

Riverside College

Widnes & Runcorn

Minutes of the Board of Governors Meeting

Date: Monday, 13th October 2025

Time: 4:30 PM

Location: Room G8 & G9 at the Cronton campus

Present:	Katie Anderson	External Governor
	Michele Bacon	External Governor, Chair
	Louise Frost	External Governor
	Oscar Lam	Student Governor
	Paul Leatherbarrow	External Governor
	Neil McGrath	External Governor
	Tom McInerney	External Governor
	Andrew MacManus	External Governor
	Mary Murphy	Principal, CEO
	Rachael Owen	External Governor
	Steph Power	Staff Governor
	Chris Sikorski	Staff Governor
In Attendance:	Dan Adams	Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Cronton)
	Ben Barton	Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Riverside)
	Leeann Bellfield	Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Cronton)
	Alan Brown	Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality)
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Julia Withersby	Assistant Principal (HR)
	Catherine Shaw	Head of Governance

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting with a warm welcome extended to Louise Frost and Oscar Lam, as newly appointed governors; introductions were made.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Resolved: Apologies for absence were received and accepted for Karen Banks, External Governor.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Resolved: The Board noted there were no declarations of interest made for this meeting.

3. WRITTEN RESOLUTIONS

3.1 **Appointment of Louise Frost as an External Governor** (*previously circulated*)

Resolved: The Board ratified its decision which had been approved via written resolution to appoint Louise Frost as an External Governor for a 4year term of office and membership to the Audit Committee.

3.2 **Appointment of Oscar Lam as a Student Governor** *(previously circulated)*

Resolved: The Board ratified its decision which had been approved via written resolution to appoint Oscar Lam as a Student Governor (Cronton campus) for a 1-year term of office and membership to the Quality and Standards Committee.

3.3 **To receive a summary of written resolutions ratified during 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

Resolved: The Board noted the three occasions in the previous academic year when the written resolution mechanism was invoked to expedite matters and support effective governance.

4. **CHAIR'S UPDATE**

To receive an activity report

The Chair provided a summary of her activity from the commencement of her tenure on 1st August 2025 to date:

- Annual Governor Reviews – the majority of meetings with board members had taken place. There had been strong engagement throughout the process, and this had enabled the Chair to gain a greater understanding from individual perspectives
- Governor Recruitment – the Chair's participation in the recruitment processes in respect of Louise Frost and Oscar Lam
- Performance Development Reviews – these had been conducted with (i) the Principal and (ii) the Head of Governance
- College collaboration – an introductory meeting had taken place with the new Board Chair of Solihull College in response to their request. This was a positive experience in sharing ideas and best practice
- Attendance at the AoC Chairs' Network Meeting – provided updates on sector developments and the sharing of good practice
- Attendance at the AoC Quality and Standards Chairs' Network – reported to be very informative. The Chair advised that invitations to this forum had been extended to all governors and not solely committee chairs. She encouraged governors to participate in online networking events of this nature, whenever possible
- Financial Statements Training – attended this very useful training session which had been delivered by the College's External Auditors
- Meetings with the Principal and Head of Governance – these continued to take place at three weekly intervals

In conclusion, the Chair thanked former Board Chair, Neil McGrath, and the Head of Governance for their valued support during her transition into the role.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

5. **PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGIC REPORT** *(previously circulated)*

The Principal delivered a presentation which highlighted key elements from her comprehensive report. These included:

- National political landscape - the College was navigating a complex, changing policy and funding environment, with key government announcements pending
- Overview of Ofsted's revised Inspection Framework - the College was preparing accordingly
- Local engagement – included new adult provision and collaboration with regional authorities on skills priorities
- Safeguarding - cases continued to rise in quantity and complexity
- Staff wellbeing - successful initiatives had been introduced to promote wellbeing and outcomes from the recent staff survey provided positive feedback
- Achievement Rates – very pleasing results in Summer 2025, with strong student outcomes and positive destinations reported
- Financial Health - this remained in an outstanding position with a surplus greater than forecast at the end of 2024/2025; largely driven by increased funding and delayed capital projects. Property expansion was under consideration to meet student demand and local skills needs
- Student Recruitment - 16-18 was strong; adult and apprenticeship numbers remained stable
- College Priorities - included (i) Adult Skills Fund alignment and (ii) advancing foundation learning and inclusion

In conclusion, the Principal reported that the College remained in a strong position with a determined focus on quality, growth and adaptation to external changes.

During discussions a Governor queried the impact of staffing requirements, given the increased adult uptake on part-time and basic skills courses. The Principal provided an overview of how the curriculum had been redesigned to optimise resources, resulting in the current position whereby no additional staff recruitment was required.

In response to a question raised regarding the selection process of Defence Technical Excellence Colleges, it was confirmed that further details were awaited as to the procedure being adopted.

Resolved: The Board

- Noted the Principal's report
- Approved the Annual Report 2024/2025
- Approved the College Plan 2025-2028
- Noted the updates relating to the performance monitoring of the Quality, Efficiency and Growth targets (QEG) directly aligned to the Strategic Plan
- Agreed the quality and financial targets for 2025/2026

6. SAFEGUARDING *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Governance summarised the statutory responsibilities of the Board in respect of safeguarding and advised that annual training was mandatory. She drew attention to the requirements contained within the most recent publication of the Keeping Children Safe in Education by the Department for Education (DfE). The Head of Governance advised that most Governors had completed the online safeguarding training. The Chair re-iterated the importance of this training and for all Governors to ensure they confirm it has been undertaken.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

7. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

7.1 Finance Update including Management Accounts as at 31st July 2025 (*previously circulated*)

The Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) highlighted the following key elements from the report:

- The College reported a surplus of £4.8 million, exceeding the forecast. This was predominantly due to increased 16-18 funding, government-paid National Insurance contributions, bank interest on reserves and delayed capital projects.
- The Adult Skills Fund had a shortfall of approximately £300k. As previously reported to the Board, this had been anticipated and managed without adversely affecting financial health
- Delays in capital projects had resulted in higher cash balances, enabling the College to attract interest on bank accounts
- Benchmarking exercises confirmed that the college compared favourably to others, and financial management was supported by strong internal controls and auditor opinions
- Future income was expected to rise further due to continued growth in student numbers

The Principal advised that the College had maintained an outstanding financial health grade for ten years. This independent assessment demonstrated robust financial management and resilience in responding to monetary challenges. During discussions, the Board was informed that the College had chosen not to bid for external funds in situations where it could self-fund improvements.

A Governor asked for further information relating to specific budget lines within the report. The Deputy Principal (F&R) provided additional details on running costs, purchase policy and capital accruals. She explained the reasons for any variances.

Resolved: The Board noted the report and commended the College on its transparent and prudent financial management.

7.2 Property Update (*previously circulated*)

The Deputy Principal (F&R) provided an update on developments since the report to the Board at its meeting on 7th July 2025. The following key elements were highlighted:

- Visioning Project - The College continued to develop a long-term property strategy. This included potential land acquisition.
- Capital Projects - as previously reported, some capital projects had been delayed, resulting in increased cash reserves. Good progress was being made in building the Green Skills Centre and the Cronton teaching block.
- College property plans were being aligned with local town regeneration plans.

A discussion took place. In response to a question raised regarding the cladding project at Kingsway, the Board was advised that rising construction costs were being managed through value engineering.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

8. AUDIT COMMITTEE

8.1 To receive a report on the Audit Committee meeting held on 22nd September 2025

In the absence of the Committee Chair, Andrew MacManus (member of the Audit Committee) highlighted the following key elements from this report:

- Committee Chair – Karen Banks was elected for 2025/2026
- Strategic Risk Presentation – the Assistant Principal (HR) delivered a very informative presentation on safer recruitment, detailing thorough checks from application to appointment to ensure competent and safe staff were employed. This aspect was relevant to strategic risk 7 on the College’s Risk Register.
- Internal Audit Reports – substantial assurance ratings were provided in respect of (i) Curriculum Efficiency and Staff Utilisation, and (ii) Follow up on previous recommendations. The Internal Programme 2024/2025 had been completed in line with the approved plan at the start of the academic year.
- Audit Committee Self-Evaluation 2024/2025 – this had been completed and the Committee was satisfied that it had discharged its responsibilities effectively by (i) ensuring that assurance had met the needs of the College, (ii) appropriate challenge to ensure assurance was robust across strategic, governance, financial and operational aspects, and (iii) overseen effective risk management activity.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

8.2 Annual Risk Management Report 2024/2025 and Risk Management Activity since July 2025 (previously circulated)

The Board was advised that the monitoring of risks had been enhanced in 2024/2025 due to the implementation of a revised system, as detailed in the Risk Management Policy. Governors were assured that the College regularly updated its Risk Register and the Audit Committee reviewed any changes at each of its meetings. Governors were informed that a strategic risk relating to artificial intelligence (AI) misuse had been added in 2024/2025 to the Risk Register. The Board received assurance that the Risk Management Action Plan was updated and considered at every meeting for the purposes of tracking timely progress.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

8.3 Assessment of Controls on Fraud and Irregularity (previously circulated)

An overview of the Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire (RSAQ) was provided. The assessment of controls in place encompassed areas where fraud might occur. Examples were given, such as payroll, purchasing, expenses claims and credit card use. The completed RSAQ detailed the risks and mitigating measures in place.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and approved the RSAQ.

8.4 Engagement Letter – Internal Audit Services (previously circulated)

It was confirmed that the Committee had scrutinised the draft Engagement Letter with one amendment deemed necessary, which had subsequently been actioned.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and approved the Engagement Letter.

8.5 **Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was informed that the Internal Auditors had provided reasonable assurance that there were no major weaknesses in the College's risk management arrangements or systems of internal control. Insufficient internal audit work was undertaken to provide an opinion on the College's governance arrangements.

The Head of Governance advised that reasonable assurance was the highest level that could be given by the Internal Auditors. She also informed the Board of an agreed amendment to the annual report which stated that based on the internal audits completed by ICCA during 2024/2025, no significant governance issues were identified.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

8.6 **Risk Management Policy** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that there had been significant updates to this policy in 2024. Therefore, minimal changes were being recommended upon its most recent review by the Audit Committee.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and approved the Risk Management Policy.

8.7 **Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that this policy had been updated to reflect the introduction of the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and approved the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy.

9. **SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

9.1 **To receive a report from the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 23rd September 2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee highlighted the following key elements from this report relating to the meeting held on 23rd September 2025.

- Board succession planning – this remained of critical importance
- Governors' Attendance 2024/2025 – the majority of governors had either met or exceeded the target attendance levels
- Annual Governor Reviews – most of the individual review meetings had taken place and to date, these had been extremely productive. Once all reviews had been completed any emerging themes were to be presented at the next Board meeting
- Governance Subscription Service with Eversheds-Sutherland – this had been recommended for approval
- External Board Review recommendation – a standing agenda item on 'meeting effectiveness' had been introduced in 2024/2025 and its impact reviewed. It was noted that the effectiveness of meetings was considered by all committees, as part of their self-evaluation process
- Annual Committee Self-Evaluation 2024/2025 – this had been completed and the committee was satisfied that it had discharged its responsibilities effectively; the Board

had a highly skilled membership and it had governed effectively in 2024/2025, having had no vacancies

Resolved: The Board

- noted the report
- agreed that the standard agenda item on ‘meeting effectiveness’ be removed, as this continued to be assessed by each committee, with any areas for development to be included in the Board Self-Assessment Review (SAR).

9.2 **Committee’s Annual Report 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The key aspects of this report were highlighted:

- Attendance – the Board achieved 87% attendance, surpassing its target and also the national benchmark
- Governance developments – activity included (i) the review of the Instrument and Articles of Government, (ii) undertaking a skills audit and (iii) introduction to the use of AI and its continued development
- Areas for Development 2025/2026 – these included effective succession planning and enhancing the diversity profile of the Board

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

9.3 **Calendar of Business 2025/2026 and College Events** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the draft schedule of business as presented by the Head of Governance which included both Committee and Board meetings throughout the year. The Chair drew attention to the variety of college events taking place throughout the academic year which governors may wish to attend.

Resolved: The Board

- accepted the recommendation made by the Search & Governance Committee and approved the Calendar of Business 2025/2026
- noted the College events throughout the academic year which governors may wish to attend

9.4 **Membership and Succession Planning** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that since the last Board meeting Jayne Edwards had tendered her resignation as an external governor. Governors were directed to the associated correspondence which had previously been circulated, whereby appreciation was placed on record for Jayne’s service to the Board over the past four years. Currently, the Board had one external governor vacancy and one student governor vacancy; recruitment campaigns were underway for both positions. A discussion took place with a suggestion being made for governors to create a video campaign to promote governor opportunities.

Resolved: The Board

- accepted the recommendation made by the Search & Governance committee and approved the committee membership 2025/2026
- approved that Karen Banks and Neil McGrath be appointed as the Board Vice-Chairs in 2025/2026

- noted the report and the critical importance of robust succession planning to ensure the continuance of effective governance into the next academic year

9.5 **Board Self-Assessment Review (SAR) 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Committee Chair advised that the draft had been considered and the Committee was satisfied that the Board had demonstrated compliance with the principles laid down in the AoC Code of Governance. Three areas for further development had been identified, as referenced in the briefing paper.

Resolved: The Board

- noted the report
- approved the identified areas for inclusion in the Board SAR action plan.

9.6 **Committees Terms of Reference** *(previously circulated)*

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search & Governance Committee and approved the terms of reference in respect of:

- Finance and Resources Committee
- Quality and Standards Committee
- Search & Governance Committee

9.7 **Review of Confidential Minutes 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

As detailed in the report, where confidential minutes were no longer deemed to be sensitive, they were to be reclassified as non-restricted.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search & Governance Committee and approved for relevant minutes to be re-classified, as presented within the report.

9.8 **Annual Report on use of the College Seal 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Governance provided an overview of the regulations concerning the use of the College Seal.

Resolved: The Board noted the report which detailed the use of the College Seal on one occasion in 2024/2025.

10. **MINUTES**

10.1 **To approve the draft minutes of the Board meeting held on 7th July 2025** *(previously circulated)*

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th July 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

10.2 **To review the action log and to consider any matters arising from the previous meeting**

It was noted that there were no matters arising that had not been addressed elsewhere on the agenda and there were no matters outstanding on the action log.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no matters of an urgent nature submitted for consideration.

12. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Resolved: Future meetings were noted as follows:

- Audit Committee – 1st December 2025
 - Board Meeting – 15th December 2025
 - Finance & Resources Committee – 3rd December 2025
 - Quality & Standards Committee – 2nd December 2025
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Signed...Office copy signed by Michele Bacon.....**Board Chair**

Date...15th December 2025.....