Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee held on Wednesday 11 February 2026 at 17.30 – 19.30, Jorvik Suite

Present:	Neil Ashton (Chair) Dr Rob Hickey Heidi Fraser-Krauss Ken Merry	Independent Governor Independent Governor Independent Governor (joined remotely) Principal/Chief Executive
In Attendance:	Philip Curtis, Chief Operating Officer David Hawkins, Interim Chief Finance Officer Carolyn Barker, Director of Governance Chris Leng, Director of Human Resources Chris Courtine, Head of Finance Operations Geoff Wroe, Estates Manager Joy Kettyle, Deputy Principal/CEO	

1.	**Apologies for Absence / Declarations of Interest**	**Action**
1.1	Welcome and introductions were given at the start of the meeting. Apologies were received from Sarah Leatherbarrow. It was noted that Joy Kettyle would join the meeting later. Declarations of interest were noted for Heidi Fraser-Krauss and Dr Rob Hickey as recorded on the register of declarations. The Chair of the meeting was Neil Ashton. Notice of the meeting was given at least 7 days in advance. The meeting was quorate.	
2.	**Minutes**	
2.1	**Minutes from 12 November 2025** The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed by the Committee. ***The Committee resolved to approve the minutes.***	
3.	**Matters Arising**	
3.1	**Action Summary Sheet** The Committee received the updated Action Summary Sheet, noting that of the six actions previously recorded, four have now been closed. Two actions remain open: • **Cyber Attack Planning Exercise:** This remains in progress, with further testing and a planned tabletop exercise to be delivered before the next scheduled Committee review. • **Capital Expenditure (Capex) Plan:** An outline plan has been developed and will be revisited by the Chief Operating Officer in due course. Governors asked whether the Capex plan remains on track. The Principal advised that the Chief Operating Officer is familiarising himself with the current position and will be undertaking site walk-arounds next week to gather further detail and intelligence. **Insurance Renewal** The Interim Chief Finance Officer updated the Committee on the	

	forthcoming insurance renewal. The renewal date is in November, with preparatory work expected to commence in May/June. The Chief Operating Officer and his team will consider whether to continue with the current provider. This item will be brought forward for discussion at the next F&GP Committee meeting. Governors queried the timeline, which was confirmed. **Cyber Security Update** The Principal reported that the latest cyber security review had been completed, showing significant progress compared with previous years. The report will be considered by the Audit Committee before being brought to F&GP. Governors asked whether the review covered both technological and people-related aspects. It was confirmed that ongoing phishing exercises continue to support staff awareness, and improvements are being observed. ***The committee resolved to note the update.***	
3.2	**Any other Matters Arising** No other matters had been brought to the Chair's attention for discussion.	
4.	**Strategic Plan Implementation**	
4.1	**Finance and General Purposes KPI Scorecard and update** The Committee considered the KPI Scorecard and accompanying update. The Interim Chief Finance Officer highlighted several areas of strong performance, noting that overall progress against strategic plan targets remains broadly positive and that the College is currently forecasting an outstanding financial health rating at year-end. The Head of Finance Operations reported that, when compared with published financial results of other colleges, the College's position, particularly EBITDA above 5%, remains very strong. However, challenges persist in achieving the apprenticeship income target and the £1.6m HE income target, which will require continued focus. **Staff and Workforce Metrics** Governors queried progress against the staff ethnic minority representation metric, currently at 3.7%. The Director of Human Resources advised that although the figure had increased gradually over recent years, recruitment within the year is unlikely to shift the measure significantly due to overall workforce size. **Apprenticeships Growth Plan** Governors asked whether plans are in place to meet the apprenticeship income target. The Principal confirmed that to date growth has been organic rather than driven by targeted activity. A more proactive approach is now being implemented, including recruitment of a dedicated sales team and strengthening market intelligence. This will focus on identifying areas of external demand, such as accountancy, where the College can expand provision. **Financial Forecasts and Year-End Position** The Principal updated the Committee on the financial indicators within the scorecard. The year-end cash position remains dependent on confirmation of grant funding, including the national insurance grant. The College has already prudently factored this into forecasts, meaning that any confirmed funding would add positively to the bottom line. Early modelling suggests	

	possible outcomes ranging between £0.5m and £3m, although the final figure remains uncertain. **Demographic Context and Future Demand** Governors asked about demand projections, noting peaks and potential pressures in future years. The Principal explained that demographic shifts, particularly reduced school cohort sizes expected around 2033, could affect sixth-form enrolment patterns. However, the relative small size of some local sixth forms may create opportunities for the College should viability issues arise. Governors queried whether the College would be required to accept displaced learners; the Principal confirmed that under the youth guarantee, it would. He also noted that a demographic dip may shift demand toward lower-level provision. Options such as satellite outreach sites were discussed. Governors began by asking whether there was any further support they could provide regarding the KPI scorecard items. The Principal responded that a broader, strategic conversation would be beneficial around how the College can generate increased EBITDA in the medium to long term. Governors suggested that competitor analysis may assist this work by providing benchmarking insights and highlighting potential opportunities for growth. The Interim Chief Finance Officer confirmed that comparative reviews with other colleges already form part of standard financial evaluation processes. In the course of the discussion, governors also noted that carrying higher levels of cash reserves could create greater flexibility for innovation, subject to regulatory requirements and funding rules. The discussion then turned to capital investment. Governors highlighted that several areas of the estate appear to be reaching the end of their lifecycle, particularly in relation to health and safety considerations, and emphasised the importance of proactive investment planning. The Principal agreed and noted that the College's strong financial position provides welcome flexibility in determining priorities for capital expenditure. ***The committee resolved to note the update.***	
4.2	**Strategic Risk Monitoring** The Committee held a broad discussion on the Strategic Risk Register and the accompanying monitoring update. The Principal noted that many of the risks had been explored earlier in the meeting and highlighted the significant progress made in strengthening cyber-security controls, as reflected in the updated mitigated scores. Governors recognised that an informed decision will shortly be required regarding the College's risk position on cyber security, given the substantial improvements to infrastructure, resilience testing, and staff compliance activity. The Principal advised that the financial sustainability risk continues to be well mitigated, supported by strong forecasting, robust financial controls, and positive indicators within the latest management accounts. He further noted that subcontracting-related risk had temporarily dropped off the register but is expected to reappear in future months as activity increases. Governors raised questions about emerging risks, including the future of online learning. The Principal confirmed that this remains under review and will continue to develop as part of the College's digital strategy and curriculum planning processes.	

	A discussion followed on the Ofsted inspection framework. Governors queried whether further development or training was required, noting that only a small number of colleges had been inspected under the updated framework to date, which limits sector intelligence. The Principal advised that more information is expected as additional inspections take place. Governors asked about clarity in the presentation of risk ratings, noting that the summary does not currently include the numeric identification of each risk. The Principal agreed that this could be reviewed to improve transparency and ease of reference in future reports. ***The committee resolved to note the update.***	KM
5.	**College Staff and Teams**	
5.1	**HR Report (workforce profile and tutor utilisation)** The Committee discussed the HR Report, noting the key workforce trends and tutor utilisation data. Governors acknowledged that the College's overall staff absence rate stands at 3.1% for the year to 31 December, a slight reduction compared with the previous year. The report also highlighted variations in absence levels across directorates, with several areas showing higher rates linked to a small number of complex long-term cases and two recent ill-health retirements, which feature significantly in the statistics. Governors commended the clarity of the report and raised questions about the management of frequent short-term absences, recognising that these can present more significant cultural and engagement challenges than longer-term medical cases. They asked whether such patterns were prevalent and how they are being addressed. The Director of Human Resources reported that managers are actively monitoring patterns of absence, referring staff to occupational health promptly, particularly in cases of absence exceeding four weeks, and accessing additional support mechanisms where needed. It was further noted that the College's culture and early-intervention approach assist in preventing issues from escalating. Turning to workforce wellbeing, governors observed that combined stress and mental health-related absence accounts for 29.6% of all sickness time lost to date, consistent with the longer-term trend. This area continues to be closely monitored, with recognition that the proportion fluctuates over time. The Committee also reviewed tutor utilisation levels. Governors noted the positive trajectory, with overall utilisation increasing to 98.32% as at 29 January 2026. In particular, the Committee discussed areas showing significant improvement, such as Maths, where utilisation increased by approximately five percentage points since October. Health had also risen notably to above 100%, reflecting increased demand and more efficient deployment of staff hours. Overall, governors welcomed the continued focus on workforce efficiency, wellbeing, and data-driven management. ***The committee resolved to note the report.***	
5.2	**Health, Safety and Welfare Update** The Committee received an update on current Health, Safety and Welfare matters, referring to the written report. Members were informed that the long-running issues with the stonemasonry LEV had now been resolved. Although the repair had proved challenging, the system is now operational,	

	and Estates are developing a proposal for full replacement given the age of the equipment transferred from the former site. The Estates Manager highlighted that several other pieces of equipment originating from the old campus are also approaching end of life, and work is under way to scope a broader replacement scheme. The Director of Human Resources updated the Committee on the ongoing concerns regarding lighting levels in some work areas. Adjustments are being trialled to identify a suitable configuration, following reports that certain LED units were too bright and exacerbating migraines. The Committee noted that this is an area the HSW team will continue to monitor and address across the wider estate. An update was also provided on staffing within the Health and Safety team. A new Health and Safety Adviser had now been appointed, and an overlap period is taking place before the current postholder leaves. Members welcomed this approach, recognising the value of continuity at a time when several key pieces of work are in progress. The Committee discussed the issue raised in relation to the server room, including the fire suppression system and concerns about access to underfloor valves. While work has been identified to enable retesting of the system and stored items are in the process of being removed, the Director of Human Resources confirmed that there is no immediate or urgent safety risk requiring rapid intervention. A governor queried the nature of the issue, and the Estates Manager clarified that the concern related specifically to the fire suppression system. The governor also noted that the College's investment in such a system was significant and positive. As part of the discussion, a governor raised a question about the relatively high number of incidents recorded within Hair and Beauty. It was explained that incident levels vary depending on the specific activities students are engaged in, and that the frequent use of scissors and hands-on tasks naturally influences the profile of recorded accidents. The Committee noted the update and the continued progress being made across a number of Health, Safety and Welfare priorities, as well as the improvements reported in the broader data set included within the written report. ***The Committee resolved to note the report.***	
6	**Committee Assurance Review**	
6.1	**Physical Security of College Estate** The Committee received a deep dive presentation from the Principal on the physical security of the College estate. The presentation outlined the relevant regulatory framework, including the duties arising from the Education Act 2002, *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (2025), Martyn's Law, and Ofsted expectations, all of which inform the College's overarching safeguarding responsibilities. The Principal reported that the College's current safeguarding position remains strong, with no known or credible threats identified and no items on the College's main risk register that would suggest a need for additional physical security measures at this time. He noted that the College has never operated physical entry barriers since the building opened, relying instead on a robust safeguarding culture and an authorised visitor policy.	

	In considering whether physical barriers should be introduced, the Committee reflected on the broad considerations presented, which included installation cost, the unclear benefits of such measures, and the potential impact on the welcoming atmosphere of the campus. The Principal highlighted that if the College were designing a new building today, barriers might be included as part of contemporary design expectations; however, this did not in itself provide justification for retrofitting them now. The Committee also considered the broader arguments for and against barriers as presented in the slides. Points noted included the potential deterrence effect, improvements in punctuality, reduced reliance on staff challenging ID badges, and the reassurance barriers may provide. Counter-arguments highlighted that most incidents involve people who are authorised to be on site, that barriers could negatively affect the culture and feel of the College, and that they do not replace the need for strong safeguarding practices. The Committee discussed alternative approaches, including enhanced CCTV technologies and the potential use of facial recognition. A governor expressed uncertainty about the initial benefits of facial recognition CCTV, commenting that such systems capture incidents retrospectively rather than preventing them, and suggested that the College might derive greater benefit from increased visible personnel focused on site safety and security. The Principal noted that modern systems can help identify individuals who should not be on site but acknowledged that the technology would not prevent authorised individuals from acting improperly. It was advised that consideration is being given to whether a dedicated, visible security role is required. Governors suggested that it may be helpful to hold a short discussion with the full Board to capture wider governor perspectives on the direction of travel for physical security. Governors agreed that the discussion had been a useful reflection exercise. The Committee thanked the Principal for the comprehensive presentation and for facilitating an open discussion. ***The Committee noted the update and the assurance provided regarding the current security position.***	CB
7	**Statutory and Regulatory Compliance**	
7.1	**Statutory Maintenance Report** The Committee received the Statutory Maintenance Report to 31 December 2025, presented by the Estates Manager, who confirmed that the College remains *broadly compliant* with statutory maintenance obligations, with inspections largely up to date and remedial actions being managed appropriately. He highlighted that the College's FM partner, Hemlow, had experienced performance challenges during the reporting period, including delays in statutory light testing and issues arising from staff changes within the contractor team. He noted that these challenges have impacted the timeliness of some inspections and of reports being returned. The Committee was advised that certain areas, such as emergency lighting and fire damper inspections, continue to require attention, although contractors have generally responded when issues have been escalated. Fire dampers, in particular, were noted as having failed in some areas, which the Estates Manager explained is common in buildings of this type.	

	The Committee discussed the FM contract more broadly, noting the approaching end of Hemlow's contract term. A governor asked whether re-tendering would be undertaken as a matter of course, and the Principal confirmed that discussions are under way with the Chief Operating Officer around whether to initiate a procurement exercise or consider extending Hemlow's contract. A governor queried whether the College had a dedicated resource overseeing this work and was assured that the same postholder continues to manage the contract, although the Committee recognised that bringing the service entirely in-house would carry its own risks and would require careful evaluation. The Deputy Principal/CEO joined the meeting at 18:20. The Committee reflected on the previous tender exercise, with the Interim Chief Finance Officer reminding members that there had been a significant spread in the costs returned at that time. Governors noted that an in-house model would only be cost-effective where there was a continuous workload of sufficient scale. A governor asked whether adequate contract management had been possible given the challenges experienced. The Estates Manager confirmed that monthly progress meetings are held with Hemlow, and although the contract does not include financial penalties, there is a provision allowing the College to contract out work elsewhere if necessary. He added that this provision had already been raised with Hemlow, which had resulted in improved responsiveness in recent weeks. The Estates Manager summarised key areas of statutory work outstanding, noting that the timing of contractor visits, particularly the need to schedule during holiday periods, can create delays. He reported a lag in the issuing of inspection reports, which has contributed to some of the compliance pressures. Governors asked whether the College should be taking the contractor to task where inspections had failed; the Estates Manager confirmed that where follow-up work is required, contractors have generally attended to it. The Committee Chair requested that future reports include the financial position alongside the compliance data. The Chief Operating Officer agreed to explore producing a visual representation of costs for future meetings. The Committee discussed wider estates planning, including capital planning and proportional investment in maintenance versus expansion, with governors noting that this level of detail would be helpful from a governor oversight perspective. The Committee Chair sought an update on the College's solar panel work; the Principal confirmed that installations are fully complete and that solar canopies are also under consideration. The College has already realised savings from existing panels. The Committee also noted the related discussions on net zero ambitions and decarbonisation grant opportunities. ***The Committee resolved to note the report.***	PC
7.2	**Business Continuity Plan** The Committee received the updated Business Continuity Plan (BCP), introduced by the Deputy Principal/CEO, who explained that she had taken the lead in navigating and coordinating the refreshed approach. She highlighted that the key development arising from the review was the intention to make the plan more visual, improving accessibility for staff responding in high-pressure scenarios. This aligned with the executive summary included in the paper, which noted that the BCP had been streamlined and supported by linked documents for further detail.	

	The Deputy Principal/CEO invited governors to offer comments, suggestions, or ideas that could strengthen the final version before it is recommended for Board approval.	
	In discussion, the Committee Chair asked whether copies of the BCP were held off-site; the Estates Manager confirmed that the document is stored in the cloud rather than in physical form. The Committee Chair queried at what stage governors would be alerted in a live incident. The Interim Chief Finance Officer reflected on a recent real-life example involving flooding, during which the College responded effectively by following the principles within the plan, despite not formally consulting the document at the time. He confirmed that governors had been alerted mid-morning during that event.	
	A governor noted the value of having undergone scenario development and the inclusion of key contacts within the plan but emphasised that the most effective method of testing business continuity arrangements is to undertake live or simulated exercises. The BCP itself provides for regular drills and exercises, including fire drills and Martyn's Law rehearsals. She encouraged senior leadership to plan future exercises that stress-test both decision-making and communication arrangements.	
	A governor raised a challenge regarding the centralisation of the BCP. He asked whether individual curriculum and service areas maintained their own departmental continuity plans, reflecting the operational realities of their work. The Deputy Principal/CEO confirmed that every team had been consulted and taken through a process of identifying responses to a range of potential scenarios. Governors requested assurance that these departmental-level plans are in place and aligned with the overarching BCP.	
	The Committee discussed crisis communication arrangements. The Committee Chair suggested it would be beneficial to consider in advance what the College might say publicly in crisis situations. A governor highlighted the increasing pace and complexity of communication expectations, emphasising the need for a coordinated team to manage messaging swiftly and consistently, particularly given the extensive media and communication protocols set out within the BCP.	
	The Committee Chair queried whether the College had established any formal agreements for the use of alternative accommodation in the event of building loss. The Interim Chief Finance Officer confirmed that there are no formal pre-agreed arrangements, but previous incidents had prompted partner providers to offer temporary space. A governor asked whether a strategic agreement exists around continuation of teaching in the event of a significant interruption, referencing student protection considerations. The Principal explained that in the FE sector the Department for Education would, where necessary, determine the placement of students affected by a college-wide continuity failure.	
	The Chief Operating Officer noted that the feasibility of relocating learners depends on the scale and location of any disruption. The Committee acknowledged these complexities within the relocation and recovery options identified in the plan.	
	Governors expressed their support for the visual format of the revised plan and the clarity it provides. A governor suggested that once the plan had been finalised and endorsed by this Committee, it should also be shared	JK

	with the Audit Committee for oversight, given its importance within the College's risk and assurance framework. ***The Committee noted the update, welcomed the progress made, and agreed that the plan should be submitted to the Audit Committee for consideration.***	
8	**Financial Sustainability**	
8.1	**2025-26 Financial Performance** **Management Accounts for the 5 months to 31 December 2025, including year-end forecast** The Committee received the Management Accounts for Period 5, introduced by the Interim Chief Finance Officer, and gave reference to the cover sheet and detailed financial commentary. The report highlighted that the projected full-year surplus had increased to £551k, compared with the £444k projected in the September management accounts and a budgeted surplus of £304k, representing a favourable variance of £247k. The Interim Chief Finance Officer presented the waterfall analysis, showing positive variances in HE tuition fees, adult skills funding, and full cost tuition income, as well as the impact of other smaller movements in income lines. He noted that sports lettings income was lower than expected due to the 3G pitch renovation. The Committee also discussed the increase in agency staffing costs, reflecting the need to support delivery in response to higher student numbers. The Committee Chair queried what level of expenditure had originally been anticipated. The Head of Finance Operations explained that several assumptions had been necessary at the budget-setting stage, and that the capital plan linked to depreciation is now on a much firmer footing, with greater robustness expected this year. The Interim Chief Finance Officer added that contingencies remain within both pay and non-pay budgets, with decisions on their deployment to be taken between now and July. It was highlighted that in-year funding uplifts remain possible, which could further improve the out-turn position. High Needs income has, however, been adjusted downwards in the forecast to reflect a cautious and prudent approach. The Committee agreed that the overall stance taken in the forecast is deliberately conservative. The Principal highlighted the scenario planning work undertaken by the Head of Finance Operations to support forecasting accuracy, alongside the planning of several significant projects and general maintenance works scheduled over the remainder of the year. Governors commended the clarity and reliability of the forecast, noting that the College has a strong track record of accurate full-year projections. The Committee also noted positively the recent achievement of Real Living Wage accreditation, as reported by the Principal. ***The Committee noted the Management Accounts and the financial position for the first five months of the year, together with the updated full-year forecast.***	
8.2	**2026-27 Budget Challenges** The Committee received the paper outlining the anticipated budget challenges for 2026–27. The Interim Chief Finance Officer introduced the item and highlighted the positive indicators within the report, particularly the expectation of a strong 16–18 funding position, reflecting increased	

	enrolments and anticipated growth in allocations once released by ESFA in late February/early March. These positives were noted by the Committee. The Principal expanded on this, drawing attention to the healthy projected 16–18 allocations and the continued growth in T Level student numbers, with associated funding following these learners. He also reminded the Committee that apprentice numbers remain strong, with further growth anticipated into 2026–27, consistent with the positive indicators set out in the report. In discussion, the Principal informed the Committee that a pay strategy report will be taken to the People & Governance (P&G) Committee. This will support consideration of longer-term approaches to pay, noting the increasing pressure to maintain competitive pay awards, an issue also highlighted within the budget challenges paper. The Committee noted the mixture of opportunities and risks outlined, including the positive movement expected in key income streams and the challenges associated with cost pressures, potential changes to national insurance and pension grant arrangements, and the ongoing financial demands of an ageing estate. ***The Committee noted the report and welcomed the early visibility of issues that will shape the 2026–27 budget planning cycle.***	
9	**Policy and Other Matters**	
9.1	**Financial Regulations** The Committee received the updated Financial Regulations, introduced by the Interim Chief Finance Officer, who reminded members that the proposed amendments reflect prior discussions held with the Board in October. He noted that the paper now formalises those points, particularly the updates required to ensure compliance with the Procurement Act (2023) and revised procurement thresholds. The Committee noted that the amendments include revised authorisation levels for purchase orders, updated thresholds up to £207,720, and formal clarification that orders above this level will require Board approval, with additional authorisation from two of the Chairs (Governors, Audit, or F&GP). References to the Chief Finance Officer have also been replaced with Chief Operating Officer in line with current structures. The Interim Chief Finance Officer confirmed that any required sign-offs will be communicated to governors in advance, supporting transparency and ensuring timely oversight. ***The Committee noted the amendments and agreed to recommend the updated Financial Regulations to the Board of Governors for approval.***	
9.2	**Data Protection Policy** The Director of Governance introduced the revised Data Protection Policy, explaining that the updates were necessary to reflect recent enhancements to the College's security infrastructure. The policy had been amended to incorporate the introduction of additional cameras. It was noted that the Senior Leadership Team had reviewed and approved the revised policy and privacy notices. Governors advised that the version in the meeting pack did not show the tracked changes. The Director of	CB

	Governance confirmed that it would be circulated to governors following the meeting to allow for full visibility of the amendments. In discussion, governors asked what the College currently does with the data captured by CCTV cameras. The Principal confirmed that the College does not currently use the data for any analytical or automated purposes, and that usage is strictly limited to access control and campus safety. He also advised that relevant staff are completing CCTV and SIA-aligned training, ensuring safe and compliant operation of the new systems. ***The Committee noted the revised policy and the explanation provided, and awaited circulation of the tracked-changes version.***	
10	**Key Meeting Outcomes and/or Actions**	
10.1	Matters for report to the Governing Body (If any) - Management Accounts - Budget challenges - Statutory maintenance report - Financial regulations - Physical security at college – deep dive presentation	
10.2	Matters for report to the Audit Committee (if any) - Business Continuity Plan	
11	**Summary matters**	
11.1	Any Other Business There were no items submitted for inclusion under any other business. The Principal expressed his sincere thanks to David Hawkins (Interim Chief Finance Officer) on behalf of the College team for his continued support, guidance, and contribution. He noted that David's commitment and steady leadership have been greatly valued across the organisation.	
13.2	Date of Next Meeting – Tuesday 5th May 2026.	