



Agenda No: 01

Finance & General Purposes Committee – Main Minutes

Friday 26 September 2025 – 9.00-11.35am

Gateshead College Boardroom

Committee Members	Type	Initials	Attendance	Apologies
Martin Hedley	Chair / Independent Governor	MH	X	
David Brind	Independent Governor	DB		X
David Alexander	Principal / CEO and Governor	DA	X	
Darren Curry	Independent Governor	DCu	X	
Dan Wallace	Staff Governor	DW	X	
Victoria Beattie	Co-opted Governor	VB		X
Sarah McCourt	Co-opted Governor	SMc	X	
Chris Forster	Co-opted Governor	CF	X	
Clerk				
Nicola Taylor	Director of Governance & Compliance	NT	X	
Attendees				
Sarah Judson	Deputy Principal Finance & Resources	SJ	X	
Nadine Hudspeth	Director of Brand & Learner Experience	NH	X^	
Deni Chambers	Director of Curriculum & Skills	DCh	X^	
Ivan Jepson	Director of Business Development & Innovation	IJ	X^	
David Keetley	Financial Controller	DK	X^	
John McNeany	Head of IT	JMc	X^	

^Attended for part of the meeting.

1. Chair's welcome, apologies, conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees. It was noted there would be a confidential item covered under 1.1 and then the remaining report presenters would attend.

Apologies were received from DB and VB. The Committee **agreed** the meeting was quorate.

There were no conflicts of interest declared. Members were reminded to declare any conflicts that arose during the meeting.

1.1. Confidential Item

Covered under a confidential minute.

The report was noted.

2. Minutes of the last meeting dated 20 June 2025

- A) The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the 20 June 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate account of the meeting.
- B) The Committee **reviewed** the confidential minutes from the 20 June 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate account of the meeting.

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters Arising / Action Log

Action Log

SJ presented the action log and provided updates of ongoing actions. All other actions had been closed, completed or not yet due as reported.

Tenders via e-governance

MH highlighted that the following items had been recommended / approved by the Committee since the last meeting on 20 June 2025:

- IT Hardware Tender - FGP Committee approved.
- Coach Hire Tender - FGP Committee approved.
- Skills Bootcamp Tender - FGP Committee Recommendation for Board Approval and Board approved.

The report was noted.

Item 6.5 taken at this point.

4. Strategic Risk Register

Item taken after 6.4.

SJ presented the report, highlighting work had been undertaken to improve the risk register based on governor comments and feedback. A revised risk register was due to be presented to the Audit Committee in November 2025 for discussion.

The horizon scan, as part of the current risk register, had been updated and further developed.

No scores had changed on the current risk register since the last Committee meeting.

The Committee **noted** the complexities of the FE landscape and **supported** the risks being presented at Board / Committee being more strategic in nature.

The report was noted.

5. Procurement Tenders

SJ provided a verbal update on the ongoing media buying tender, noting that the evaluation process was current underway and this would be circulated to the Committee for approval electronically.

The report was noted.

6. Strategic Progress Reporting

6.1. Estate

SJ presented the report, setting out the progress made against the Estate Strategy during 2024/2025, the priorities for 2025/2026 and an update on the KPIs which were due to be presented to the Committee in November 2025 following the appointment of a Head of Estates and Facilities.

Action: SJ to present Estate Strategy KPI update at the November 2025 meeting.

Action: Committee to consider Estate Strategy KPI reporting at Committee and Board level following in November 2025.

The College were going to explore the collection of data to ensure this was categorised appropriately and allowed the College to benchmark against DfE metrics. With this being the first year of the strategy, this would be used as the baseline. SJ would work with VB as part of this work.

Action: SJ to work with VB on Estate Strategy KPIs and baseline data (January 2025).

SJ recognised the links between the Estate and Digital Strategies in terms of ways of working across the College estate.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- Space per student, noting that different students would require different space elements due to their needs / the nature of their qualifications – it was confirmed that these metrics were provided by the DfE and specific to curriculum areas to recognise this.
- Possible regeneration and development opportunities within Gateshead and what this could mean for the College in terms of space, place and campus.

The Committee noted the progress made and approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The report was noted.

6.2. Finance

SJ presented the report, setting out the progress made against the Finance Strategy during 2024/2025, the priorities for 2025/2026 and the KPIs for Committee and Board monitoring. SJ noted the link with the Estate and Digital Strategies.

SJ highlighted the proposal to reduce monthly management accounts to being reported quarterly, to allow further capacity within the Finance Team. The management accounts pack would be reviewed to ensure accessibility and digestibility for governors. SJ provided reassurance that finance would continue to

be monitored monthly with the proposal of reduced reporting, continuing to monitor key metrics and risks.

The Committee **supported** the move to more digestible management accounts, and the direction towards quarterly management accounts. The Committee **suggested** to proceed with caution and care, **suggesting** a workshop with DA, DB, DW and MH to consider the level of information to be provided.

Action: SJ to arrange a workshop with DA, DB, DW and MH to consider financial reporting (November 2025).

It was agreed that a decision to recommend a change reporting could be made in November 2025 following the above workshop taking place. If a change of reporting was supported, the Finance Strategy would need to be updated and the Board to approve this, following recommendation from the Committee.

The Committee noted the progress made and approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee approved the continuation of the Committee and Board KPIs with no changes proposed.

The report was noted.

6.3. Procurement (including Annual Procurement Report 2024/2025)

SJ presented the report, setting out the progress made against the Procurement Strategy during 2024/2025, the priorities for 2025/2026 and the KPIs for Committee and Board monitoring.

SJ highlighted the College were further exploring social value and how this could be developed as part of procurement exercise.

The Committee **noted** the great work set out within the Procurement Annual Report.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- Supporting local organisations and the ongoing action to review the tender process to ensure accessibility.
- The tangibility of social value. The Committee offered their support and experience of this from their sectors.
- The target against the KPI of *Percentage of procurement exercises where sustainability is included within the award criteria*, noting that the outturn had decreased from 2023/2024 to 2024/2025 and the target not being achieved – it was confirmed that the College were still keen to keep the target as still hoping to progress in this area however procurement frameworks prevented flexibility for additional elements, such as sustainability.
- The outturn against the KPI of *Percentage of invoices where purchase order was raised in advance of the invoice being received*, noting that this had dropped 17% from the previous year and was away from target – the Committee specially queried what work was being done in this area to improve. It was suggested that further training was required across the College. The earlier collection of data, and proposed KPI dashboard, would allow greater monitoring of KPIs. It was agreed SJ and DA would consider the operational nature of this in more detail outside of the meeting.

Action: SJ to consider the work needed to improve purchase orders being set up in advance of invoices being received (December 2025).

The Committee noted the progress made and approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee approved the KPIs, noting that these would be reported to the Committee annually as part of the Procurement Annual Report.

The report was noted.

6.4. Digital

Item taken after 6.6

JMc presented the report, setting out the progress made against the Digital Strategy during 2024/2025, the priorities for 2025/2026 and the KPIs for Committee and Board monitoring.

JMc noted the need to focus on being more proactive with digital approaches, rather than reactive, and to improve data maturity use across the organisation.

Processes had been improved for learners, which also had a positive impact on cyber security, such as single sign on for users.

There remained to be a mix of digital skills across the organisation and development was in place to support this.

KPIs had been suggested through the Digital Steering Group. Further exploration of the infrastructure included within the analysis of device age was due to take place.

JMc had been working with SJ on operational risk, creating an IT operational risk register considering high impact and low probability events.

Significant progress had been made relating to sustainability, decommissioning legacy hardware, reducing carbon footprint from infrastructure and reducing scope 1 emissions.

SJ noted the link with the Estate Strategy, in terms of a 10-year estate plan, including IT and digital to ensure sustainability of resource.

The Committee discussed and queried the following:

- *Covered under a confidential minute.*
- *Covered under a confidential minute.*
- Condition survey of IT infrastructure – it was noted there was a mix of conditions across the infrastructure, with user facing equipment being good.

The Committee queried the links between the KPIs and the proposed priorities for 2025/2026. The Committee requested for these to be further considered by the Digital Steering Group and for measurable KPIs to be introduced where possible.

Action: CT to facilitate a discussion at the Digital Steering Group to consider links between the KPIs and the proposed priorities for 2025/2026, and report back at the November 2025 meeting.

The Committee discussed whether device age was the most appropriate KPI to report at Board level. Instead, the Committee suggested a KPI relating to learner and staff satisfaction of IT.

Action: CT to consider a KPI relating to learner and staff satisfaction of IT at the Digital Steering Group and report back at the November 2025 meeting.

Action: Committee to consider Digital KPI reporting at Committee and Board level following update from Digital Steering Group in November 2025.

The Committee noted the progress made and approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The report was noted.

JMc left the meeting.

6.5. Brand and Marketing

Item taken after Item 3.

NH presented the report, setting out the progress made against the Brand and Marketing Strategy during 2024/2025, the priorities for 2025/2026 and an update on proposed KPIs to allow committee monitoring.

The proposed KPIs related to staff and learner net promoter scores, and further scores relating to employer / partner scores would also be explored.

NH noted the review of the College's Strategic Plan may result in amends to the proposed priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee **recognised** the positive work of the poverty research being undertaken by the College to help address barriers to learning.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- The exploring of partner / employer net promoter scores – it was suggested that although feedback was collected currently, there was a sufficient data set to create a net promoter score from this and therefore this would be explored during 2025/2026.
- The definitions / differences of employers and partners – it was agreed the College needed to define these groups and ensure consistency / clarity.

The Committee noted the progress made and approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee approved the proposed KPIs for Committee and Board monitoring relating to staff and student net promoter scores and noted that a further KPI would be developed around employer / partner net promoter scores.

Action: NH to explore employer / partner net promoter scores (July 2026).

The report was noted.

6.6. Sustainability

Item taken after Item 6.5.

NH presented the report, setting out the progress made against the Sustainability Strategy during 2024/2025, the priorities for 2025/2026 and an update on the KPIs which were due to be presented to the Committee in November 2025. The dataset to be presented in November 2025 would provide a three-year trend data. NH noted that presentation of the trend data may result in a review of the College's Decarbonisation Plan.

Action: NH to present Sustainability Strategy KPI update at the November 2025 meeting.

Action: Committee to consider Sustainability Strategy KPI reporting at Committee and Board level following in November 2025.

NH noted the support and guidance of the Sustainability Link Governor (DB).

NH confirmed the original KPI relating to energy consumption had been included for completeness however energy consumption had increased. This was as expected due to learner and staff number growth.

The College had achieved silver accreditation of investors in the environment (IiE) and this was a positive way of gaining external advice and assurance.

An amend had been proposed to the Sustainability Strategy, including a reference to the strategic links with inclusion. This was presented for recommendation for Board approval.

The Committee noted the progress made and highlighted that there was a positive structure in place to monitor data.

The Committee approved the priorities for 2025/2026.

The Committee recommended the proposed amend to the Sustainability Strategy for Board approval.

NH left the meeting.

The Chair **requested** for future strategy updates to be future focussed, confirming progress made without the need to go into detail but instead highlighting future priorities, key risks and KPIs / OKR (objective key results).

Action: NT to consider 2025/2026 strategic progress reporting, confirming progress made without the need to go into detail but instead highlighting future priorities, key risks and KPIs / OKR (objective key results).

Item 6.4 followed this item.

7. Finance Report

7.1. Outturn 2024/2025

SJ presented the report, highlighting the following:

- *Covered under a non-confidential minute.*
- The 2024/2025 financial statements were being prepared for external audit.
- There had been movements in income and expenditure since the June 2025 Management Accounts and this largely related to:
 - Adult income being higher than anticipated.
 - Apprenticeship income being higher than anticipated - the forecast was based on the apprenticeship achievement rate historic trend however this had improved. There had been an overestimation of the number of withdrawals of apprentices sitting their end point assessments.

- Bootcamp income being higher than anticipated – IJ set out the complex funding related to bootcamp funding and set out that 2nd milestone payments had been better than predicted.
- Associated expenditure had offset the majority of additional income.

DA set out that the 2024/2025 bottom line had been managed as anticipated, with the College recognising and managing the unexpected reduction of in-year 16-18 growth funding during 2024/2025 in a way which still ensured a balanced outturn position.

The report was noted.

IJ left the meeting.

7.2. Budget Update 2025/2026

SJ presented the report highlighting any changes to the budget for 2025/2026 since Board approval in July 2025. There remained to be some unknowns at this point in time, including the potential of in-year 16-18 growth funding. In-year 16-18 growth funding had not been factored into the budget in case this did not materialise.

DA noted that the AoC recommendation on a sector pay offer had been published at 4%. A letter had been received from the UCU trade union to highlight their ask of a 10% pay increase, improved working conditions and national bargaining. DA had ensured the Chair of the Board was kept up to date.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- Tracking of unknown costs and associated risk – it was suggested that the Finance Team had further developed their operational level risk register which monitored funding stream risks in greater detail.
- The likelihood of future funding of the increase of the employer's national insurance contributions – it was suggested that this was unknown and the College were being prudent with this by removing full funding from March 2026 financial projections, with it being assumed the College would have to cover this cost. This would be monitored as further information became available.

The report was noted.

7.3. Recruitment Update 2025/2026

DCh presented the report, highlighting the following:

- Learner number growth had been planned in 16-18 of approx. 430 additional students. Based on recruitment figures to date, the College had seen approx. 300 of this planned growth.
- *Covered under a confidential minute.*
- It was highlighted that the trend data for 2023/2024, 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 shows 16-18 learner number growth of approx. 20% which was a significant increase.
- Recruitment in T Levels had increased but remained below business plan.
- Adult recruitment was slightly ahead of business plan.

- Higher Education provision had started this week, recruitment was slightly behind business plan.
- Apprenticeship recruitment was slightly behind plan, but recruitment continued all year. Business Development were focussing efforts on the areas of engineering, automotive and plumbing.
- Due to the College's proactive approach to business planning and expected growth, appropriate staffing and space resource had been factored in to support learner number growth to ensure a positive learner experience.

The Committee **discussed** and **queried** the following:

- The strategy to improve HE recruitment and the future intent – it was suggested that the College had focussed its HE intent on Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) to prevent competition with local universities. A three-year plan was in place to further develop the HTQ offer.

The Committee **agreed** it would be beneficial to monitor recruitment and learner numbers across the academic year, linking with reporting to the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee to monitor the financial impact.

Action: CT to provide a recruitment update at each FGP meeting.

The report was noted.

8. Estates Report

8.1. Insurance Annual Report 2024/2025 and 2025/2026 Arrangements

SJ presented the report, setting out that a report of this nature had not been provided to the Committee previously.

The Committee **noted** the usefulness of the report and the identification of any further financial risk.

The report was noted.

8.2. Catering Contract Update

Covered under a confidential minute.

The report was noted.

DCh left the meeting

8.3. Gateshead International Stadium Lease Update

Covered under a confidential minute.

The report was noted.

9. Committee Terms of Reference and Work Plan 2025/2026

NT presented the report for information, noting this set out the Committee's term of reference and planned agenda items for 2025/2026, noting that additional items would be added throughout the year.

The report was noted.

10. Any Other Business

N/A

The Chair thanked the attendees for their reports however reiterated the ask of governors to reduce the operational nature of papers and to reduce the number of pages per each report.

11. Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Friday 28 November 2025 at 9.30am, following by a joint meeting with the Audit Committee.