

Finance & Resources Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd December 2025 at 4:30 PM

Location: Riverside College Halton, Kingsway, Widnes, Cheshire

Present:

Neil McGrath	External Governor
Mary Murphy	Principal
Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
Susan Smith	Co-Opted Governor

In Attendance:

Dan Adams	Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Cronton)
Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
Gordon Holmes	Assistant Principal (Finance & Estates)
Julia Withersby	Assistant Principal (HR & Central Services)
Catherine Shaw	Head of Governance

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received. All members were present.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No new declarations were made.

3. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR 2025/2026

Resolved: Neil McGrath was appointed as Chair for the coming year.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

4.1 Approval of the Minutes (*previously circulated*)

Resolved: The minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

4.2 Matters Arising

Resolved: The Committee noted that there were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda and there were no matters outstanding on the action log.

5. FINANCE AND RESOURCES UPDATE

5.1 HR Update *(previously circulated)*

The Assistant Principal (HR) highlighted the following aspects from her report:

- Staff attendance continued to improve; both long-term and short-term absences were decreasing
- Staff turnover remained low at 9.7% (all leavers) and was significantly below the national average
- The first year of the condensed working week and revised timetables had been reviewed with positive outcomes reported
- A staff well-being day was held on 21st November, with positive feedback having been received
- Equality & Diversity: Over 90% of staff identified as White British; 18.8% declared a disability or long-term health issue. Plans were in place to launch an early careers group for new staff.

Resolved: The Committee noted this update.

5.2 Health & Safety Annual Report *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (F&R) highlighted the following aspects from this report:

- 122 accidents reported in 2024/25 (down from 140); no reportable accidents.
- Near misses recorded were consistent with previous years.
- No accidents had been reported on building projects.
- Critical incident training had been delivered, including bomb threat and hazardous chemical scenarios. The two real-life incidents were managed effectively, with lessons learned informing future incident management procedures
- Ongoing improvements continued to take place with external input, where required. This included preparation for legislative changes, such as Martin's Law

During the subsequent discussion, the classification of a critical incident was clarified. In response to a question raised, senior managers provided greater detail regarding the themes of the scenarios used in the training. Both scenarios were purposely designed to test response escalation and effective decision-making.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

5.3 Environmental Sustainability Annual Report *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (F&R) highlighted the following aspects from this report:

- New substations and sustainable building projects had reduced utility costs and carbon intensity
- Challenges remained in measuring emission reductions; there was a concerted focus on sustainable construction and student education.
- There was a requirement for streamlined energy and carbon reporting to be included in the annual Financial Statements.

A Governor requested clarification as to how progress towards sustainability was measured. In response, the Committee was directed to the key performance indicators relating to the AoC Climate Action Roadmap. It was noted that the college was 63% towards 'leading' status on the Climate Action Roadmap with improvements expected as new initiatives were logged.

Resolved: The Committee noted the contents of the annual Environmental Sustainability Report 2024/2025.

5.4 Management Accounts to 31st October 2025 *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (F&R) highlighted the following aspects from this report:

- The operating surplus was slightly higher than planned
- Cash balances remained high; all income streams were performing well
- Over-recruitment in the 16–18 age group may result in additional growth funding (confirmation expected in January).
- HE recruitment was slightly lower. This was attributed to universities lowering entry requirements.
- The approved pay award of 4% had been implemented, avoiding industrial action seen elsewhere
- External Auditors identified two capital invoices that required reclassification. These had no impact on the surplus or reserves position
- College's financial health rated as 'outstanding' by the Department for Education (DfE).

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

5.5 Finance Update *(previously circulated)*

In presenting this report, the Deputy Principal (F&R) drew the Committee's attention to:

- Costs had increased in respect of the need for additional bus services, exam costs, and general running costs due to increased student numbers
- Growth of 250 learners was anticipated for next year.
- Apprenticeship numbers were lower but funding remained stable due to the focus on high-value areas.
- The outstanding financial health grade had been maintained, as confirmed by the DfE

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

5.6 College Financial Health Assessment *(previously circulated)*

The Committee noted the correspondence received from the DfE confirming the outstanding financial health assessment of the College. Governors also considered the financial dashboard published by the DfE for governance purposes. A governor queried the 'adjusted cash in hand' financial metric on the dashboard which was clarified by the Deputy Principal (F&R). Governors noted that on a conservative assumption basis, the College maintained 86 cash days, demonstrating a strong position.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

5.7 Property Strategy *(previously circulated)*

The Assistant Principal (Finance & Estates) presented this report and drew the Committee's attention to the following key aspects:

- Building works in respect of the Cronton Music Hub and teaching block were nearing completion, though delays had moved the anticipated handover to March/April 2026
- An additional £650,000 expenditure had been approved for three new music classrooms via Chair's Action (subject to due diligence)
- Revisions in respect of cost-effectiveness had been made in connection with the cladding project at the Kingsway campus and market testing was underway
- The Green technology building at Kingsway was progressing well, with student visits and tours being planned
- Ongoing communication was taking place with residents living in close proximity to the Cronton campus, as complaints were received regarding portacabins in situ, car parking issues, and site disruption

A discussion took place, during which it was confirmed that the removal of portacabins was reliant on the completion of the building projects currently in progress; this was anticipated to be approximately Easter 2026. In response to a question raised by a Governor regarding car parking complaints being received from some residents in Cronton, senior managers advised of the

measures in place in to address the issues. This included establishing temporary car parks and ensuring effective communication with residents to mitigate disruption.

A Governor sought to ascertain whether there were financial implications resulting from delays on building projects. The Assistant Principal (F&E) reported that preliminaries were likely to cause cost increases, however contingencies were in place to address this with savings anticipated via direct engagement with subcontractors.

Resolved: The Committee noted the report.

5.8 Partnership Performance 2024/2025 and Plan 2025/2026 *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (F&R) presented this report on behalf of the Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Riverside). She summarised as follows:

- Achievement - Both subcontractors' achievement rates remained strong compared to national benchmarks
- Subcontracting expenditure continued to reduce and currently stood at 2.2% of college income
- Recruitment – Crosby Training did not meet its 19+ target which affected the Adult Skills Fund (ASF) budget, though reasons for under recruitment had been evidenced
- Quality- no critical concerns had been identified
- Contract awards and variations – noted that these were approved by the Board at its meeting in July 2025

Resolved: The Committee noted the contents of the report.

6. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2024/2025 *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal (F&R) informed Governors that the External Auditors (Menzies) had presented their draft Management Letter to the Audit Committee at its meeting on 1st December 2025 and a summary was presented:

- Unqualified/unmodified opinions on the Financial Statements and Regularity audits were anticipated
- Alignment with Management Accounts – the Financial Statements closely matched the July 2025 management accounts. The Deputy Principal (F&R) advised that the £12k variance resulted from minor adjustments, such as depreciation and asset disposals.
- Grant Income – the College received £1.4m in grant funding in 2024/2025 which was earmarked for the Visioning Project that was currently taking place
- Cash balances remained very strong, with a restricted amount allocated for capital projects under grant conditions.
- The College's financial health was rated outstanding by the DfE

In response to a question raised by a Governor regarding the Asset Register, the Deputy Principal (F&R) confirmed that the note to the accounts referred to gross fixed assets which had been written down to nil value during a clean-up of the register, with no impact on net book value.

Resolved: The Committee noted the contents of the report.

7. POLICIES

7.1 Health and Safety Policy *(previously circulated)*

This policy had been reviewed for legislative and nomenclature updates; no fundamental changes were being proposed. In response to a question raised, it was confirmed that the policy was integrated with related policies, such as safeguarding and harassment.

Resolved: The Committee recommended approval of the policy to the Board.

7.2 Trips and Visits Policy *(previously circulated)*

No fundamental changes were proposed to this policy.

Resolved: The Committee recommended approval of the policy to the Board.

7.3 Reserves Policy *(previously circulated)*

No fundamental changes were proposed to this policy.

Resolved: The Committee recommended approval of the policy to the Board.

7.4 HE Fees 2026/2027 *(previously circulated)*

Consideration was given to the proposed increased fees in specific areas.

Resolved: The Committee recommended approval of the HE fees 2026/2027 to the Board.

8. COMMITTEE SELF-EVALUATION 2024/2025 *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Governance presented the draft self-evaluation for consideration, highlighting the committee's impact in 2024/2025 and areas for development in 2025/2026.

Resolved: The Committee approved the Committee Self-Evaluation 2024/2025, as presented.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

10. ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

Resolved: The Committee approved that the following items be reported to the next Board meeting:

- Management Accounts
 - Annual Environmental Sustainability Report
 - Annual Partnership / Sub-Contracting Report
 - Property Strategy
 - Equality & Diversity Annual Report
 - All policies being recommended for approval by the Committee
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11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

This was **noted** as follows:

- Finance & Resources Committee – 11th March 2026 at 4:30pm

The Chair thanks all attendees for their participation and the meeting was closed.

Signed.....Office copy signed by Neil McGrath

Committee Chair

Date.....11th March 2026.....