Ankrett, Graham McKean and Harrison Thompson.

## **3. Declarations of Interest**

The Principal and CEO declared an interest under the IoT item.

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance stated that governors will receive new declaration of interest forms to complete and return for the new academic year.

## **4. Membership Update**

### 4.1 Student Governor Term of Office update

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance stated that both Student Governors are extended to a full term of another 3 years.

### 4.2 Staff Governor Recruitment

After a recent staff election and upon the recommendation of the Search & Governance committee, the Corporation **RATIFIED** the appointment of Holly Bayliss as Staff Governor effective from 1st September 2025 for a period of 4 years.

### 4.3 Graham McKean

GM's first term has been extended to 2028.

### 4.4 Staff Governor Resignation

Donna Poole will cease to be the Staff Governor with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025. The Chair thanked Donna for her contributions as Staff Governor, noting the value of her staff perspective. He praised her exceptional service on the corporation, acknowledged their close collaboration, and recognised her ability to balance staff and governance roles. He thanked her for her teamwork and said she will be hard to replace.

## **5. Chair's Action and Use of College Seal and Chair's E-signature**

The Annual Accountability Statement Chair's Action was recorded, and a hard copy of the accountability statement was distributed for informational purposes.

## **6. Minutes of the Previous Corporation Meeting and Actions List held on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2025 were circulated, it was noted that Susie Ankrett should be recorded as providing apologies.

The minutes were **APPROVED** pending required changes. **ACTION**

### **6.1 Matters Arising (verbal)**

The Additional Information for Term 2 Safeguarding Report 2024/25 was linked for information.

### **6.2 Actions**

The actions report was distributed, and updates were given and acknowledged. Item 12 is now closed. The March Item 8 will be addressed in the autumn term. For March Item 8 regarding Boxphish training. Governors were reminded to complete the task, and this action will remain ongoing.

### **6.3 Top Key Risks**

Linked and noted for information

## 7. Committee Minutes

The following draft minutes were circulated and **NOTED** for information:

- Audit & Risk Committee meeting 04.03.2025
- Additional Financial Oversight Group (FoG) meeting 27.03.2025
- Property Special Interest Group (SiG) 27.03.2025 & 21.05.2025
- Search & Governance Committee 07.05.2025
- Remuneration Committee 13.05.2025 **CONFIDENTIAL from Staff and Student Governors and EMT.**

**Feedback from an absent governor** on the Woodlands extension was noted. The Deputy Principal and CFO confirmed that this issue was discussed at the June Property SiG and is now closed.

**A governor raised concerns** via email, about sensitive topics discussed in the remuneration committee minutes. The Director of Corporate Governance Risk & Compliance replied that, under the Carver model, all governors must receive the same information, including committee discussions. These minutes remain confidential to non-governors, staff, and student governors and are not displayed on the website.

## 8. Chair's Update

The report summarised the activities of the Chair of the College and updated Governors on key developments. The Chair confirmed that the report should be largely taken as read.

The Chair invited governors to volunteer for the EDI link governor role. **ACTION**

## 9. Principal's Update

The Principal's report was circulated which focused on key areas of the College. The following link documents were shared for information:

- Prime Minister letter Spending review
- Governor Letter - Proposed Housing Development Objection
- Landex Peer Review Report
- DfE Update on Further Education Additional Funding 2025 to 2026
- Letter from FE Commissioner – Financial Benchmarks
- Annual Accountability Statement 2025-26
- Solihull Annual Strategic Conversation (20 May 2025)

The strategic plan consultation is now closed to external stakeholders and will remain open to staff and students for several more weeks. An update was provided summarising feedback from external stakeholders and parents regarding three words they associate with the college.

**A governor inquired about student attendance comments.** The Principal and CEO responded that expectations for consistent attendance are communicated, and parents are made aware through notifications reflecting our high standards.

Staff and student consultation concluded that week. Updates on the autumn term and its alignment with the strategic plan will follow. The new plan will feature a summary of relevant feedback from each group.

**The Chair queried the representativeness of employer feedback.** The Principal and CEO reported a 10% response rate and mentioned that focus groups were also considered.

A letter to governors concerning a proposed housing development in Stratford was raised. The development objection was shared for information and governors briefly discussed the letter. It was noted that no further contact has been made on the matter since the initial letter, and that the college has no grounds for formal objection. The Chair highlighted the importance of maintaining a neutral stance as a local education provider, while a governor observed that future relationships may warrant careful consideration of our response.

#### **Strategic ambition 1:**

Achievement rates are predicted to improve by 4%, with all previously underperforming curriculum areas - except GCSE Science and Maths for 16–18-year-olds - forecast above national averages. The college received two Quality Professionals Awards and hosted the FE 'Big Lunch' for ALD students, attended by the Lord Lieutenant. A positive Landex peer review report was received. The college is participating in an Ofsted inspector recruitment pilot alongside BMet, and the Principal is involved in the national AoC Curriculum Strategy Group, which is currently focused on qualification reform and English/maths. As a founding member of National Employability Week, preparations are underway. The 'Ready, Respect, Safe' philosophy was launched, to be fully rolled out in September as part of the college's trauma-informed approach.

#### **Strategic ambition 2:**

The Accountability Agreement final version was provided for information; previous feedback opportunities were noted. Applications are at 102% of last year's total, with Creative & Foundation and STEM up to 105%, Service Industries at 98%. There are 76 fewer learners in Business, Animal Care, Science, A Levels, and Sport.

#### **Strategic ambition 3:**

Staff awards, wellbeing day, and CPD fortnight is upcoming.

#### **Strategic ambition 4:**

Details on this will be provided under finance item 14. DfE update: Further Education additional funding 2025–2026 – FE Commissioner financial KPIs.

#### **Strategic ambition 5:**

Waltham Forest College visited both Stratford and Blossomfield to share good practice, while City of Bristol also visited Blossomfield to discuss EDI best practice. The Principal and CEO and previous Chair of Corporation attended the Buckingham Palace Garden Party with a focus on Education and Skills. The FE 'Big Lunch' was hosted, and the Principal and CEO is scheduled to attend the FEC 'Just one more thing' event on 20 June. The Apprenticeship Awards were held on 20 June, and the Quality Coach & English Lecturer presented at a conference in Texas. FE Commissioner Shelagh Legrave visited Stratford, 18 June.

The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

### **10. Institute of Technology (IoT) Report**

The Vice Principal Business Growth, Skills and Partnerships reported that the Director of Operations at IoT has resigned, and recruitment for the position is underway. Interviews have been conducted, and a candidate has been selected to start during the Autumn term and will be invited to a meeting. An update was given regarding the selected candidate's background, noting their prior experience with IoT.

The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding and decision making by governors.

### **11. Monitoring - Access and Participation Plan**

The report provided a full update on Solihull College's Higher Education portfolio and to gain approval of the new HE Strategy Document. The following appendices were shared for information:

- Appendix 1 - 2019 (old) HE Strategy
- Appendix 2 - 2025 (new) HE Strategy for approval

- Appendix 3 - APP Monitoring Evaluation Group PPT
- Appendix 4 - APP Meeting minutes.

**A governor inquired** about key issues, their alignment with priorities, and whether an update was needed. The Vice Principal for Business Growth, Skills, and Partnerships identified declining numbers as the main challenge and explained this with reference to recommendations from an external consultant's review.

The consultant's recommendations were discussed. The Vice Principal for Business Growth, Skills, and Partnerships observed that the higher education environment and landscape present challenges for all stakeholders. It was emphasised that there is a need to build upon our existing initiatives and continue their development. Regarding areas where we are not currently active, the presence of competitors requires consideration before making investment decisions. These topics were thoroughly discussed during the meeting.

**The Chair questioned** endorsing the HE strategy before the overall College Strategy has been updated. The Principal and CEO clarified that the College's Strategic Plan is much broader and does not need to be finalised before approving the HE Plan, as their priorities differ. Assurance was provided on this point.

With there being no further comments or questions, the Corporation **APPROVED** the new HE Strategy.

## 12. Bids and Projects including termly KPI report

The report was presented which was to approve of WMCA Community Learning proposal and Update on bids and projects with including termly bids and contracts tracker for Autumn term.

The following appendices were received

- Appendix 1 - WMCA Community Learning Business Case
- Appendix 2 – DFE CTEC Business Case
- Appendix 3 – OFS Grant Business Case
- Appendix 4 - Current bids and projects in progress £100K+.

There was discussion about whether construction should be a bid, our ability to accommodate it, and the reasons for bidding on construction.

There was discussion about the exciting CTEC and community hubs bids. Clarity is needed on how these projects would align with current management structures if funded, and assurance that they would support rather than distract from core priorities. Further information on their strategic fit would be valuable.

**A governor asked** about pending funding for the RMF equestrian centre and whether to continue pursuing it or shift focus elsewhere; an update was provided.

With there being no further comments or questions the Corporation **APPROVED** the CTEC and OFS bid submission.

## 13. There were no items discussed

## 14. Finance Update

### Feedback from Financial Oversight Group (FoG)

The Chair of the FoG provided a brief verbal update, noting that a more detailed report would be given during the Finance presentation.

## Finance Presentation

The presentation confirmed the following items:

- Challenges and Risks
- Assumptions 2025/26 and 2026/27
- Assumptions and Sensitivities for:
  - DfE
  - Adult Skills Funding Apprenticeships
  - Higher Education
  - Other Income
  - Pay Expenditure
  - Non-Pay Expenditure
- Income
- Income and Expenditure
- Underlying Operation
- Financial KPI's
- Cash Flow
- Capital Investment
- Sensitives and Mitigation

The draft budget for 2025/26 and financial plan 2024 – 2027 were shared. In addition, the 2024/25 contributions analysis forecast outturn and the 2025/26 budget were presented to the Corporation, excluding Staff and Student Governors due to confidentiality. The report updated on contributions by faculty and school and included the CFFR College Finance Forecasting Return and Commentary for budget approval.

**Discussions addressed** the increasing balance and the healthy cash position. It was reported that resources are being allocated on a one-time basis for investment in college and learning initiatives. **A governor observed** that agency staff costs are higher. The Deputy Principal and CFO stated that measures are being implemented to reduce these costs next year by appointing permanent staff.

**A governor questioned** the reported and projected decline in HE student numbers. The Deputy Principal and CFO clarified that figures were off because the contingency was omitted but confirmed it can be updated. **ACTION**

The Corporation **APPROVED** the budget 2025/26 and the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) which confirmed it supports the College's strategic objectives.

The following Audit & Risk committee recommendations were received, and the Director of Corporate Governance Risk & Compliance provided an overview.

- RSM Internal Audit Plan 25/26
- Bishop Fleming's Audit Plan.
- Strategic Risk Register 25/26
- Health & Safety Policy
- Anti-Fraud Bribery and Corruption Policy Procedure & Strategy

**A governor inquired** about awareness and training under the anti-fraud policy. Regular, compulsory training for managers is vital, and many auditors or law firms offer it free. The Director of Corporate Governance Risk & Compliance confirmed that the policy underwent thorough internal and external reviews and committee discussions before being recommended to the Corporation, ensuring its robustness.

The Corporation **APPROVED** the recommended items.

## 15. Property Report/Update on Projects

The Deputy Principal and CFO reported on property matters and sought approval to lease an offsite brick workshop in Stratford, pending legal due diligence.

The Chair of the Property Special Interest Group (SiG) summarised recent meeting discussions.

The Corporation were asked to approve entering a lease for 13 Swan Centre, subject to satisfactory Heads of Terms and legal review, with final sign-off via Chairs Action.

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance confirmed that the SiG's terms now allow them to recommend Chairs Actions.

The Corporation **APPROVED** to enter into a lease for 13 Swan Centre subject to satisfactory Heads of Terms and legal work. It is also recommended that the finalised lease can be approved by a Chairs Action.

## 16. Governance Matters

### 16.1 Staff Governor Election Update

Discussed under item 4

### 16.2 Self-Assessment / Exit Interview Meetings

During a verbal update, the Director of Corporate Governance, Risk, and Compliance confirmed that these activities were scheduled for the summer. Attendees were requested to complete the questionnaire prior to the meeting.

### 16.3 Governor Induction

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk, and Compliance confirmed that governor inductions will commence in the autumn term for newly appointed governors.

### 16.4 Annual Cycle of Business 2025/2026

Shared for information

### 16.5 Review of Governors Handbook

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk, and Compliance has completed a review of the handbook and will meet with Heather Cross to provide support in updating it. The revisions will incorporate assurance measures, reflecting the latest guidance from the AoC.

### 16.6 Gifts and Hospitality Report

Shared for information

### 16.7 Quality SiG Terms of Reference (for information)

Shared for information

## 17. Confidential

CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES NOT FOR PUBLICATION

## 18. Policies

The following policy updates were considered and agreed:

- Health & Safety Policy – discussed under item 14
- Paternity Policy
- Freedom of Speech Policy

The policies were **APPROVED** by Corporation.

#### **19. Item for information**

The following items were noted for information:

- April PMR
- Freedom of Information report
- Health & Safety Update Report
- Tuition Fees 2025/26 and 2026/27

Governors commented on the number of FoI requests and received an update on them.

#### **20. Any Other Business**

The Financial Oversight Group (FoG) for the next academic year has changed to Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

#### **21. Future Dates**

Dates were confirmed as per the agenda.

The Chair thanked everyone, and the meeting ended at 6.10pm