

# Riverside College

Widnes & Runcorn

## Minutes of the Board of Governors Meeting

**Date:** Monday, 15th December 2025

**Time:** 4:00 PM

**Location:** Room B12 at the Kingsway campus

<b>Present:</b>	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
	Carrolly Torres	Student Governor
<b>In Attendance:</b>	Ben Barton	Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Riverside)
	Leeann Bellfield**	Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Cronton)
	Ged Hanley	Assistant Principal (Systems Development & Funding)
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Sue Hutchinson**	Audit Partner, Menzies
	Andy James	Assistant Principal (Curriculum, Riverside)
	Susan Smith	Co-Opted Member
	Catherine Shaw	Head of Governance

*\*\* indicates remote attendance via Microsoft Teams*

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting with a warm welcome extended to Carrolly Torres, as the newly appointed student governor; introductions were made.

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

**Resolved:** Apologies for absence were received and accepted for:

- Karen Banks, External Governor.
- Chris Sikorski, Staff Governor
- Alan Brown, Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality)

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### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

**Resolved:** The Board noted the following declarations of interest:

- Carrolly Torres – agenda item 3
  - Rachael Owen – agenda item 8.4
  - Neil McGrath – agenda item 10.1
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### **3. WRITTEN RESOLUTION** *(previously circulated)*

#### **3.1 Appointment of Carrolly Torres as a Student Governor** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board ratified its decision which had been approved via written resolution on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2025 to appoint Carrolly Torres as a Student Governor for a 2-year term of office and membership to the Quality and Standards Committee.

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### **4. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS 2024/2025**

#### **4.1 Internal Audit Report 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

In the absence of the Audit Committee Chair, Andrew MacManus (Audit Committee Member) presented this agenda item.

As verbally reported at the Board meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025, it was confirmed that at its most recent meeting the Audit Committee had received the final version of Internal Audit Annual Report. This contained a slight amendment which had previously been agreed. This served to clarify that whilst no specific audit on corporate governance had taken place in 2024/2025, no governance issues had been identified when undertaking planned audits throughout the academic year.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the contents of the Internal Audit Report 2024/2025.

#### **4.2 Audit Committee Annual Report 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Annual report provided a comprehensive overview of the college's financial and non-financial controls, risk management and control processes. It concluded with the Audit Committee providing a favourable opinion to the Board regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of these measures.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and approved the Audit Committee Annual Report 2024/2025.

#### **4.3 To receive the Financial Statements Auditor's Management Letter** *(previously circulated)*

This report was presented by Sue Hutchinson (Audit Partner, Menzies) and highlighted the following:

- A very positive audit process had taken place. The Board was advised that two adjustments were made during the audit with neither affecting the reported surplus for the year regarding final reconciliation. Both the College and the auditors anticipated this awaited evidence to confirm the balances and transactions in the accounts.
- Presently, there was one final element of evidence awaited, and this was from the Liverpool City Region Strategic Authority. Upon receipt and following the Board's approval of the accounts, the Auditor would be satisfied in signing an unmodified audit report to the financial statements. This would state that the accounts showed a true and fair view in all material respects, both from a financial perspective and the College's use of funding in terms of regularity.

The External Auditor concluded by expressing thanks to all involved at the College for their co-operation throughout the audit process.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the contents of the Management Letter

#### 4.4 To approve the Financial Statements for year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025 (*previously circulated*)

The Chair reported that the Financial Statements had been scrutinised by the Audit Committee and the Finance & Resources Committee at their respective meetings and invited any questions.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) approved the Financial Statements and supporting documentation for year ended 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025 for their submission to the DfE by the required deadline
  - (ii) approved the Letter of Representation and Letter of Assurance
  - (iii) placed on record thanks to the Finance Team, the Auditors and all involved for their work in achieving a positive outcome from the audit
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## 5. CHAIR'S UPDATE

### 5.1 Chair's Action (*previously circulated*)

The Head of Governance reported that Chair's Action was taken on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025 to approve the building of additional classrooms at the Cronton campus linked to the Music Hub build. This was in response to the clear need for additional space in order to accommodate the growth in student numbers. The Deputy Principal (F&R) provided greater detail regarding the design and cost not to exceed £650k.

**Resolved:** The Board ratified the Chair's Action taken and associated expenditure, as requested.

### 5.2 To receive an activity report

The Chair provided a summary of her activity since the previous Board meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025:

- Annual Governor Reviews – all had been completed with strong engagement from board members. The linked report was to be addressed at agenda item 10.1
- Participation in the annual strategic conversation with officers from the Department for Education (DfE) and college senior management team
- Attendance at the AoC Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Chairs' Network – this was reported to be very informative.
- Ongoing, regular meetings continued to take place with the Principal and Head of Governance.
- Participation in college events, including (i) the HE Graduation Awards Evening, (ii) Student of the Month Awards at Riverside College, (iii) attendance at the spectacular performance of 'Legally Blonde' at the Cronton Playhouse Theatre.

Should availability allow, the Chair strongly recommended governors' attend one of the Student of the Month Awards, reporting favourably upon her experience at this celebratory event.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

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## 6. PRINCIPAL'S STRATEGIC REPORT (*previously circulated*)

The Principal presented a comprehensive update covering the following key areas:

- National Policy and Sector Updates – recent government reforms were outlined and included the Post-16 Education Skills White Paper and the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review (CAR). There was a focus on expanding technical education and apprenticeships. The Board was informed that the College was actively engaging in sector consultations, specifically regarding the defunding of some Level 3 qualifications and the anticipated SEND reforms.
- Funding Matters – New funding streams were reported to address youth unemployment and developing initiatives in connection with Universal Credit eligibility. Additional funding for Technical Excellence Colleges (TECs) had been announced, with opportunities in clean energy, digital and advanced manufacturing. The College met the criteria to make a TEC application, though planned on proceeding with caution to ensure sustainability.
- Community, Employer and Stakeholder Engagement – the College continued to simplify complex reforms for employers and schools, ensuring clear communication and practical support, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) and apprenticeship providers. In response to a question raised, the Principal emphasised the importance of ensuring information was accessible and relevant to various stakeholders. It was reported that the College was actively involved in local skills planning, anti-racism activities in support of the Liverpool City Region strategy and membership of development boards relating to local authority re-generation plans. Recent events and collaborations included (i) Aspire Week, (ii) HE Graduation Awards and (iii) various cultural activities; all contributing to the College's strong community presence.

A discussion took place with questions being raised and responded to. In relation to the changing FE landscape, a governor sought clarification as to how the college would remain competitive with other providers. The Principal re-iterated that the College met the application criteria to become a TEC and despite a caution approach being taken at the present time, the College's offer remained attractive to both learners and staff.

The Principal concluded that the College remained in a strong position, adding that it was well placed to respond to sector changes and future opportunities.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the Principal's Strategic Report.

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## **7. AUDIT COMMITTEE**

### **7.1 To receive a report on the Audit Committee meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025** *(previously circulated)*

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

- The Committee had met with the Internal and External Auditors in the absence of senior managers and no areas of concern had been raised in those discussions.
- Strategic Risk Register Review – the Committee had undertaken its routine review of the register. It was considered to be up to date and reflected current risks. In addition to this regular review, the Committee conducted a review of the College's disaster management and business continuity plans. These plans were found to be satisfactory, with appropriate measures in place to address potential disruptions.
- Financial Statements & Regularity Audit – the Auditor presented the draft Management Letter and findings from the respective audits. It was anticipated that the external

auditors were to provide unqualified/unmodified opinion on the respective audits, as confirmed within agenda item 4.3. This provided assurance to the Committee of the robustness of the College's financial management and controls in place.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

#### 8.2 **Value for Money Annual Report** *(previously circulated)*

The Board was advised that the Committee had reviewed the Value for Money Annual Report. This served to further substantiate the confidence it had in providing a positive assurance opinion to the Board in its Annual Report, as presented at agenda item 4.2

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

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### 8. **QUALITY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

#### 8.1 **To receive a report from the Quality and Standards Committee meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Chair of the Quality & Standards Committee highlighted the following key elements from this report relating to the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2025:

- Favourable outcomes from recent walkthrough / classroom observations
- Scrutiny of the minority of curriculum areas subject to closer monitoring and associated action plans
- Positive Link Governor reports presented by (i) Katie Anderson (SEND) and (ii) Tom McInerney (Safeguarding)
- Analysis of the annual Complaints Report

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

#### 8.2 **College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) 2024/2025 and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) 2025/2026** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice-Principal (Head of Centre, Cronton) highlighted key aspects of this report which included:

- Attendance and achievement rates – significant improvements had been evidenced, especially for 16-18 learners.
- Quality of Teaching and Learning – the 'Great Teaching' strategy had become firmly embedded.
- Safeguarding – this remained a high priority with an increasing number of complex cases being managed effectively.
- Foundation Studies remained an area for improvement. Assurance was provided that strong leadership and positive feedback from recent presentations and visits had been evidenced.
- Adult Skills Fund (ASF) – performance against the ASF target in this academic year was favourable

**Resolved:** The Board approved the SAR 2024/2025 and QIP 2025/2026

#### 8.3 **Safeguarding** *(previously circulated)*

It was noted that the increasing number and complexity of safeguarding referrals was addressed within the Principal's Strategic Report at agenda item 6. The Committee continued to closely monitor the position via a standing agenda item at each meeting.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

#### 8.4 **Curriculum Presentation – Foundation Studies** *(previously circulated)*

In light of the Committee Chair's declaration of interest relating to this agenda item, it was presented by the Board Chair. She advised the Board of the following:

- The Head of Foundation Studies was commended for her clear, determined and positive approach to driving improvements in this curriculum area. She was also commended for the rapid progress evidenced since taking up the role.
- The physical environment was highlighted as much improved within the constraints of listed building status, with upgraded security and a welcoming atmosphere.
- The curriculum was praised for providing clear pathways for all learners. The presentation had included examples of individual student progress and the reaching of significant milestones.

A Governor commented on his experience following his attendance at the recent FS Christmas Fete, where the feedback from parents and carers was overwhelmingly positive with many expressing appreciation for the support and opportunities provided to their children. The SEND Link Governor also commented favourably on her recent visit when she met with both staff and students.

During the discussion that followed, it was recognised that effective leadership had brought about a positive change in culture and that FS was on a clear trajectory towards outstanding provision. Ongoing monitoring and support were to be provided by the Quality & Standards Committee.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) noted the report
- (ii) requested for the Principal to convey the Board's appreciation to the Head of FS and the team for their continued dedication in raising standards in teaching and learning

#### 8.5 **POLICIES**

For Approval:

##### 8.5.1 **Safeguarding Children & Child Protection** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee and approved this policy.

##### 8.5.2 **Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee and approved this policy.

##### 8.5.3 **Teaching, Learning & Assessment** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee and approved this policy.

##### 8.5.4 **Higher Education (HE) Freedom of Speech** *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Governance advised that this was a newly introduced policy and an associated presentation was to be delivered by the Head of HE at the next meeting of the Quality & Standards Committee.

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality & Standards Committee and approved this policy.

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## **9. FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

### **9.1 To receive a report from the Finance & Resources Committee meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025 (previously circulated)**

The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee provided an overview of the business addressed at its meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2025. He confirmed that in addition to the standalone agenda items at 9.2 to 9.7 (inc), the Committee had considered:

- HR reports
- The committee self-evaluation of its performance in 2024/2025 and subsequent approval
- Draft Financial Statements 2024/2025
- Correspondence received from the DfE confirming the outstanding financial health position of the College.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

### **9.2 Management Accounts (previously circulated)**

The management accounts as at 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025 evidenced the continuing strong financial position of the College, noting that the College had achieved an underlying operating surplus significantly higher than planned, mainly as a result of favourable variances in income and pay.

The Deputy Principal (F&R) responded to a question raised by a governor regarding financial performance and specifically the key ratio in connection with the percentage figure of ‘cash generated from operations.’

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

### **9.3 Annual Health & Safety Report 2024/2025 (previously circulated)**

**Resolved:** The Board noted the contents of the report.

### **9.4 Annual Environmental Sustainability Report 2024/2025 (previously circulated)**

It was noted in the report that £7m had been invested in ‘green’ trades and technologies at the College. Reference was made to the ‘Visioning Project’ that was taking place and the importance of net zero ambitions. The pleasing progress being made against the AoC Climate Action Roadmap adopted by the College was also noted.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

### **9.5 Partnership / Sub-Contracting Report (previously circulated)**

**Resolved:** The Board noted the contents of the report.

## **9.6 POLICIES**

For Approval:

### **9.6.1 Health & Safety (previously circulated)**

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and approved this policy.

#### 9.6.2 **Trips & Visits** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and approved this policy.

#### 9.6.3 **Reserves** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and approved this policy.

#### 9.6.4 **HE Fees 2026/2027** *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and approved the HE fees for 2026/2027.

#### 9.7 **Property Strategy** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the report and updates in conjunction with agenda item 8.4 regarding the Visioning Project. Anticipated completion dates for the Greens Skills Centre at Kingsway and the Music Teaching Hub at Cronton were discussed.

The Principal informed the Board that senior college managers had recently met with residents living close to the Cronton campus. She was pleased to report that this had been a productive meeting. Senior managers acknowledged the impact that the current building works and traffic congestion was having on the local community. Assurance was given that the College continued to make concerted efforts to balance the needs of students, staff and the local community and looked forward in continuing positive engagement.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the contents of the report.

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### 10. **GOVERNANCE MATTERS**

#### 10.1 **Governor Review Process 2024/2025 and Board Development Action Plan** *(previously circulated)*

The Head of Governance presented the outcomes from the individual governor review meetings which had been undertaken with the Board Chair. She referred to the development action plan and advised that the DfE had accepted the Board's application for assistance in recruiting a governor with a financial skills set, as part of effective succession planning.

**Resolved:** The Board

- (i) noted the report
- (ii) approved the Board Development Plan for future monitoring by the Search & Governance Committee
- (ii) in the event Search & Governance Committee members were unavailable to form a panel to interview prospective governors towards the end of February 2026, it was approved for the Head of Governance to seek availability from other board members to undertake this recruitment activity

#### 10.2 **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Annual Report 2024/2025** *(previously circulated)*

The Board considered the metrics in respect of (i) students, (ii) staff and (iii) board members.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

#### 10.3 **Governors' Activity / Training Update** *(previously circulated)*

Since the last Board meeting several governors had attended a variety of training sessions and feedback for information purposes was provided.

**Resolved:** The Board noted the report.

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**11. MINUTES**

11.1 **To approve the draft minutes of the Board meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025**  
*(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> October 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

11.2 **To review the action log and to consider any matters arising from the previous meeting**  
*(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Board 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.

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**12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

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

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**13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

**Resolved:** Future meetings were noted as follows:

- Local Skills Working Group – 15<sup>th</sup> January 2026
  - Strategic Planning Workshop – 10<sup>th</sup> February 2026
  - Board – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2026
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The Chair thanked all attendees for their contributions and closed the meeting at 5:20pm

Signed...Office copy signed by Michele Bacon.....**Board Chair**

Date.....23<sup>rd</sup> March 2026.....