

Empowering Success, Enriching Communities, Supporting Industry

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING**

**HELD REMOTELY ON WEDNESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2025**

Present: Gill Banks, Paul Gaskell (Chair), Ian Evans, Simon Price (co-opted committee member)

In attendance: Kevin Williams, Vice Principal – Finance, Estates & MIS  
Lesley Venables, Governance Professional  
Jo-Anne Tam, Director of Finance  
Melissa Thomas, Interim Director of Human Resources - minutes 105 to 148  
Andrew Ellams, Commercial Director – minutes 105 to 156

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

105 Apologies for absence were received from Paul Smith and Joanne Henney (external governors).

**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

106 There were no declarations of interest in any agenda item.

**MINUTES**

107 **Resolved -** That the minutes of the meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair

**MATTERS ARISING**

108 Governors received for information a progress report on the actions identified at the previous meeting and noted that the majority of these were either completed, in progress or featured on the agenda.

109 The Vice-Principal Finance & Resources advised that purchasing new signage for each campus was not an immediate priority (minute 129 refers) and would form part of the current capital projects. All previous branding had been removed and the Principal would be discussing opportunities for improved signage across the Borough with the Council's CEO.

110 The Principal commented that the College was waiting for up-to-date benchmarks for HR indicators to be published and these would be included in future versions of the report (minute 9). This item would now be moved to the 'completed' section of the action list.

**MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS TO 31<sup>ST</sup> JANUARY 2025**

111 Governors received for information the management accounts to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

- 112 Total forecast income in 2024/2025 was £31,238m and the forecast outturn was a deficit of £223k, which was a reduction of £810K compared to the budgeted surplus of £587K. Income for high needs provision had increased, however, there had been reductions in the areas of 16-18, Adult Education Budget and HE income.
- 113 Pay expenditure was currently £731K less than the approved budget due to non-essential vacancies not being filled. The correction of depreciation charges in year had meant a variation of £1.15m
- 114 All financial indicators were positive and cash balances were £24.91m
- 115 There had been 2 significant movements in the College's financial position. The first of these was a clawback of apprenticeship income of £155K following the recent ESFA funding audit. Management was currently in discussion with the College's external auditors as to whether this should be included in the 2024/2025 financial statements or required re-opening the 2023/2024 annual accounts. The second variation related to an increase in pension costs of £200K compared to the approved budget.
- 116 The Committee noted that the variations outlined above caused the College's financial health rating to move from Outstanding to Good. [In response to a question about the cash position of moving from a surplus to a deficit, the Director of Finance confirmed that there was no impact on cash levels. Governors were reminded of the discussions that had taken place at the last meeting on treasury management. Steps had been taken to maximise the interest generated from the College's cash deposits, whilst keeping them secure.](#)
- 117 [The College had also opted to align its cash balances with its values such as environmental sustainability, which would contribute to the Environmental, Social & Governance section of the Report on the Financial Statements. Updates on treasury management would be provided to the Committee twice each year.](#)

## **ESTATES & CAPITAL PROJECTS UPDATE**

### **Health & Safety**

- 118 Governors received for information a report on Health & Safety issues in term 2. A review of relevant policies had commenced with a view to streamlining the number and content to ensure that these could be easily accessed and understood by staff.
- 119 Fire safety improvements continued to be made, including the commissioning of fire strategies and assessments for external wall construction and cladding to existing buildings. This was part of the site re-development for Twelve Quays (12Q) and Hamilton Campuses and would be rolled-out across all campuses in the long term.
- 120 The internal auditors (RSM) were scheduled to review processes for the maintenance/servicing of College equipment in March 2025. Following agreement of the scope of the audit, the fieldwork would take place onsite due to the practical nature of the activities in the relevant curriculum areas.
- 121 Further strengthening of the College site security procedures had taken place.

- 122 Work continued on a number of other issues that had been reported to previous Committee meetings, such as obtaining and recording staff driving licence information, the management of the College's minibus fleet and student trips and visits.
- 123 Unannounced fire evacuation drills had been implemented at all campuses in term 2. Any resulting actions from these were currently being evaluated and these drills would continue on a termly basis. Some issues had been raised on a single point of exit at the Hamilton Campus, together with a lack of assembly point management and no fire marshalling except for members of the maintenance team. Further volunteer fire marshals were being sought to address these gaps.
- 124 The level of First Aid cover continued to be closely monitored, particularly in relation to the retention of trained staff and the release of staff for training during term time.
- 125 A total of 43 accidents/incidents had been reported in Term 2 (up to 21st February 2025). The majority of these had occurred at the 12Q and Conway Park campuses, however, it was felt that there may be under-reporting at the Wirral Waters and Oval sites.
- 126 One RIDDOR reportable incident was reported in the first half of term 2, which involved a member of security staff and had resulted in a head injury and temporary unconsciousness. The individual had received immediate first aid on site (CP) and the was hospitalised.
- 127 Following an assessment of the purpose, benefits and associated risk of drone activity, it had been agreed that this activity would no longer be permitted at the College.

### **Estates & Capital Projects Update**

- 128 Governors received a report on current estates and capital projects. During recent fire drill evacuations it had become apparent that car parking issues may prevent emergency vehicles from accessing some sites. It had been agreed that a system of parking permits would be implemented, followed by further measures at some future point.
- 129 There had been a significant increase in the proportion of students who would be taking English and maths exams in the summer, which required additional rooming capacity. Discussions were underway with Wirral Council for the possible use of Birkenhead Town Hall.
- 130 College Management was considering the introduction of knife arches to improve security. Advice from subject experts and the experience of other colleges would be used to inform any final decision. [A governor asked about the College's policy on the discovery of knives being carried by students. The Principal advised that the use of knife arches would be unannounced and intermittent, involving support from the local police. The College did not have the power to 'stop and search' students, but the operation of these devices could improve the feeling of safety on campus and may act as a deterrent. The main issues centred around prevention and zero-tolerance of poor behaviour. It was agreed that a further update would be provided to the next Committee meeting on the options considered by SLT and any resulting recommendations.](#)

- 131 A number of capital projects were progressing in line with the overall plan. Tenders for the construction works of the Prep for Life Sensory Garden and the Hamilton Basement Catering Kitchen would be issued shortly. The cost of the former project would be £40K higher than the original budget, but this additional funding would be drawn from another project, within the overall envelope of £14.4m. Careful scheduling of all capital works would be required in order that the ESFA grants were spent by the allotted deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026.
- 132 A governor asked about progress on any planning applications and was advised that the College had not yet been notified of any outcomes, with the exception of the new entrance to the Twelve Quays campus. Investigations on the ownership of the tram tracks continued and the Committee was advised that the proposed extension would not impact on the canal wall. However, approval may be required from the operator for any works on the site water supply.
- 133 It was agreed that future reports would include the current status of planning applications.
- 132 The upgraded CCTV system had been ordered and, in response to questions from governors, the Vice-Principal reported that maintenance of the equipment formed part of the 10 year contract.
- 133 A total of £30k of the FE Capital Reclassification grant received from the ESFA had yet to be deployed prior to the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. The allocation for the Local Skills Improvement Fund had almost been spent. Regular meetings with the design team for the Capital Transformation Project continued and works should commence on site over the next few weeks.

### **Estates Strategy Update**

- 134 The Vice-Principal Finance & Resources presented an update on progress on drafting a revised Estates Strategy, which would be submitted for recommendation to the Board at the Committee's next meeting (June 2025).
- 135 Over the past couple of months an analysis of the College's current space/room utilisation had been undertaken. Although further work was required, initial indications suggested that there was a surplus of space at the Conway Park and Twelve Quays campuses, with the remaining sites in line with sector norms.
- 136 The estates consultant was working with curriculum teams to understand future developments and how these would impact on space requirements. A recent announcement by the Government on capital funding for FE colleges would also affect the Estates Strategy and it was suggested that this additional grant could be sufficient to fund an extra floor in the Maths & English Centre.

### **Environmental Sustainability Policy**

- 137 Governors were advised that the College already had an Environmental Sustainability Strategy, which aligned to the Association of Colleges' Climate Change Roadmap. However, there was a significant amount of work to be undertaken to enable the College to reach the same level as its peers.

- 138 Further resourcing capacity was being sought including an Environmental Sustainability Officer who would be responsible for monitoring energy consumption, facilitating the development of learning materials for use by curriculum staff and raising awareness of sustainability issues within the College community. The Committee questioned whether the role should be pitched at a more senior level but were advised that the College was seeking someone with energy and passion, together with the fact that someone more experienced and with practical experience would probably be more costly to employ. The Interim Director of HR advised that the College would follow an equitable and inclusive recruitment process.
- 139 The Principal commented that the College had strong links with relevant sustainability organisations that could provide expertise and support. The College needed a dedicated officer and a full business case would be drafted for approval by the Executive Team.
- 140 The Vice-Principal reported that the College needed to implement the AoC Roadmap, which included ensuring that students were aware of sustainability issues and having relevant courses that could be offered to the community. Sustainability was one of the pillars in the Strategic Plan and it was important to have an associated policy to set out the College's aims and processes in this area.
- 141 **Resolved -** That the Board **be RECOMMENDED** to approve the Policy on Environmental Sustainability

## HR & WELL-BEING UPDATE

- 141 The Committee received a report on performance against key HR indicators for 2024/2025, together with information on current HR issues. The report contained benchmarking data, which should enable the Committee to monitor progress and identify any issues. The Interim HR Director reported that work had been undertaken on the accuracy of the data available from the current HR system, a high proportion of which had been carried out manually.
- 142 Turnover to date was 17.1% compared to the target of 17% and the overall total for 2023/2024 of 15.4%. Overall, 24% of the 32 staff leavers were classified as involuntary or unavoidable, comprising 5 retirements, 2 redundancies and one ill-health capability dismissal. It was felt that the reduction in turnover may be due to initiatives implemented from the start of the academic year, including the pay and grading review, revised lecturing contracts with reduced teaching hours, the new Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and curriculum management restructure, together with a new brand identity and strategic plan.
- 143 Staff attendance was 94.43% compared to the target of 98% and 94.08% for the same period in 2023/2024.
- 144 A total of 81.3% of staff had participated in the recent staff survey, which was an 11% increase on 2023/2024. No significant areas of concern had been highlighted and management was reviewing outcomes within departments to determine what actions were required. The Committee questioned why the figures in the survey for TU Education were much lower than other areas and was advised that this was due to only half of the staff completing the survey and the departure of a key member of the team part-way through the year.

- 145 The College had been re-accredited for the Investors in People award last week and the report recognised the amount of work that had been undertaken since the last review. A new staff awards initiative had been introduced from July 2025, in addition to the STAR awards for students.
- 147 Governors were advised that changes had been made to the HR system which would provide improved reporting in future and meant that it was now linked to the automated recruitment service. 'Blind' CV screening was in place to reduce any conscious bias.
- 148 The Committee thanked the Interim Director for the work undertaken by her team over the past few months and wished her well in her new role at a neighbouring FE college.

**Melissa Thomas left the meeting.**

## **TOWNS FUND PROJECT UPDATE**

- 149 The Commercial Director presented an update on the Towns Fund Project, which was part of the Government's Levelling-Up Strategy.
- 150 Progress had been made on all but one of the 'spokes' (the Probation Service). Governors noted that 51% of the grant allocation had been spent to date, with the remaining monies to be disbursed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- 151 A Project Management Team had been created and would meet on a monthly basis and regular dialogue with key partner organisations continued.
- 152 Wirral Council had advised the College that there was no need to renegotiate the 'longstop date' for the project, which had been 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025.
- 153 The Commercial Director reported that one spoke agreement had not yet been signed, which related to the Probation Service. Although discussions continued with this partner, the College now felt that a firm decision needed to be made about the viability of this spoke, as it was high risk and unlikely to be delivered by the due deadline.
- 154 The umbrella funding agreement with Wirral Council states that it was within the College's authority to identify a new project and redirect funding accordingly. A potential alternative project had been identified (MAKE CIC) to create an arts learning hub on the third floor of the Hamilton building. This would be discussed with the Council, but any decision would be required as soon as possible to enable the project to be delivered by October 2025. This action had been supported by the Executive Team and the Committee concurred with this decision.
- 155 The Vice-Principal had sought legal advice on this issue. The Governance Professional was asked to check whether Board approval was required or if the Committee's terms of reference enabled it to give approval.
- 156 **Resolved -**
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|---|--|
| 1 | That approval in principle be given to the changes to the Towns Fund projects outlined above   |
| 2 | That the Governance Professional determine whether Board approval was required or the matter could be signed off under the Committee's terms of reference and Chair's action |
| 3 | That the Committee Chair be kept informed of progress  |

**Andrew Ellams left the meeting**

## **FE FEES, DISCOUNTS & PAYMENTS POLICY 2025/2026**

- 157 The Vice-Principal Finance & Resources presented a draft policy on FE Fees, Discounts & Payments for 2025/2026. The content was in line with similar policies at other colleges and the main change was the replacement of a £100 deposit by 25% of the total cost of the course, as this demonstrated a higher level of commitment or intent by students.
- 158 It was noted that a separate policy for higher education fees would be submitted to the Committee's June 2025 meeting.
- 159 **Resolved -** That the Board **be RECOMMENDED** to approve a revised FE Fees, Discounts & Payments Policy for 2025/2026

## **FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2023/2024**

- 160 The Committee was advised of the latest position on the funding assurance audit by KPMG, which had identified a potential clawback and had meant that, following Board approval, the College had sought an extension for signing off the Financial Statements for 2023/2024. The revised deadline for submission of the accounts to the ESFA/Department for Education was 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- 161 KPMG's draft report had now been received and management was currently drafting responses to the recommendations identified.
- 162 Following discussions with the College's external auditors, the Board could either opt to re-open the 2023/2024 financial statements or include the clawback outcomes as a post-balance sheet event in the 2024/2025 financial statements. The Audit Committee had considered these options and had recommended the latter.
- 163 **Resolved -**
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|---|---|
| 1 | That the Board <b>be RECOMMENDED</b> to approve the Financial Statements for 2023/2024 in their current state at a special Board meeting before 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025 |
| 2 | That the Board <b>be RECOMMENDED</b> to incorporate the apprenticeship clawback within the Financial Statements for 2024/2025   |

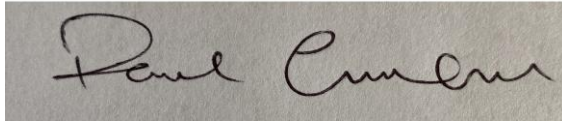
## **ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD**

- 164 The Chair summarised the main points of the meeting which would be reported to the Board on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2025:
- Policies on Environmental Sustainability and Tuition Fees were recommended for approval by the Board
  - Update on production of Estates Strategy and capital projects. This included outline proposals for the use of knife arches
  - Update received on funding assurance audit of apprenticeships and recommendation to include this in Financial Statements for 2024/2025
  - Information on progress with Towns Fund
  - Management accounts, health & safety and HR reports received for information.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

25<sup>th</sup> June 2025, 4.30 p.m.

It was agreed that meetings would be held in person at least once a year (November/December – Financial Statements), with all remaining meetings on Teams.

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in dark ink on a light-colored, textured background. The signature appears to read "Paul Cunniff".

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chair

Dated: 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2025