Solihull College and University Centre

Minutes of the meeting of the Search and Governance Committee held on Tuesday 30th September 2025, Blossomfield Campus

Present	Paul Assinder [Chair and Chair of Governors] Tony Lucas [Vice-Chair of Governors] Christine Abbott Rebecca Gater [Principal and Chief Executive] Cheryl Pidler
In Attendance	Sam Bromwich [Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance], Tina Taylor [Senior Governance Officer]
Apologies	None

1. **Welcome and Apologies**
The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

2. **Declarations of Interest in relation to this Agenda**
There were no new declarations of interest received. The Chair noted the extension of Christine Abbott's term of office and advised that, should any related discussions arise, CA may be asked to leave the meeting while these take place.

3. **Minutes of the Meeting held on 7th May 2025, Confidential Minutes held on 7th May 2025 and Matters Arising**
The minutes and confidential minutes of the meeting held on 7th May 2025 were shared and **APPROVED**.

The actions were reviewed and updated.

4. **Membership Report**
The report gave information on the composition and membership and any vacancies of the Corporation and its committee's and to advise Corporation on any appointments necessary and recommend any extended terms of office.

Following the recent self-assessment meetings, the committee **NOTED** the extension of the following terms of office:

- Helen Kinghorn 1st Term of Office ended 31st August 2025, extended by another 3 years to 31st August 2028.
- Dave Nanda – 1st Term of Office expires 31st October 2025, extended by another 3 years to 31st October 2028.
- Susie Ankrett 1st Term of Office ends 1st November 2025 extended by another 3 years to 1st November 2028.
- Christine Abbott – Term of office expires December 2025. Extended for another term of 4 years to December 2029.

The committee received an update regarding the resignation of a governor who stepped down following a brief period of appointment. It was noted that he had not attended induction meetings or responded to communications. As a result, a vacancy has now arisen on the Corporation.

The committee were informed that discussions are ongoing with Peridot Partners regarding previous applicants, to explore whether any remain interested in the governor role. It was recommended that the Vice Chair and the Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance meet with a potential candidate to assess suitability.

An update was provided on one candidate's background, noting that although their experience is linked to young offender training, it offers a different educational perspective and could bring valuable diversity to the board. ***A governor queried*** whether another FE focused appointment was necessary, suggesting that employment sector experience may be more beneficial. The committee acknowledged the value of having a range of professional backgrounds represented.

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance confirmed that Peridot Partners will honour the funded recruitment arrangement.

A governor asked whether Solihull Council had been approached regarding interest in the vacancy. The Principal and CEO confirmed that contact had been made, but no interest had been expressed. The Chair suggested that, should the Peridot applicants not progress, Stratford Council could be considered as a next step.

5. Register of Interests for Governors, EMT and Director of Corporate Governance Risk & Compliance.

The Senior Governance Officer confirmed that the information is fully up to date and published on the website, ensuring compliance requirements are met.

6. Search and Governance Annual Report

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance overlined the report which gave a review of the year 2024/5, to propose new objectives for 2025/6 and give assurance to governors on the conduct and impact of the Search & Governance committee that it meets the terms of reference in the Instruments and Articles of Governance.

The following appendices were shared for information:

- Feedback themes from annual governor self-assessments July-
- September 2025
- Governor Learning Visits report
- Mandatory Training report 2024/25
- Governors Annual Objectives 25/26 and Action Plan

<u>Feedback themes from annual governor self-assessments July - September 2025</u>

The committee received an update on the themes emerging from the recent governor self-assessment meetings, which are being shared with the Executive Management Team (EMT) for further consideration. ***The Chair suggested*** that future self-assessments could be conducted online every two years, given the time commitment involved. The effectiveness of the current volume of work was discussed. In response, the Director of Corporate Governance, Risk and Compliance noted that while self-assessment is required annually, it does not necessarily need to involve virtual meetings. It was proposed that next year's process be streamlined in light of the upcoming External Board Review (EBR), which will require significant input from governors.

The committee agreed that this should be discussed further outside the meeting.

A governor queried whether it was necessary to discuss the self-assessment questions in detail, given that themes would be drawn together and a few conversations held. It was suggested that a separate meeting involving only governors could be beneficial to agree on their own priorities. This would serve as a pre-meeting ahead of the Corporation meeting, allowing governors to explore and define their priorities independently of those presented to them. Discussions followed regarding how such a meeting could be structured. **ACTION**

<u>Governor Learning Visits and Focus Group Report</u>

A summary of learning visit and focus group activity and feedback for 2024/25 was presented. It was noted that some governor visits were missing from the report. Following clarification, it was confirmed that the report would be updated to include all learning visits to ensure completeness. **ACTION.**

Discussions took place regarding how actions are followed up from the feedback received. It was suggested that the report should indicate what the issues are, and actions to be taken on the key themes to make it clearer. **ACTION**

A governor enquired whether a decision had been made regarding staff focus groups, noting their value particularly when Heads of School participate in student focus groups. This was offered as a suggestion, with further discussion exploring whether more could be done in collaboration with the Staff Governor. The Chair advised caution to avoid crossing into operational matters. A governor highlighted a gap in engagement with teaching staff and noted that a significant number of non-teaching staff are also not currently represented. The Principal and CEO emphasised that any participation would need to be voluntary and reiterated the importance of maintaining a strategic, non-operational focus. The group also discussed the importance of clearly communicating the benefits of involvement to staff ensuring they understand "what's in it for them." **ACTION**

<u>Mandatory Training Report</u>
An update was provided noting the importance of all governors completing Keeping Childre Safe in Education (KCSiE) on an annual basis.

<u>Governors' annual objectives 25/26 and action plan</u>
It was suggested that timescales be added to the action plan for greater clarity. ***A governor enquired*** how the committee might work with the Team to support the appointment of the two current vacancies. The committee also discussed themes emerging from the governors' self-assessment, including how artificial intelligence (AI) could be used to enhance governance processes. Benchmarking against other colleges was considered, with governors offering to assist in this area. The potential for collaboration with outstanding colleges was explored, and an update was provided on institutions where such partnerships could be beneficial. It was agreed to include collaboration as a formal objective going forward.

It was recommended to submit to Corporation for approval, incorporating the additions discussed during the meeting.

7. External Board Review
The report outlined the proposal for Phase 2 of the External Board Review (EBR). Phase 1 of the EBR Action Plan had been completed and was reported to the Search & Governance Committee in May 2025. An update was provided on the proposed next steps for Phase 2.

The Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance advised that three quotes had been received for consideration. It was recommended that Rockborn be appointed, given the existing working relationship established during Phase 1 of the EBR and the current Governance Handbook review. Rockborn was considered to offer added value and remained within budget. It was noted that the reviewer had previously worked with the Association of Colleges (AoC) and is now with Rockborn.

The committee discussed the process for the scoping meeting once the external reviewer is appointed, ensuring alignment with governance objectives. ***A governor raised a concern*** about the potential for reduced objectivity due to the reviewer's familiarity with the organisation but acknowledged that proceeding with the review was the appropriate course of action.

The committee agreed that the Terms of Reference for the EBR would need to be reviewed and approved, with the Director of Corporate Governance, Risk & Compliance coordinating this process.

It was approved to recommend that Corporation appoint Rockborn, subject to the caveats discussed during the meeting.

8. Skills Audit update and Succession Planning Map (Standing Item)
To report outlined how the skills audit and succession planning helps to identify skills gaps and where vacancies need to be filled.

<u>Skills Audit Analysis</u>

The Chair noted that the two most recent appointments have strengthened representation in Curriculum and Quality. However, it was acknowledged that there remains a gap in expertise relating to external industry and commerce, as well as the property and estates portfolio. The committee agreed that this was an accurate reflection of the current areas requiring further representation.

Succession Plan

The Senior Governance Officer provided an overview of the succession planning document that had been shared with the committee. A recent review identified a minor gap in succession coverage, highlighting the need to recruit additional expertise to strengthen the current framework.

The report was **NOTED.**

9. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Summary Report

The report provided an updated overview of EDI within the Corporation.

The Committee is asked to confirm whether it is content for the ESFA FE Workforce Governor Data Collection item to be removed from future reporting cycles. It was agreed to report this once per year in the second meeting of the year. **ACTION**

10. Governors Handbook Review

The findings of the Governors' Handbook Review were presented, and governors were invited to consider the proposed amendments and recommend any changes to Corporation. The committee indicated that they had feedback and suggested revisions. It was therefore agreed to defer submission to the October Corporation meeting and instead present the final version at the November meeting, once all comments have been received. The committee agreed that submitting a finalised document would be preferable, and members were asked to provide their feedback within one week. **ACTION**

The Chair left the meeting, and the Vice Chair assumed responsibility for chairing the remainder of the session. It was confirmed that the meeting remained quorate.

11. Attendance Report 2024/25

A copy of the attendance report was shared for information.

Concerns regarding governor attendance were noted during the self-assessment meetings. Valid and unavoidable reasons had been provided in most cases, but it was agreed that attendance should be monitored more closely in the next academic year. The committee discussed the possibility of allowing hybrid attendance for governors located abroad, with a suggestion that this be considered on a "by exception" basis. It was also noted that three outstanding self-assessment meetings are yet to take place, where low attendance will be further discussed.

The committee discussed attendance at Governor Development Days, briefings, and Special Interest Groups (SiGs), noting the impact of low participation. It was suggested that this be formally reviewed, including consideration of recording attendance and evaluating the added value and contribution of those attending.

A comment was received recommending that the Governor Brochure be updated to reflect the number of hours typically dedicated to the role. It was also suggested to include reference to additional responsibilities, such as participation in SiGs, and to ensure the Stratford campus and its areas of coverage are more prominently featured. Reference to both the Warwickshire and Solihull Chambers was also recommended. These updates are to be considered following the External Board Review (EBR). **ACTION**

The committee discussed the concept of SiG membership and raised concerns that it may begin to resemble a formal committee structure. It was agreed that this should be addressed as part of the EBR.

An update was provided on the process for filling the vacancy on the Remuneration Committee. It was suggested that one of the governors be considered for the role; however, it was noted that she may have limited availability and might not be able to attend all meetings.

12. Review Action Plan – AoC Code of Good Governance recommendation

The report provided an update on the action plan for the AoC Code of Good Governance which has been in place since it was reviewed at the governor's development day in September 2024.

The report was taken as read and governors were given option to provide any comments by email.

13. Any Other Business

It was noted that matters relating to college competitors, in connection with a governor, had been addressed in an email to the Search & Governance Committee and were recorded for information.

Collaboration with Riverside College and Cheshire College South & West (CCS&W) was acknowledged as having been covered above.

14. Date and Time of Next Meeting

Tuesday 21st April 2026 at 4pm on TEAMS

Ended 5.40pm