



Agenda No: 02

Finance & General Purposes Committee – Main Minutes

Friday 28 November 2025 – 9.30-11.30am

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	DC	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	
Chris Toon	Deputy Principal Curriculum & Quality	CT	X^	
Nadine Hudspeth	Director of Brand & Learner Experience	NH	X^	
Ivan Jepson	Director of Business Development & Innovation	IJ	X^	
Rachel Leech	Sustainability Officer	RL	X^	
Lee Jackson	Smart Carbon	LJ	X^	

^Attended for part of the meeting.

F/328 1. Chair’s welcome, apologies, conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

Apologies were received from DB and SM. DA was to join the meeting slightly late.

The Committee **agreed** the meeting was quorate.

It was noted that members of College staff in attendance at the meeting were members of the LGPS fund. It was agreed that this did not negate them from participating in the LGPS discussion under item 9.2.

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

F/329 2. Minutes of the last meeting dated 26 September 2025

- A) The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the 26 September 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate account of the meeting.
- B) The Committee **reviewed** the confidential minutes from the 26 September 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate account of the meeting.

The minutes were approved.

F/330 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.

In relation to the lease at the Academy for Sport, the Council were aware of the timelines, and this was progressing.

The College had included a provision in the accounts for the decommissioning of the equipment on the test track based at Nissan. The lease was due to end in the next 5 years. It was agreed this action could be closed.

A workshop on the management accounts had taken place, SJ was to pull together the December 2025 accounts in a revised format based on Committee feedback.

Staff training regarding procurement was ongoing.

CF joined the meeting

A number of actions would be closed following presentation at this meeting.

Ratification of Media Buying Contract Approval (Electronic Circulation)

MH highlighted that the Media Buying Contract had been approved by the Committee electronically between meetings.

The Committee **ratified** this approval.

The Finance and General Purposes Committee noted the report.

F/331 4. Student Recruitment Update

CT presented the report, highlighting the following:

16–18 Recruitment

The College had not achieved the full 2025/26 recruitment plan for 16-18 learners. A flexible resource model had been implemented to support this and therefore had been adjusted accordingly; this included the moving of staff to alternative provision

types and areas. Although there had been planning to accommodate additional learners, it was believed that this had resulted in an improved student experience for those that had joined the College.

CT confirmed the budget and forecast had been reviewed to reflect the lower than planned learner numbers.

Adult Recruitment

Current tracking indicated performance ahead of target for adult learner recruitment.

Apprenticeship Recruitment

Apprenticeship numbers were slightly below expectations. Sensitivity had been built into the budget to accommodate this variance, and confidence remained that performance would be at or near budget.

Higher Education (HE) Recruitment

Recruitment for HE had not met planned levels. Efforts were underway to improve next year's performance, including alignment with the Skills White Paper. Recruitment challenges were being explored to help planning for next year.

Overall Position

Recruitment was above last year's levels but remained below internal targets.

Learning Support Needs

There had been a significant increase in learners requiring additional support, which was not funded in-year. The College had to appoint additional Learner Support Officers to meet need. Challenges persisted with securing Local Authority funding for these learners. The only alternative would be to refuse places for learners, however this is not an approach the College wished to adopt. The Committee **supported** this.

SJ noted that risks associated with high-needs funding had been highlighted in the finance paper. The College was considering potential alternative funding opportunities to mitigate these risks.

The Committee **challenged** the planning of an additional 400 16-18 learners with the outturn being 170. It was suggested that 400 was an estimation based on recruitment events and application data. CT noted that the College hoped to receive full in-year growth funding from the DfE however this had not been included in the budget to be prudent. This would therefore be a potential upside to the budget. The Committee were keen to understand the financial implications of the changes in learner numbers and **queried** the flexible approach to staffing as part of operational planning. CT noted that there wasn't flexibility in some areas such as Digital, Construction and Engineering however there was an ability in other areas for staff to be deployed elsewhere. CT confirmed there was approximately a 10% flexibility in teaching staff across the College.

The Committee **discussed** the reduction in apprenticeship recruitment. CT suggested that this was a challenging market, and the recent White Paper referenced the lack of investment from employers. The College were exploring alternative opportunities relating to skills and training.

The Committee **noted** the recent recognition of PlanBee and **queried** if this could be a model for other areas and provision types. CT noted the need to ensure high learner numbers to ensure financial viability. SJ noted the risks surrounding the PlanBee provision relating to requiring high level of governance and administration, as well as risks around costs.

The Committee **discussed** potential opportunities with NECA relating to current and future skills needs.

It was **noted** that learner recruitment would be a standing agenda item and the financial impact of this would be tracked through financial reporting.

The report was noted.

F/332 5. Digital Strategy KPIs

CT presented the report, highlighting the following:

- At the previous meeting, the Committee had asked for the Digital Strategy KPIs to be reconsidered, ensuring alignment with the proposed priorities for 2025/2026, along with the suggestion of a KPI relating to staff and student satisfaction.
- This had been discussed at the Digital Steering Group, and as the focus related to improvement in IT infrastructure, the steering group struggled to identify any alternative KPIs.
- It was confirmed that satisfaction would be further considered as part of pulse surveys however CT caveated this with any data being specific to that point in time and therefore being day / feeling dependent. Tracking feedback over a period of time would be considered.
- IT mandatory training was tracking slightly behind target due to new staff starting in September and there being a 3 month period for completion. This was expected to have improved by the next meeting.

The Committee **noted** the limitations of the operational KPIs and suggested the consideration of KPIs relating to projects to allow the Committee to oversee progress. CT noted the challenge with the majority of projects taking place over the summer term, resulting in a lack of progress being able to be reported until this point.

SJ confirmed a 10-year estate plan was being developed, linking estates and IT to allow the College to consider capital projects based on need.

The Committee **approved** the continued use of the current KPIs for the time being.

Acton: CT and SJ to consider KPIs relating to project progress (July 2026).

The report was noted.

CT left the meeting.

NH, RL and LC joined the meeting.

F/333 6. Sustainability Strategy - Decarbonisation Plan Update and College Performance Data and Sustainability Strategy KPIs

NH noted that the Sustainability Steering Group, including governors DB and CF had received a presentation from Smart Carbon regarding the College's progress of carbon emissions and data collection, and this was now being shared with the Committee.

DA joined the meeting.

LJ provided a presentation and highlighted the following:

- The baseline results indicated 2,615 tonnes of emissions across all three scopes.
- Greater clarity and refinement of data were expected over the next six months, which could impact the baseline results.
- The College continued with its target of Net Zero by 2050 which equated to a 7.63% year-on-year reduction which was challenging. Reduction targets focused on energy, transport, and supply chain, supported by planned actions to achieve these goals. Challenges remained in obtaining accurate emissions data from suppliers for inclusion in College reporting.
- In terms of 2024/2025 performance, building energy emissions decreased by 4.75%, against a KPI of 8%, however this was largely attributed to grid decarbonisation as there had been increases in electricity and gas usage across the College, specifically at the Team Valley campuses.
- The baseline data may not have captured all relevant information now being recorded, meaning comparisons may not be fully like-for-like.
- Suggested considerations were as follows:
 - Adoption of intensity targets.
 - Engaging with the College's supply chain to obtain data.
 - Maintain progress with the national decarbonisation plan.
 - Focus impact in the areas of education, partnership and promotion of active travel.
- Next steps were to include:
 - Reviewing travel data for staff and learners.
 - Reviewing SIC code allocations.
 - Complete the 2024/2025 report.
 - Consider intensity metrics for College.

LJ noted the difficulty of using KPIs to monitor progress due to changes in data and the effects of external factors.

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

- The focus of a linear target per scope per building to help with the monitoring of progress.
- A long term forecast for Scope 1 emissions – it was confirmed this wasn't known.
- The potential impact of marginal gains, and the consideration of cost vs impact when exploring new initiatives.
- An FTE learner number equivalent being used to measure progress and being transparent in terms of what is being measured and how performance could be monitored over time.

Action: NH to consider Committee reflections on the monitoring of future progress, linking in with DB and CF as part of the Sustainability Steering Group and provide an update at the next meeting (February 2026).

The Committee **took assurance** from the presentation, noting that progress was being monitored.

The Committee **noted** their thanks to DB and CF for their support in this area and **agreed** to revisit Sustainability KPIs at the next meeting.

The report was noted.

NH, RL and LC left the meeting.

F/334 7. Estate Strategy KPIs

SJ presented the report, highlighting the following:

- Following approval of the Estate Strategy in July 2025, the College were working towards a baseline year of the KPIs included within the strategy.
- Previously reported data had been reviewed and there had been inconsistent KPI methodology and data collection which was not necessarily in line with RICS guidelines.
- The Head of Estates and VB were due to meet to consider the data collected and the KPIs to monitor going forward to ensure data collection and reporting was meaningful. This would allow benchmarking with other organisations, including the DfE.
- A Computer Aided Facility Management (CAFM) was being explored to allow improved recording and reporting of data.
- An update on KPIs (where possible) had been included in the report.
- A 10-year estate plan was being developed to ensure sufficient investment in estates, linking with IT, as discussed earlier in the meeting. DA reiterated the need to ensure a 3-year plan was in place ahead of pulling together the 10-year plan to ensure better project planning over the interim period.

The Committee **queried** the previous data available and **asked** when the latest space utilisation data review was undertaken. SJ confirmed this would need to be checked outside of the meeting.

Action: SJ to look at space utilisation data for 2024/2025 and provide this to the Committee (February 2026).

The Committee **noted** the difficulty in measuring against KPIs when further work was required to make the data available. The Committee **recognised** that KPIs may change over time but **requested** the ability to track progress over time. DA reiterated that there was data available and this could be used to monitor progress ahead of revised data collection.

The College **noted** the 2023/2024 data relating to space utilisation, recognising that the College had space for growth in learner numbers.

The report was noted.

F/335 8. Strategic Risk Register

SJ presented the report and noted the Audit Committee had received the revised risk register and risk framework for initial comment. Further work was required and then the register and framework would be taken through Board for approval. A session would be planned for January 2026 with all Board members invited. This would be an opportunity for SJ to cover the risk register in more detail and seek Board feedback. The main aim of the revisions was to ensure the risks were strategic and the register was easily understood and digested.

The current risk register had been included in the meantime, this included additional detail on the horizon scanning section of the document.

The Committee **noted** the opportunity to tie into the Estate and Sustainability Strategy.

The report was noted.

F/336

9. Finance Report

9.1. Finance Report

SJ presented the report, highlighting the following:

- Now the 42-day census point had passed, the College's 16-18 learner numbers had been confirmed. The learner numbers had been updated in the forecast, alongside further crystallisation of items following the Board's approval of the budget in July 2025.
- The actual for October 2025 was better than budget and this was due to an additional bootcamp contract and delivery with SORA being ahead of profile. In the last academic year, SORA's delivery being ahead of profile resulted in an impact on finance due to the income profile with NECA being flatlined however this year there had been additional reconciliation points with NECA and therefore this prevented cash timing issues of between delivery and income.
- The forecast end of year position had improved by approx. £470k. The main movements had been included within the report.
- Bootcamp contracts with NECA were due to end in March 2026, with further information awaited. NECA was expected to receive a single settlement from government which provided risk and opportunity. The College were hoped to be in a strong position due to academic outcomes. This had been referenced in the risks and opportunities within the report.

The Committee **approved** the accounts for presentation to the Board.

Note: Following Item 9.2, it was agreed the accounts would be updated to reflect the Committee's recommendation relating to the LGPS Triennial Evaluation.

The report was noted.

9.2. LGPS Triennial Evaluation

SJ presented the report, noting that a formal valuation of the scheme took place every 3 years, during which there was a review of employer contribution rates. The valuation resulted in a significant reduction in the employer contribution primary rate from 19.5%, with the option of opting for a rate of 9.1% (amortised) or 13.6% (full primary rate). SJ highlighted the risks and benefits of both options and confirmed that a level of prudence had already been included into the lower rate and there was no guarantee that overpaying would benefit due to condition changes over time. SJ confirmed that the lower rate of 9.1% would be a higher cash benefit for the College over the next three years, resulting in an improved pay:income ratio and ability to build cash for investment.

The Committee **discussed** the following:

- The difference in savings between the two rates.

- The risks and benefits of both options, including the potential risk of needing to pay a higher rate after the next evaluation.
- The College's current risk appetite in relation to financial sustainability.
- The lack of an investment plan to action with the higher rate of additional funds.
- The volatility of the market.
- The current financial position of the College.

The Committee **agreed** that the full primary rate was still a reduction in the current rate and would allow additional investment over the next 3 years however also balanced the risk of future financial sustainability. The Committee **supported** the rate option of 13.1% and **recommended** this for Board approval.

It was recognised that this would have an impact on the October 2025 accounts as the lower rate of 9.1% had been used in the forecast and therefore this would need to be amended.

Action: SJ to update the October Management Accounts for presentation to the Board (December 2025).

The report was recommended for Board approval.

9.3. Financial Regulations

SJ presented the updated financial regulations, noting that wording had been updated to reflect DfE guidance and strengthening of wording. SJ suggested that a more holistic review was required to prevent ad-hoc reviews. The Committee **supported** this approach.

Action: SJ to carry out a holistic full review of the Financial Regulations (July 2026).

The Committee **recommended** the proposed updates for Board approval.

Action: SJ to present Financial Regulations for Board approval (December 2025).

The report was recommended for Board approval.

9.4 Finance Findings and Management Accounts Update

SJ presented the report which provided a position statement on the work undertaken following the internal audit into the College's financial controls and the streamlined management accounts pack.

SJ confirmed that additional resource was being considered to drive improvements needed however reiterated that progress was being made relating to the audit findings.

The Committee **noted** the continued risk relating to the use of poorly connected excel spreadsheets and manual data entry.

The Committee **noted** the usefulness of the report.

The report was noted.

N/A

F/338 11. Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Friday 13 March 2026 at 9.00am.