Corporation Meeting – Quality & Curriculum

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 17th March 2026 5.00pm – 8.00pm at Woodlands Campus

Present	Paul Assinder – Chair of Corporation Christine Abbott Holly Bayliss – Staff Governor Rebecca Gater – Principal and CEO Sarah Horton-Walsh Sue Hopewell Helen Kinghorn Ravi Kumar Tony Lucas – Vice Chair of Corporation Gerard McGrory Mehreen Mirza Dave Nanda Amirun Nehar Cheryl Pidler Harrison Thompson
In Attendance	Sam Bromwich – Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance, Nancy Buckley – Vice Principal Business Growth, Skills and Partnerships, Linda McLaughlin – Vice Principal Quality & Curriculum, Pete Haynes – Vice Principal HR and Student Services, Heather Hunt – Deputy Principal and CFO, Tina Taylor – Senior Governance Officer, Adam Thomas – Director of Student Services (for one item).
Apologies	Susie Ankrett, Sharmin Rima – HE Student Governor,
Not in attendance:	Megan Bacalla – FE Student

1. **Welcome and Announcements**
   The Chair welcomed all attendees and gave thanks to Cheryl Pidler for chairing the Student Executive meeting.

2. **Apologies for Absence**
   Apologies were received and accepted from Susie Ankrett and Sharmin Rima – HE Student Governor. Megan Bacalla – FE Student was declared not in attendance.

3. **Declarations of Interest**
   None received.

4. **Membership Update**
   Susie Ankrett was appointed Chair of the People & Performance Special Interest Group (P&P SiG), and the Chair thanked her for taking on the role.

   An update was provided on the current governor recruitment process, including the current position. It was noted that interviews for the vacancy will take place on Monday 23 March.

5. **Chair's Action and Use of College Seal and Chair's E-signature**
   There were no items to discuss.

6. **Minutes and Confidential Minutes of the Previous Corporation Meeting and Actions List held on 28th January 2026.**
   Sue Hopewell's attendance record will be updated to reflect that she attended the meeting.

   The Chair identified errors in the previous minutes, specifically regarding the KCSiE training (should refer to all governors, not staff) and the financial compensation scheme amount, which should be £120k instead of £20k. These corrections were acknowledged and will be updated.

   The Minutes and Confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 28 January were **APPROVED**, subject to the amendments noted. **ACTION**

   Following a request from a governor, it was discussed the possibility of sharing draft minutes with governors who were absent from meetings to keep them informed, with the consensus that this would aid understanding if the minutes were clearly marked as drafts and not for approval. **ACTION**

   6.1 Matters Arising (verbal)
   Following up on care leavers, the Director of Student Services will produce ongoing reports for governors on learners experiencing financial hardship or disadvantage, with the first report expected next term. **ACTION**

   6.2 Actions

   The meeting reviewed the action log, noting that most actions were completed. The annual HR presentation on absence triggers is being finalised and will be referred to the P&P SiG. The HE strategy will be incorporated into the overall Curriculum and Skills strategy, to be presented in May, with opportunities for further discussion and iteration. **ACTION**

7. **Committee Minutes**

   The draft confidential minutes of the Remuneration Committee held on 3 December 2025, and the Audit & Risk Committee Internal Audit Plan 2026/27 (10 February 2026), were shared for information, noting that the Remuneration Committee minutes are confidential to Staff and Student Governors and non-Governors.

   The minutes of the Property SiG (25 February 2026) and the Audit & Risk Committee (3 March 2026) was deferred to the next meeting. **ACTION**

8. **Chair's Update**
   The Chair provided an update against key corporate risks, including cyber security, recruitment, and achievement.

   Governors noted assurance from recent cyber activity, including "Solihull Unplugged" and external insurance assessment feedback. Continued focus on cyber security testing actions was emphasised due to insurance implications. The Chair of the A&R committee provided an update on Cowbell and the implications for the College's insurance cover. The Link Governor for Digital and Transformation referred to insights from the recent digital transformation sessions.

   Governors discussed emerging risks around apprenticeship standards changes and adult provision. Assurance was provided that mitigating actions were being developed. Overall achievement improvement was noted, though areas remained below national averages.

A reminder was given regarding Boxphish training and the frequency of completion. Governors were reminded there where a significant number of training modules remain outstanding, and the Director of Corporation Governance, Risk & Compliance will follow up directly.

The recent letter from the FE Commissioner was shared. ***In response to a question from a Governor*** about Regional Improvement Teams (RITs), the Principal confirmed that there is no further update at this stage. Three RIT pilot arrangements are being considered, including within Birmingham, although no additional details have yet been confirmed. A detailed discussion took place on the content of the letter.

The document *Governors' Statutory Duties and Key Responsibilities* was shared, and the Chair reminded Governors of their responsibilities as set out by Ofsted.

A summer BBQ for Governors to thank staff was proposed for 23rd or 24th June, from 4.00pm–6.00pm. Governors were asked to confirm their availability. **ACTION**

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

9. Principal's Update

9a. Principal's Update report

The Principal presented her update, drawing particular attention to the draft Strategic Plan 2026–2028.

Strategic Plan 2026–2028

The Principal and CEO confirmed that the strategic plan had been finalised. Governors were advised that a minor but important correction had been identified following printing, whereby the terms *"learner"* and *"student"* had been used interchangeably. It was confirmed that the correct terminology is *"learner"* throughout, and amendments were underway. No further copies would be printed, nor would the plan be published, until this correction had been completed.

The Strategic Plan for 2026-2028 was APPROVED

Strategic Ambition 1

The Principal and CEO highlighted significant success in learner participation and performance in external competitions, evidencing impact against strategic priorities.

In animal care, learners secured 1st place at Level 2 and 1st, and 2nd place at Level 3 in West Midlands inter-college competitions. A learner achieved 2nd place in an inter-college creative writing competition, judged by an external author and publisher. In Early Years, where the College hosted the competition with external judges, 1st place at Level 2 and 1st place in the T Level competition. Learners had participated in e-sports competitions hosted by Sandwell College. Further competitions were scheduled, including Travel and Tourism. The College would host the first ever national finals of the Maths Challenge in April.

The Principal and CEO emphasised the value of external validation, competitive opportunities, and engagement with employers and sector professionals, which aligned closely with the ambitions within the draft strategic plan.

January examination outcomes were awaited and would not be available until later that week. It was confirmed that once available, results would be shared with the Chair and circulated to Governors. **ACTION**

Attendance for January exams was discussed. Despite disruption caused by snow across the West Midlands, learners who were able to attend generally did so. Colleges West Midlands had raised concerns collectively on behalf of affected colleges, although no further updates had been received from awarding bodies.

Strategic Ambition 2

The Principal and CEO reported on a new strategic partnership with Atos, a Solihull-based digital employer.

28 apprentices were currently enrolled through the partnership, with potential growth to 40. This was highlighted as a shift towards securing large single-employer cohorts, improving efficiency and sustainability within apprenticeship provision.

The College had also successfully won a tender with Birmingham City Council to deliver a Hospitality Bootcamp, supporting learners with additional needs and upskilling individuals into leadership and management roles. The Principal noted this as a significant achievement, particularly given competition from Birmingham-based colleges.

Strategic Ambition 3

The Principal and CEO referenced a range of activities aligned to this ambition, including:

International Women's Day celebrations. A programme of mentoring throughout the month, involving members of SLT and Governors, which had been positively received.

Wider engagement activity supporting inclusion and leadership development.

Strategic Ambition 4

An update was provided on matters previously discussed under other agenda items, including "Solihull Unplugged", with assurances that lessons learned and feedback were being cascaded internally.

Following recent property discussions, the Principal and CEO sought in-principle Corporation support for a Chair's Action to progress the Griffin Business Park option as a temporary solution for construction delivery.

Chairs Action

It was reported that the proposed unit at Griffin Business Park had been recently refurbished. The arrangement would provide short-term capacity (approximately three years), allowing increased learner numbers from September while longer-term estate strategy was developed. This option was considered more viable and sustainable than further development on the car park, which carried planning and value-for-money concerns.

It was agreed that a full report including financial details would be brought back before any contractual commitments were made. The Corporation were content to **delegate authority to the Chair** to progress matters via Chair's Action. **ACTION**

The Principal and CEO also reported on exploratory discussions linked to longer-term regional development opportunities, including future growth in the Chelmsley Wood area, noting that these were long-term considerations (7–8 years) and not immediate proposals.

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

10. Termly 1 Safeguarding Update

The Committee received the termly safeguarding report, presented by the Director of Student Services covering Term 1 activity. It was noted that the report was presented slightly later than in previous years to align with the annual safeguarding report and maintain consistency of reporting periods.

The Director of Student Services confirmed that safeguarding culture and management arrangements remained consistent with previous updates. The College continues to work closely with the Central Safeguarding Company, which provides a termly supervision sessions for safeguarding staff and an Independent assurance and audit of safeguarding practices and record keeping.

The following key points were advised:

An external audit had taken place in late February, during which the safeguarding system (*MyConcern*) and associated records were reviewed. Initial verbal feedback had been positive, with a written report awaited. It was confirmed that this report would be shared once received. **ACTION**

A Governor questioned whether the independent safeguarding audit report should be formally considered by the Audit & Risk Committee to ensure that actions could be appropriately monitored. It was agreed that the external safeguarding assurance report should be reflected within Audit & Risk reporting as part of external assurance, consistent with other non-financial assurance reports.

The Director of Student Services outlined how safeguarding support is communicated to learners. It was emphasised that anonymous reporting can be helpful in identifying wider concerns, even where direct follow-up with the learner is not possible.

It was reported that the safeguarding service was currently fully staffed, comprising nine safeguarding officers across sites, with no vacancies. This was noted as a positive position that supports consistency and quality in safeguarding practice.

During Term 1, safeguarding staff engaged in a wide range of multi-agency meetings, including child protection and early support arrangements, at a level consistent with the previous year. Safeguarding referrals showed a modest increase compared with the same period last year. Key profile information was shared.

The Director of Student Services noted that higher referral rates for learners with learning difficulties or disabilities were not unusual, reflecting increased vulnerabilities, but warranted continued attention and awareness-raising.

Governors challenged whether more analysis could be undertaken to understand why learners with learning difficulties or disabilities were proportionally over-represented within safeguarding referrals, and whether this insight could inform staff awareness and preventative action. It was acknowledged that additional analysis would be beneficial. The Director of Student Services committed to exploring this further to inform staff development and messaging.

A significant change to safeguarding reporting was highlighted. Previously, safeguarding data had been dominated by a large mental health category, making wider trend analysis difficult and a detailed explanation to those were given as detailed within the report.

Governors welcomed the revised approach, noting that it provided a clearer and more balanced picture of safeguarding risks across the College.

Peer-on-peer abuse was confirmed as referring to student-on-student incidents. An increase in referrals at the Woodlands campus was highlighted with an update on referrals provided. It was noted the increase was attributed to specific early-year incidents, including behaviour linked to smoking restrictions and students being displaced off-site, which had since been addressed. It was reported that concerns had since stabilised and would be monitored during Term 2.

An update on campus comparisons was also summarised.

An update was provided on cases involving references to extremist ideas or content. It was noted that all cases had been investigated internally and assessed as not meeting the threshold for a Prevent referral. One further case is expected to be reported in Term 2.

Mandatory safeguarding training compliance stood at 93%, with remaining non-completion largely attributable to new starters and staff with limited on-site attendance. Follow-up activity was ongoing.

Governors raised concerns regarding anti-social behaviour and youth violence in local town centres, particularly relating to social media-driven activity and the potential impact on learners travelling to and from College. The Director of Student Services assured governors that the College maintains regular liaison with local police and partner colleges noting that whilst incidents had been noted in local communities, few safeguarding disclosures had been received from learners directly affected. Emerging risks linked to AI-generated content, deepfakes and online harassment were acknowledged and monitored.

The Safeguarding Link Governor confirmed, based on recent engagement and challenge, they felt assured that safeguarding is embedded into daily practice, that staff understand their responsibilities, and that safeguarding arrangements go beyond statutory minimums.

Governors requested clarity on safeguarding responsibilities within sub-contracted provision and how assurance is obtained in those settings. It was agreed that further detail would be provided in a future update to ensure Governors could be fully assured of safeguarding oversight across all delivery models. **ACTION**

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

The Director of Student Services left the meeting.

There was a break for food.

11. Governors Review of Accountability Agreement Statement 2025/26

To update Corporation on progress to date on the targets set out in the Annual Accountability Statement 2024/25.

The Vice Principal Business Growth, Skills and Partnerships confirmed that the Accountability Statement is subject to a formal mid-year review and that a link to the full published statement was provided for reference. An overview of progress against the identified priorities was presented, and it was reported that the College was on track to achieve the commitments set out in the statement.

An update was provided on those areas where targets had not yet been fully met, including the actions being taken to address these. It was noted that further progress could be achieved with additional funding; however, this had not yet been confirmed. The Vice Principal highlighted that the College continued to be recognised as a trusted delivery partner for bootcamps.

The Corporation were advised that the next draft Accountability Statement would be presented to the May Corporation meeting, with a view to final approval in July.

Following a governor question regarding community learning and higher education hubs, the Vice Principal Business Growth, Skills and Partnerships clarified the purpose of the hubs and confirmed the activity currently being delivered through this model.

12. Quality, Curriculum, Teaching & Learning

The Corporation considered the Quality Improvement Plan and Quality Report for 2025/2026.

12.1 QiP Update 2025/26

Governors provided significant challenges regarding attendance trends, clarity of milestones, ownership of actions, and alignment between college-level priorities and curriculum teams. Improvements to English and Maths delivery were welcomed, with early positive indicators at Woodlands following structural changes.

Governors provided detailed challenge on attendance, noting a 2% decline across provision types compared with the previous year and queried whether Assistant Principals had sufficient support, skills and training to effectively challenge Heads of School. In response, it was confirmed that Assistant Principals present faculty performance to EMT three times per year, supported by follow-up meetings, and that faculties would be reported separately to strengthen accountability.

Further discussion focused on the need for clearer ownership, interim milestones and measurable actions within the Quality Improvement Plan, as end-year targets alone did not allow for effective in-year judgement. ***Governors also questioned*** the extent to which teachers were aware of, and aligned to, QIP priorities, noting a predominance of amber and red ratings without a clear pathway to improvement. It was agreed that the QIP would be revised to include clearer milestones, defined ownership, revised colour coding and a more explicit narrative on actions and progress. ***The Chair emphasised the importance*** of the QIP being aspirational, including for high-performing areas, and assurance was provided that differentiated targets had been set at school level. **ACTION**

An update was also provided on recent improvements in English and mathematics. Governors agreed that a further update on English and maths would be brought to the Quality & Curriculum SiG in May. **ACTION**

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

12.2 Quality Report (Term 2)

Governors queried whether the progress reported for December and March was based on the recent MOT meetings and were advised that this reflected ongoing review activity supported by school-level action plans.

Governors questioned whether consideration should be given to the timing of the report, noting that the March Corporation meeting did not provide a complete picture of impact. Concern was also expressed that, while a small number of curriculum areas were performing strongly, there were significant and concerning drops in retention in others, and that the headline summary table did not sufficiently explain the underlying issues. ***Governors further challenged*** whether interventions were being implemented quickly enough in response to declines in attendance and were assured that these trends were recognised and that appropriate performance conversations and interventions were taking place. An update was also provided on the number and frequency of MOT meetings held throughout the year. **ACTION**

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

12.3 Focus Group Feedback

The report presented feedback from the Student Focus Group meetings which took place in December 2025. The report was **NOTED** for information, understanding, and decision-making by Governors

13 Bids and Projects including Termly Bids and Contracts Tracker

Three major projects were presented for approval: the BFI Film Academy Hub, a job guarantee grant, and construction skills funding. ***Governors discussed*** the importance of understanding the financial implications and capacity for delivering multiple projects simultaneously, agreeing that future proposals should include clear summaries of costs, income, and return on investment. Governors emphasised the need for comprehensive business cases detailing costs, delivery methods, resource requirements, and expected financial returns before approving significant investments. **ACTION**

Governors **APPROVED** the 3 tenders as detailed in the report.

The update on current £100k+ bids and projects, including the KPI tracker, was noted for information.

14 Annual Report to the Corporation on the Reappointment of the External Auditors

The Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and the Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance reported on the reappointment of external auditors.

On the recommendation of the Audit & Risk Committee, the Corporation **APPROVED the reappointment of Bishop Fleming as External Auditors for 2025/26.**

15 Governance Items

15.1 Feedback from the GDD group activity on Ofsted

The Corporation received an update on the Ofsted-related session delivered as part of the recent Governors' Development Day. Governors were reminded that the session focused on governors' statutory responsibilities and lines of enquiry and included a structured exercise using flip charts to capture governors' understanding, assurance and areas for further development.

It was reported that governors had engaged positively in the exercise, identifying areas where assurance was strong and highlighting potential gaps in awareness or confidence against Ofsted expectations. The outputs from the flip charts would be reviewed to identify any common themes and inform future governor development activity.
ACTION

15.2 Feedback on Governor Learning Visits/Focus Groups

Governors' feedback from the December Learning Visit and Focus Groups was **NOTED** for information.

15.3 Appointment of Internal and External Auditors

The Corporation received an update from the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee on the outcome of the tender processes for both Internal and External Audit. It was confirmed that full tender exercises had been undertaken, with three providers invited for each appointment, including the incumbent auditors.

In respect of Internal Audit, the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee noted that RSM submitted a particularly strong bid, demonstrating a high level of sector expertise, clear understanding of the College and continuity of audit leadership, which together provided strong assurance. The A&R Committee agreed that alternative bidders did not offer sufficient additional benefit to warrant a change of provider, noting improvements in audit delivery and the effectiveness of the working relationship over time.

In relation to External Audit, members were advised that bids were broadly comparable; however, Bishop Fleming continued to demonstrate a strong understanding of the College and its operating context. Continuity of service, improved audit delivery and agreement of a fixed fee arrangement for the forthcoming period were noted as providing additional assurance.

On the recommendation of the Audit & Risk Committee, the Corporation **APPROVED the reappointment of RSM from 1st August 2026 to 31st July 2029 as Internal Auditors and Bishop Fleming as External Auditors from 1st August 2026 to 31st July 2029.**

16 Confidential Items

No items discussed.

17 Policies

Governors reviewed the Grievance Procedure for all Staff and the Paternity Leave & Parental Leave Polices.

Governors discussed the Grievance Procedure for Senior Post Holders and its alignment with Corporation oversight, noting that the process was difficult to follow in places. Clarification was sought on the sequencing of stages, particularly where the Chair of Corporation is referenced at multiple points, and on the composition of the Appeals Committee. The Vice Principal HR & Student Services agreed to clarify the procedure to ensure the process is clear contained within the policy. **ACTION**

The **Paternity Leave & Parental Leave Policies were APPROVED**.

18 Items for Information

The following items were shared for information:

- Bids and Projects (see item 13)
- Gifts & Hospitality Report
- Updated Governor's register of Interest
- PMR December 2025
- Health and Safety Update Report

19 Any Other Business

No items discussed.

20 Future Dates

Dates were confirmed as per the agenda.

The Chair thanked everyone, and the meeting ended at 8.15pm.