



Minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee Meeting held on Thursday 12 March 2026 at 8am via Microsoft Teams

Present: John Fogarty – Chair (*Foundation Governor*)
Brother Ben (*Foundation Governor*)
Janet Gater (*Principal*)
Darren Melling (*Foundation Governor*)
Andrew Rannard (*Foundation Governor*)

In attendance: Michelle Williams (*Vice Principal, Finance, Resources & Systems*)
Jackie Hazelden (*Finance Manager*)
Ruth Potter (*Clerk to Governors*)

The Chair welcomed all attendees and the meeting was opened in prayer.

1. ROUTINE AND STANDING ITEMS

1.1 Declarations of interest

Members were invited to declare whether they had any direct or indirect personal, prejudicial or pecuniary interest or conflict of interest in any matter which formed part of the agenda for this meeting or was likely to be discussed at this meeting. John Fogarty declared an interest in item 3.1, Student Transport Annual Review, due to his employment at the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

1.2 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Naheem Shafiq. The meeting was declared quorate.

1.3 Items to be included under urgent business

No items were submitted.

1.4 Minutes of the Finance & Resources Committee meeting held on 20 November 2025 (*previously circulated*)

The minutes were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair in accordance with Article 12 (3) of the Articles of Government. The publication of the minutes was authorised in accordance with Article 13.

1.5 Matters arising from the minutes (*previously circulated*)

Committee members considered the action log prepared by the Clerk. All actions had been completed. The Vice Principal provided an update on the following matters:

Minute 2.1 – the pension contribution rate for the Merseyside Pension Fund had been confirmed.

Minute 2.3 – the pay award for teaching staff had been implemented.

Minute 3.3 – estates plans in response to Martyn's Law.

1.6 **Committee risk register** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal referred members to the extract from the strategic risk register which was included to provide assurance and oversight of the risks specific to the Finance and Resources Committee.

Resolved:

- **That the Committee Risk Register be received and noted.**

2. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

2.1 **DfE – Governing Body Finance Dashboard** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal presented the Department for Education's (DfE) Governing Body Finance Dashboard and letter to the Accounting Officer dated 4 November 2025. The Finance Dashboard was based on the data submitted by the College in its latest Financial Forecasting Return and it was noted that the financial health assessment grade was Good for 2025-26 (the current budget year) and Good for 2024-25 (the latest outturn forecast year).

The dashboard identified College performance against target and sector benchmarks and the following key points were highlighted:

- financial health grading of all colleges – more colleges were falling within the Good grading compared to previous years
- staff costs as a percentage of adjusted income – these continued to track above the sector benchmark of 70%
- profitability performance ratio (EBITDA – earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation)
- borrowing as a percentage of total income.

Discussion ensued on the key dashboard indicators and the College's position against benchmarks. It was noted that investment in staff was regarded as key to successful student outcomes. The correlation between results and staff costs as a percentage of income was not currently captured as a benchmark metric, but would be of interest in terms of impact on student outcomes.

Governors' questions were invited.

Q – What was the key driver for the College in terms of achieving a 'good' rather than 'outstanding' financial health grading?

A – The outstanding loan resulted in a lower score on borrowing when compared to colleges with no borrowing. Historic rationale for loan explained against context of investment in College estate and access to significant capital funding at the time. Also, impact of profitability performance ratio (EBITDA).

Resolved:

- **That the Governing Body Finance Dashboard be received and noted.**

2.2 **Finance Update and Management Accounts – January 2026** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal provided a summary of the College's financial performance for the six months up to the end of January 2026. She reported a favourable variance of £186k over the anticipated position at this point in the year and confirmed that

the College was on track to achieve its planned surplus outturn position at year end.

She confirmed that all headline performance indicators were RAG rated green. Key performance indicators (KPIs) were also tracking as green with the exception of three indicators that were RAG rated amber. These were as follows:

- pay as percentage of income – negative variance of 6.5% against target, however this would improve upon receipt of anticipated HE income
- cash balance – negative variance of £647k against end of year target due to income profile (reflected in the cashflow forecast)
- dependency on DfE funding – negative variance of 14% against year-end target

The Vice Principal highlighted a number of additional notes set out in the finance report, including:

- Additional 16-19 in-year growth funding estimated at £75k, however this would only be confirmed by the DfE in April.
- Investment income re-profiled in line with reducing interest rates.
- Support staff pension scheme contribution rate to reduce from 20.3% to 12.8% in April 2026 as a result of surplus in Merseyside Pension Fund and College's lower risk profile due to government underwriting of pension liability.
- A number of adjustments to plan including:
 - increase to student transport budget to fund increase in allocation of free bus passes
 - reduction in investment income forecast
 - increase in depreciation charge
 - increase in staffing budget
 - reduction in other income to reflect change in profile of asset hires.
- HE funding, £70k more than planned, due to be received in March.
- HE student fees due to increase in September 2026.

A point of clarification was raised with regard to the categorisation of staff training and development. It was confirmed that this sat within the curriculum support budget.

Governors' questions were invited.

Q – Increase in student transport budget – background to this?

A – Free bus passes available for St Helens students who live further than two miles from College (and not eligible for support under the Bursary Fund). Second year of operation had seen more interest from students. The Principal also highlighted the additional marketing and liaison work undertaken with St Helens schools which may have raised the profile of the College's offer amongst St Helens based students.

The Chair noted the positive mid-year financial position and thanked the Vice Principal for her report.

Resolved:

- **That the management accounts for January 2026 be approved and noted.**

2.3 **16-19 Allocation Statement** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal reported that the DfE's 16-19 allocation statement for 2026-27 had not yet been issued. However, the funding rate increase for next year had recently been confirmed at 0.55%. Financial planning for next year had commenced and was based on estimated information. The draft financial plan would be presented to governors for approval in the Summer Term.

2.4 **Student Applications 2026-27** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal presented this report and highlighted the current level of applications for enrolment in September 2026. The application deadline had passed and all guidance interviews had been completed. Upon review of the associated data, it was the view of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) that the College would achieve the planned student numbers next year. Liaison and marketing activity undertaken by the Marketing Team was reported.

Governors' questions were invited.

Q – Was there an upper limit on applications?

A – No cap imposed on applications. If application submitted within deadline and offer grades achieved, place was guaranteed. For other students, aimed to be as flexible as possible.

It was noted that for the last two years the College had over-recruited against plan which reflected the demographic bulge that was coming through the system. This was anticipated to drop off in the next four years. The impact on accommodation, staffing and timetabling was discussed.

Governors acknowledged the strong level of applications and noted the increase in numbers from St Helens schools.

The Chair thanked the Vice Principal for her report and put on record the governors' thanks to the Marketing Team for their work in this key area.

Resolved:

- **That the student applications report be noted.**

2.5 **Mid-Year Bursary Fund Update** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal presented this mid-year update report and confirmed that bursary applications were slightly down this year. The assessment approach, in line with updated DfE Bursary Fund guidance, had proved more complex and resource intensive to administer. A shift to indirect awards was noted, with direct cash payments only used in very limited circumstances. With regard to the targeted bursary for vulnerable students, the higher discretionary amount paid by the College would not continue next year due to DfE requirements. The overall financial position of the College's bursary fund at the end of the Autumn Term was highlighted. It was noted that the DfE had confirmed no increase to bursary funding next year, however the impact of the extended entitlement to free college meals (for those on Universal Credit) would potentially mitigate this.

Resolved:

- **That the mid-year bursary fund report be received and noted.**

2.6 **Annual Treasury Report** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal presented this report which had been prepared by the College's Finance Manager. Summary of outturn 2024-25 and position to date for 2025-26 was provided. Investment income was anticipated to reduce this year due to falling interest rates. The Vice Principal referred governors to the investment rate achieved over recent years and reported back on the recent Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA) Finance and Funding Conference at which the DfE had articulated an aim for colleges to achieve higher than UK gilt rates. Investments would be reviewed accordingly and discussion ensued on DfE-approved investment platforms.

Following discussion, governors were in agreement that the rate of return achieved in recent years was good when balanced against overall risk appetite. Continued monitoring of appropriate investment opportunities was, however, encouraged within the wider treasury management strategy.

Resolved:

- **That the Annual Treasury Report be approved and noted.**

2.7 **Internal Audit Report – Estates Management** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal updated governors on the outcome of the recent internal audit review of estates management. The Internal Auditor had concluded that there was a strong level of assurance over the arrangements in place. The report had been presented to the Audit Committee for detailed consideration.

The Chair put on record the Committee's thanks to the Estates Manager and noted the strong assurance gained in this key area.

Resolved:

- **That the Estates Management Internal Audit report be received and noted.**

3. **ANNUAL REVIEWS**

3.1 **Student Transport Annual Review** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal presented this report and highlighted the following points:

- In-year increase in budget of £40k
- Tender activity for student transport contract
- Update on subsidised early morning Kirkby bus route
- Liaison with Merseytravel on potential new public bus route to reflect growth in student numbers from recent housing developments.

Following discussion, governors noted the update and endorsed the continuation of the current student transport support schemes.

Resolved:

- **That the Student Transport Annual Review be approved and noted.**

3.2 **Contracts Register Annual Review** *(previously circulated)*

The Vice Principal referred members to the annual review of contracts held by the College, as summarised from the central contracts register. This assisted with contract management activity, oversight of contract value, and procurement

pipeline planning. Procurement frameworks were used whenever possible and supported legislative compliance as well as value for money.

Resolved:

- **That the Contracts Register Annual Review be received and noted.**

4. POLICIES

4.1 Financial Regulations 2026 (*previously circulated*)

The Vice Principal reported that the regulations had been subject to a substantive overhaul to ensure compliance with the College Financial Handbook. A summary of key amendments was highlighted.

Resolved:

- **That the Financial Regulations 2026 be recommended for approval to the full Governing Body.**

ACTION – FGB agenda item – Financial Regulations

5. OTHER MATTERS

5.1 Governor Training

The Clerk reminded governors of the upcoming SFCA Governance Webinar on 17 March, 'Understanding the numbers that matter'. Governors were asked to report training and development activities for inclusion in the training log.

5.2 Any Other Business

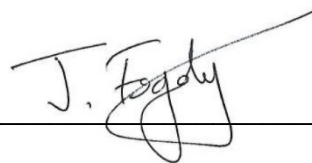
None

5.3 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 18 June 2026 at 8am.

The Chair thanked all Members for their attendance and contribution at the meeting. There being no further business to discuss the meeting was brought to a close at 8.55am.

Signed by the Chair: _____



On this day: _____ 18 June 2026 _____