Minutes of the Board of Governors Meeting
Date: Monday, 23rd March 2026
Time: 4:30 PM
Location: Room B12 at the Kingsway 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
	Andrew Parkinson	External Governor
	Steph Power	Staff Governor
	Carrolly Torres	Student Governor

In Attendance:	Ben Barton	Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Riverside)
	Leeann Bellfield	Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Cronton)
	Julie Holland	Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)
	Gordon Holmes	Assistant Principal (Finance & Estates)
	Susan Smith	Co-Opted Member
	Julia Withersby	Assistant Principal (HR & Central Services)
	Catherine Shaw	Head of Governance

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting with a warm welcome extended to Andrew Parkinson, as a newly appointed external governor.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Head of Governance advised that no apologies for absence had been received.[1] She notified the Board that Chris Sikorski had a prior commitment and would need to leave the meeting early.

Resolved: The Board noted the verbal report.

---

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

[1] Following the meeting the Board Chair and Head of Governance were advised by Karen Banks that she had emailed her apologies in advance of the meeting, though had received a delayed undeliverable message after the meeting had taken place.

Resolved: The Board noted the following declarations of interest:

- Andrew Parkinson – agenda item 4
- Michele Bacon – agenda items 9.2 and 9.3

3. CHAIR'S UPDATE

3.1 Chair's Action (previously.circulated)

The Board considered the executive summary report in respect of Chair's Action taken relating to (i) prolongation fees following the delays to the building project in relation to the Kingsway Green Skills Centre and the Cronton Teaching Block/Music Hub, and (ii) drafting Head of Terms relating to the potential land acquisition at Kingsway and Cronton. It was noted that progress reports had been presented at previous meetings and discussed at the recent strategic planning event as developments took place.

Resolved: The Board ratified Chair's Action in respect of both matters.

3.2 To receive the Chair's activity report (previously.circulated)

The Board Chair provided a comprehensive update on recent activities. These included:

- Participation at various AoC network meetings
- Membership of the Meeting Local Skills Working Group, in accordance with the Board's statutory responsibilities relating to its 'Duty to Review' and the annual Accountability Statement
- Regular meetings had continued to take place with the Principal and Head of Governance
- Attendance at the Apprenticeship Awards Evening
- Attendance at the 1stuesday breakfast meeting which provided an opportunity to engage with employers, as key college stakeholders
- Attendance and participation at the Department for Education's (DfE) Annual Strategic Conversation with the Principal, Deputy Principal (Curriculum & Quality) and Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources) – a summary of this meeting was provided.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

---

4. WRITTEN RESOLUTION

Appointment of Andrew Parkinson (previously.circulated)

Resolved: The Board ratified its decision which had been approved via written resolution on 29th January 2026 to appoint Andrew Parkinson as an external governor for a 2-year term of office and membership to the Finance & Resources Committee.

---

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

The Principal presented a strategic update highlighting the pace of national policy and funding change affecting the FE sector, much of which had been anticipated and was now emerging. She reported positively on the recent strategic conversation with the DfE, noting strong assurance over college performance and particularly positive feedback on the college's key data.

Key national developments were outlined, including the Post-16 White Paper, the new Ofsted inspection framework and SEND reforms, with the latter identified as significant due to increased statutory responsibilities and uncertainty around funding and capacity. This was to be considered carefully in terms of risk management.

The significant number of individuals not in education, employment or training (NEETs) was highlighted as a major and growing local challenge, with the college being a key partner in establishing a Post-16 Education and Employment Board to improve system-wide coordination.

While acknowledging a general sector-wide disappointment with the 16–18 funding rate increase, the Principal assured governors that the College remained in a comparatively strong financial position due to its prudent planning.

Updates were also provided on staff and student wellbeing, strong Level 3 performance outcomes, key risks including the college's "Big Six", recent internal audit assurance, and an ongoing DfE bursary and free school meals audit.

The Principal concluded by assuring the Board that, despite a challenging external environment, the College remained well placed and was responding in a measured and strategic manner.

A discussion took place. In response to governors' questions, the Principal advised that proposed SEND reforms were likely to increase workload and staffing pressures, although the full impact could not yet be quantified and was largely dependent on funding arrangements, which were currently unclear; this was identified as an ongoing risk that required monitoring. The Deputy Principal (Curriculum and Quality) explained that the college's lower national position at Level 2 reflected deliberate curriculum design choices prioritising progression to Level 3 rather than points accumulation. In response to questions on capital projects, the Deputy Principal (Finance and Resources) confirmed that disruption to learners was minimised through careful planning and scheduling. The Principal also reported that staff absence had increased due mainly to long-term absences, though early signs of improvement were evident following effective HR intervention.

Resolved: The Board
(i) noted the Principal's Strategic Report.
(ii) noted the outcomes from the Strategic Planning event held on 10th February 2026
(iii) noted the Quality, Efficiency and Growth update relating to college performance against the Strategic Plan

Chris Sikorski left the meeting

---

6. FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

6.1 To receive a report from the Finance & Resources Committee meeting held 11th March 2026 (previously.circulated)

The Chair of the Finance & Resources Committee provided an overview of the business addressed at its meeting on 11th March 2026. He confirmed that in addition to the standalone agenda items at 6.2 to 6.8 (inc), the Committee had considered the rise in health and safety data relating to the reporting of accidents, incidents and near misses. This included one RIDDOR-reportable injury. The Board was advised that the latter had been fully investigated in line with procedure. In response to a question raised by a governor, it was confirmed that the reported increase in accidents, incidents and near misses was not linked to the on-going building projects across the campuses.

In addition, the Committee had considered the HR update, noting increased staff absence due to long-term cases, stable leaver levels, and a slight narrowing of the gender pay gap. Governors also received an estates update confirming delays to the Cronton Music Hub, Teaching Block and Green Technology Build projects, with completion now expected by the end of May.

A discussion took place. A governor queried whether prolonged building activity risked impacting on student recruitment. The Principal confirmed that this had not adversely affected enrolment. Given the growth in student numbers over several years whilst building projects had taken place indicated that it could be viewed positively when well-managed.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

6.2 Financial Forecast Update 2025/2028 including In-Year Financial Monitoring Update (previously.circulated)

The Board was referred to the executive summary and advised of the following key elements of the report:

- The operating surplus in 2025/2026 was forecast as £4.213m, representing a more favourable position than projected in July 2025
- Income forecasts were more favourable than projected in July 2025 by £0.006m with supporting information being provided
- Expenditure relating to the capital programme were itemised, noting that current projects were part funded by grant
- Pay contingencies of 4% were included in future years
- Non-pay contingencies of at least £0.750m were built into the annual forecasts
- Cash-flows had been updated with the minimum cash balance throughout the Plan projected to be £6.4m, which represented approximately 61 cash days.

A question was asked about whether planned capital spend (including cladding works) would shift into future years if projects were delayed. The Deputy Principal (Finance and Resources) confirmed this may occur, though cash remained available and plans were constantly subject to close review.

Resolved: The Board

(i) Noted the contents of the report

(ii) Accepted the recommendation made by the Finance & Resources Committee and approved the three-year financial for submission as the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) to the DfE

6.3 Partnership Update (previously.circulated)

The Board considered the recommendation made by the Finance and Resources Committee and noted key factors in connection to (i) overview of performance, (ii) demand pressures and (iii) outcomes from quality assurance monitoring processes.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance and Resources Committee and approved contract increases to the 16-18 allocations for 2025/2026, as follows

(i) Power in Partnership – increase of £54,637

(ii) Crosby Training – increase of £10,000

6.4 Environmental Sustainability Policy (previously.circulated)

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance and Resources Committee and approved the Environmental Sustainability Policy.

6.5 Fees Policy 2026/2027 (previously.circulated)
Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance and Resources Committee and approved the Fees Policy 2026/2027.

6.6 Apprenticeship Fees and Charges Policy (previously.circulated)
Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance and Resources Committee and approved the Apprenticeships Fees and Charges Policy.

6.7 Higher Education Fees and Compensation Policy 2026/2027 (previously.circulated)
Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance and Resources Committee and approved the Higher Education and Compensation Policy 2026/2027.

6.8 Freedom of Information Policy (previously.circulated)
Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Finance and Resources Committee and approved the Freedom of Information Policy.

---

7. QUALITY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE
7.1 To receive a report from the Quality and Standards Committee meeting held on 10th March 2026 (previously.circulated)
In the absence of the Committee Chair, the Board Chair and Head of Governance presented this report. The Board was advised that the committee had noted the publication of the Schools White Paper and SEND reform, with further details awaited to assess implications for 16–25 learners.

Learner voice feedback from the 'Have Your Say' survey remained strong, achieving the highest response rate to date, although a dip in assessment and exam preparation satisfaction were noted and continued to be monitored alongside any specific curriculum areas identified.

Positive Link Governor reports were received for safeguarding and SEND. Key performance indicators confirmed stable attendance and strong retention, including continued improvements for vulnerable learner groups. The Committee also received a presentation on teaching and learning standards and received assurance that staff development arrangements were evidence-informed, well-structured and effectively monitored at senior management level.

In response to a question raised, the Board was advised that very pleasing progress was evident in raising standards in the Foundation Studies Department.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

7.2 Safeguarding Update.(previously.circulated)
The escalating number of safeguarding referrals and increasing complexities were considered. In response to a question raised, the Board was assured that systems, staffing and multi-agency working remained strong. Governors were informed that the increasing safeguarding referrals reflected a national picture. The Safeguarding Link Governor provided a very positive report on the extensive work undertaken by the College in supporting a high volume of disadvantaged and

vulnerable learners. He commended the work undertaken at the College and the excellent handling of some very challenging situations.

Resolved: The Board noted the report and that it remained a standing agenda item for the Quality and Standards Committee.

7.3 Duty to Review Local Skills Needs (previously.circulated)
The Board considered the draft minutes from the inaugural meeting of the Working Group which had taken place on 15th January 2026. As a member of the Working Group, the Board Chair informed governors that a very productive meeting had taken place, with a further meeting scheduled for 6th May 2026. A significant amount of work been undertaken in (i) developing documentation to evidence how the College was meeting local skills needs and (ii) how the curriculum had been adapted in response to requests made by local employers.

Resolved: The Board noted the report and progress being made.

7.4 Learner Involvement Policy.(previously.circulated)
Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Quality and Standards Committee and approved the Learner Involvement Policy.

---

8. AUDIT COMMITTEE
8.1 To receive a report on the Audit Committee meeting held on 9th March 2026 (previously. circulated)
In the absence of the Committee Chair members of the Audit Committee and Head of Governance highlighted key elements of the report. The Board received the Escalation and Assurance Report from the Audit Committee meeting held on 9th March 2026 and noted that there were no matters requiring urgent escalation. The Committee had considered Key Strategic Risk 1 relating to student numbers and funding, received internal audit reports on Apprenticeships and on Additional Learning Support and High Needs provision, both of which concluded Substantial Assurance, and noted that the internal audit programme remained on track. The Board was advised of progress with the external audit tender process and of emerging sector risks, including SEND reforms, cyber security and changes to the Ofsted inspection framework. The Committee confirmed that no material non-compliances had been identified and that the majority of strategic risks were rated green, with the remainder amber, and would continue to be monitored. A governor commented very favourably on the presentation delivered by the Assistant Principal (Systems Development and Funding) which highlighted funding complexities across the various areas of provision at the College.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

8.2 Disaster Management and Business Continuity Plan (previously.circulated)
Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Audit Committee and approved the Disaster Management and Business Continuity Plan.

---

9. SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
9.1 To receive for information a report on the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 11th March 2026 (previously.circulated)
The Board received the report from the Search & Governance Committee. This included the

following:

- the strategic risk relating to ineffective board succession planning
- a statutory external board review must take place in 2026/2027, as part of a three-yearly requirement. It was anticipated that a recommendation for appointment was to be made to the Board at its next meeting
- the committee had approved for the Board's next skills audit to take place
- assured the Board that governance responsibilities were being discharged in line with recent guidance issued by the Department for Education - Guide to effective practice in strategic planning in further education, published on 10th February 2026.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

Michele.Bacon.withdrew.from.the.meeting.for.agenda.items.❺8.and.❺9

9.2 Board Membership and Succession Planning (previously.circulated)
A rigorous governor recruitment campaign had taken place in accordance with policy and the Board Development Action Plan, resulting in there currently being no vacancies on the Board. The terms of office for three external governors and one co-opted member were due to expire at the end of the academic year and an overview of succession planning activity was provided.

Resolved: The Board
(i) approved the re-appointment of Michele Bacon as an external governor up to 31st July 2027
(ii) approved the appointment of Wesley Rourke as an external governor from 1st August 2026 for a four-year term of office, following his recent expression of interest in re-joining the Board
(iii) noted that an interview was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 25th March 2026 with a prospective new governor, whose application to become an external governor had been considered by the Search and Governance Committee at its most recent meeting

9.3 Appointment Process for the Election of Board Chair and Vice-Chair(s) 2026/2027 (previously.circulated)
The Head of Governance advised that subject to the re-appointment of Michele Bacon that had taken place in the preceding agenda item, to date she was the sole governor who had expressed an interest in being appointed Board Chair in 2026/2027. Notwithstanding this, the Board was advised that expressions of interest were welcomed from all external governors. A discussion took place, whereby it was noted that the terms of office for the incumbent Board Vice-Chairs were due to expire on 31st July 2026.

Resolved: The Board approved
(i) for the informal process to be adopted for the appointment of the Board Chair in 2026/2027
(ii) for the formal process to be adopted for the appointment of the Board Vice-Chair in 2026/2027

Michele.Bacon.re_joined.the.meeting

9.4 Board Development Action Plan (previously.circulated)
The Search and Governance Committee monitored timely progress against the action plan and the current position was presented to the Board. Four of the action points had been completed and were RAG-rated green. The remaining two action points were on track for completion and RAG-rated amber.

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

9.5 Review of the Board Standing Orders (previously.circulated)

The Head of Governance advised that this comprehensive document had been reviewed subsequent to the approval of the Instrument and Articles of Government which had taken place last year. The importance of the contents was drawn to the Board's attention and assurance that the Standing Orders had been scrutinised by the Search and Governance Committee at its most recent meeting.

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search and Governance Committee and approved the Board's Standing Orders.

9.6 Meeting Schedule 2026/2027 (previously.circulated)

The proposed dates were considered by the Board, and a discussion took place regarding a slightly earlier start time for future meetings.

Resolved: The Board

(i) approved the Meeting Schedule 2026/2027

(ii) agreed for the Head of Governance to ascertain governors' views on revising start times as a follow up action

9.7 Governor Expenses Policy (previously.circulated)

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search and Governance Committee and approved the Governor Expenses Policy.

9.8 Complaints Against the Corporation Policy (previously.circulated)

Resolved: The Board accepted the recommendation made by the Search and Governance Committee and approved the Complaints Against the Corporation Policy.

---

10. GOVERNORS' ACTIVITY / TRAINING UPDATE

Summaries included:

- Student Governors – positive feedback relating to various training undertaken
- Link Governor Visits – favourable reports were presented. The SEND Link Governor provided an overview of her most recent termly visit which took place at the Wonky Garden in Widnes, where Foundation Studies learners engaged in regular supported placements in the local community, yielding many positive benefits
- AoC Staff Governor Network – in Chris Sikorski's absence, the Head of Governance provided an overview of the extensive work he continued to undertake as Co-Chair of this network group
- Foundation Studies Spring Fete – several governors had attended and reported it to be an excellent event

Resolved: The Board noted the report.

---

11. MINUTES

11.1 To approve the draft minutes of the Board meeting held on 15th December 2025 (previously.circulated)

Resolved: The minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

11.2 To receive a progress report on 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.

---

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Expressions of interest were sought to appoint a Careers Link Governor. In addition to the role description that had previously been circulated, the Assistant Principal (Head of Centre, Cronton) provided additional information relating to the matrix standard.

Resolved: The Board

(i) approved the expansion of the Link Governor programme to incorporate a Careers Link Governor

(ii) approved the role description of the Careers Link Governor

(iii) agreed that expressions of interest were to be forwarded to the Head of Governance at the earliest opportunity

---

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved: The Board noted this to be Monday 6th July 2026

Signed.........Office Copy signed by Michele Bacon..Board Chair

Date.........6th July 2026...