



Agenda No: 03

Finance & General Purposes Committee – Main Minutes

Friday 13 March 2026 – 9.00-11.00am

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				
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	
David Keetley	Financial Controller	DK	X	
John McNeany	Head of IT	JMc	X	

^Attended for part of the meeting.

F/339 1. Chair's welcome, apologies, conflicts of interest

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees.

Apologies had been received by CF. 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.

F/340 2. Minutes of the last meeting dated 28 November 2025

The Committee **reviewed** the main minutes from the 28 November 2025 and **agreed** that they were a true and accurate account of the meeting.

The minutes were approved.

Item 6 covered at this point.

F/341 3. Matters Arising / Action Log

F/341 3.1 Action Log

Covered after Item 8.

NT presented the action log and highlighted the following:

- The College had met with the Council to discuss the lease of the Academy for Sport and conversations were progressing regarding a newly written lease. The Committee **queried** whether there was anything in writing to support this and IJ confirmed there was.
- Sustainability KPIs were included as an item on the agenda. The Committee **agreed** this action could be closed as they supported the direction of travel.
- Space utilisation data for 2024/2025 had been shared operationally. The Committee **suggested** an item on Estates at the May 2026 meeting and for this to be covered as part of this update. DA confirmed the Head of Estates could attend and provide information on the work undertaken as part of capital planning and estate management.

Action: NT to add Estates discussion item at the May 2026 meeting. Space utilisation data to be covered as part of reporting (May 2026).

- The Financial Regulations were to be covered as part of this meeting agenda however there was an action relating to a holistic review. The Committee **agreed** this action could be closed following reassurance that the Financial Regulations were aligned with sector regulation and guidance.

The report was noted.

F/342 3.2 Finance Strategy Update

DK presented the report and highlighted the following amends:

- Replacement of the requirement to retain a minimum unrestricted cash balance of 31 Cash Days at all times. "At all times" replaced with "at each month-end", as previously agreed.
- Updating the revised DfE Benchmark set by the FE Commissioner, to 40 Cash Days
- Minor housekeeping of wording which did not change the context of the overall document.

The Committee **noted** that the Strategy referred to the College's Strategic Plan having been approved in 2022 and suggested revised wording to prevent any updates to the College's Strategic Plan requiring amends to the underpinning strategies.

Action: Underpinning strategies to remove reference to date of approval of College Strategic Plan (July 2026).

The Committee **recommended** the updated Finance Strategy for Board approval.

Action: NT to progress updated Finance Strategy for Board approval (April 2026).

The Finance Strategy was recommended.

F/343 4. Review of the Strategic Risk Register

NT presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The risk register had been updated following committee review, Audit Committee discussion at the November 2025 meeting, and the subsequent governor risk workshop in January 2026.
- Actions agreed at the governor risk workshop had been actioned, with the revised register being presented to this cycle of committees.
- At the Curriculum and Quality Standards Committee, there had been a discussion around the removal of the risk relating to learner recruitment, and it was felt that this continued to be a strategic risk. This was discussed by the Audit Committee at their meeting on 3 March 2026 and it was agreed for CT to revise the risk of ER6 *Failure to secure new or maintain/grow existing income streams and a potential over reliance on particular income streams* to be more specific to learner recruitment.
- At the Audit Committee, there had been a discussion over the committee having oversight of ER8 *Insufficient digital and information security leading to a significant data breach and/or cyber-attack* with the agreement that the Audit Committee should not have oversight of a specific risk and instead oversight of the control of the risk management framework. It was suggested that this risk would be reallocated to the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The Committee **supported** the move of ER8 to the remit of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. On this basis, this would be taken to the Board and a consideration of any amendments needed to committee remit for 2026/2027.

Action: NT to review FGP and Audit Committee remit in terms of information governance / data protection for 2026/2027.

The Audit Committee also discussed the importance of focussing on risks outside of appetite.

The Committee **noted** the level of work undertaken as part of the risk register review.

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

- Further discussion on appetite and mitigating controls, with the suggestion of seeking greater assurance of the effectiveness of controls where this isn't assured by external assurance. A suggestion of staff presenting on the mitigations of key risks was made. It was confirmed this could be discussed and explored further with the Audit Committee, with the potential of this being brought into the workplan.

Action: NT to share suggestion of seeking assurance of risk mitigations with the Audit Committee for discussion (June 2026).

The report was noted.

5. Finance

5.1 College Policies to recommend for Board Approval

F/344 5.1.1 Tuition Fees Policy 2026/2027

DK presented the updated policy for recommendation for Board approval, noting only minor amends had been made, with the proposed fees remaining as they were.

The Committee **recommended** the Tuition Fees Policy 2026/2027 for Board approval.

Action: NT to progress the Tuition Fees Policy 2026/2027 for Board approval (April 2026).

The policy was recommended.

F/345 5.1.2 Financial Regulations

DK presented the updated College Financial Regulations, noting that changes included the introduction of delegation levels for key post holders and updated procurement thresholds.

The Committee **supported** the addition of delegation, linking with business continuity, and **recommended** the College Financial Regulations for Board approval.

Action: NT to progress the College Financial Regulations for Board approval (April 2026).

The policy was recommended.

F/346 5.2 Finance Report – January Management Accounts

DK presented the report, highlighting the following:

- The actuals and forecast were positive in comparison to budget.
- Adults, apprenticeships and bootcamps were the College's most volatile income streams however these were performing well against budget.
- Cash days were above the 31 days at month end Board agreed level.
- A funding increase of 0.55% had been confirmed for 16-18 learners for 2026/2027. There was no expected increase for free college meals allowances, currently at £2.61, and being topped up to £4 at the cost to the College. The National Insurance and Teachers Pension Grant funding was to continue to March 2027, with allocations to be confirmed.
- Projects were being accelerated to utilise the College's capital grant funding, with a rolling project plan being created by the Estates team.
- There had been no update on the position in relation to in-year growth funding for 16-18 learners. This information was expected in March 2026 however no specific date was set, and it was still awaited. The differing scenarios had been included in the report however the budget was based on no in-year growth funding to be prudent.
- The College was leading a bid for a Digital Technical Excellence Centre and this was a collaborative bid across the North East. There was expected to

be up to £10m in funding, with an outcome expected in April 2026. There was to be 5 bids awarded across England.

The Committee **recognised** the level of uncertainty of funding across the FE landscape over the next couple of years.

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

- Potential risks for 2026/2027 – it was suggested that there were no known risks moving into 2026/2027, in addition to what had already been included on the Strategic Risk Register. The adult funding allocation was expected to be in line with the current levels. There would be no bootcamp funding for the remainder of the 2025/26 financial year with effect from April 2026 and that was assumed in the management accounts. There was an opportunity for the College to bid for project funding as part of the regional Construction Technical Excellence College led by Education Partnership North East.
- The 16-18 lagged funding model, and the expectation to receive additional funding for 2026/2027 in relation to learner number growth in 2025/2026. It was noted that this could lead to an increased expectation around the college's pay award, however the College continued to be in a challenging position, with colleges across the sector being asked to do more with less funds. It was confirmed growth was influenced by demographics and therefore this would change over time. The Committee **recognised** the challenges around this and queried the confidence of the College in being able to continue to deliver curriculum and skills aligned with regional skills priorities. It was confirmed the College was in a strong position in terms of alignment with national and regional skills, as well as ensuring an inclusive curriculum.
- The potential impact of increased energy costs, inflation and general cost of living costs for staff.
- The exploration of AI to better utilise time and capability across the College. It was confirmed that the College continued to explore AI but were curtailed in terms of rules around teaching and delivery.
- The potential lack of demand in Apprenticeships and how this would impact the College over coming years. It was noted that this would be discussed as part of the upcoming Board Strategy Day.
- The impact of the changes to FRS 102 lease accounting rules on the College. It was suggested that this could impact banking covenants. DK confirmed that an initial meeting had taken place with the auditors and this was to be explored further.

Action: DK to provide an update of the impact of changes to FRS 102 lease accounting at the May 2026 meeting (May 2026).

The Committee **approved** the January 2026 management accounts presentation to the Board.

The report was approved.

5.3 Procurement

F/347

5.3.1 Procurement Update

DK presented the report, setting out a mid-year update on procurement activity, supported by presentation of the College's contract register. The report set out

advance notice of some upcoming tenders which could require Finance and General Purposes Committee approval outside of the meeting schedule.

The Committee **sought assurance** that all expected upcoming projects / procurement requests were included as part of the report, and it was confirmed they were.

The Committee **supported** the use of electronic approval for any reported tenders outside of the meeting schedule.

The report was noted.

F/348 5.3.2 Tender Recommendations – IT

Network Switches

DB highlighted a potential conflict, noting that his employer had contracted with the proposed organisation as part of the network switches tender recommendation. The Committee **agreed** for DB to remain as part of the meeting and discussion.

DK presented the report, setting out that a tender exercise had been undertaken in relation to network switches, with project activity to be undertaken during the summer. 61 suppliers were on the framework however only 1 bid was received. Limited feedback had been received relating to capacity issues, lack of competitive pricing and being outside of expertise. The recommendation was within the approval levels of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The Committee **queried** the trend of recent procurement tenders and a lack of bids received. It was suggested that this has been considered operationally, and for this tender, there was the option to re-run using another framework however this was not felt to be of benefit. It was recognised that greater notice of work may be required and this would be factored into future tenders. The Committee **recognised** the need for this work to be undertaken during a short timescale to prevent a negative impact on learner experience and potential disruption to learning.

The Committee **queried** tender proposals outside of framework and it was agreed this could be explored however unlikely to result in a different outcome.

Action: DK to consider procurement process in terms of effectiveness and timing.

The Committee approved the tender as per the recommendation in the report.

IT hardware

DK presented the report, setting out a tender exercise had been undertaken in relation to IT hardware. 18 suppliers were on the framework and 4 bids were received. The recommendation was within the approval levels of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

The Committee **queried** the following:

- Consideration of a contract for a time period rather than volume of devices – it was suggested this could be explored in future.
- Disposal of existing assets with rebate options – it was noted that the proposed contract would offer rebate on disposal of current assets, however the College were also keen to donate IT hardware to support the local community and were considering this further. The Committee **supported** this work.

The Committee **approved** the tender as per the recommendation in the report.
The tenders were approved.

F/349 5.4 Recruitment 2025/2026 and 2026/2027

CT presented the report and highlighted the following:

- The College had grown in terms of 16-18 learners, however this wasn't by as much as estimated as part of business planning. Resource had been managed around this, with the ability to flex.
- Adult numbers were ahead of profile with NECA however this was due to timing and there was no risk expected in relation to this.
- Apprenticeships presented the most significant challenge, with new starts behind plan and reduced progression following improved achievement rates in 2024/25. The budget for apprenticeships had been set prudently, so the shortfall was not creating a financial risk however there was potential future risk due to lessening demand.
- Application data for 16-18 learners was provided for 2026/2027, setting out a forecasted steadying of growth. CT noted the College would not receive in-year growth funding for less than 100 additional learners.

The Committee **noted** the potential volatility of income streams and provision demand.

The Committee **queried** the College's geographical catchment areas, specifically in relation to the campuses at Team Valley. CT noted that there was good access to the Gateshead sites via bus and metro, however the Team Valley sites were more difficult to access. This highlighted the impact of transport on access to campuses, and creating competition with local providers with better transport access.

Item 7 taken at this point.

The report was noted.

6. Sustainability

F/350 6.1 Sustainability KPIs - Verbal Update

Item taken after Item 2.

NH provided a verbal update as follows:

- The Green Steering Group continued to consider measurement of progress towards the Sustainability Strategy. Challenges / factors outside of the College's control had been recognised and discussed.
- The College had a greater confidence in data collection, and the baseline year had agreed to be 2023/2024, working with SmartCarbon.
- Metrics would be suggested at a future Committee meeting focussed on Scope 1 and 2. For Scope 3, continued measurements of initiatives would be suggested, with a more specific KPI suggested in future. The Sustainability Link Governor (DB) reiterated the need to ensure that KPIs were meaningful, using accurate data.

- The College continued to do wider work in the area of sustainability, including obtaining the Investors in the Environment Silver Award, providing assurance of progress.

The Sustainability Link Governor (DB) provided reassurance of the discussions taking place at the Green Steering Group, good debate and discussion. Tangible progress being made.

Green Steering Group members had recently undertaken some CPD, and it was suggested that this should be shared with Board members with an encouragement from the Committee to complete.

Action: NH / NT to circulate sustainability training to Board members. MH to recommend this as part of the Committee Chairs update (April 2026).

The report was noted.

F/351 6.2 Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reporting

NH provided a verbal report, noting the Streamlined Energy and Carbon Report (SECR) was usually published by the College by the end of March however the College were looking to update the data collection methodology and would publish this data as part of an overall Sustainability Report by the end of the academic year, including further narrative of progress and initiatives. Information continued to be reported within the College's annual accounts and published on the College website.

The report was noted.

Item 8 taken at this point.

F/352 7. Estates – Leases and Licences Update

Taken after Item 5.

IJ presented the report, setting out a position statement in relation to the College's leases and licences. IJ confirmed the College were currently exploring the need to extend the lease at Baltimore House for additional office space and if required, this would need Board approval.

Action: IJ to provide updates of the requirements to extend the lease at Baltimore House for Board approval (July 2026).

The College continued to review space utilisation across the four campuses.

The Committee **noted** it was useful to have an overview of this information.

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

- The square footage of the construction academy – it was confirmed this information wasn't to hand but would be confirmed.

Action: IJ to pick up square footage and costs with the Head of Estates (May 2026).

- The future intentions of the organisation renting space in the Construction academy – it was confirmed this information wasn't known at present but would be explored.

Action: IJ to meet with the organisation to explore future intentions (July 2026).

- Update on exploration of the lease of the test track – it was confirmed dilapidations had been included in the financial accounts relating to this however no further progress had been made in relation to any termination or expiry of the lease.

The report was noted.

8. Brand and Marketing

F/353

8.1 Stakeholder Framework

Taken after item 6.2

NH presented the report, noting this set out how the Board obtained views of stakeholders.

The Committee **recognised** the level of opportunities to engage with stakeholders across the organisation and **commended** the open and transparent approach of the annual Community Conversation.

It was suggested that the Executive Team were given delegated authority to update the document to reflect any changes following approval of the revised College Strategic Plan. This would be included as part of the Board approval request.

The Committee recommended the updated Stakeholder Framework for Board approval.

Action: NT to progress Stakeholder Framework for Board approval (April 2026).

The policy was recommended.

NH left the meeting.

Item 3 taken at this point.

F/354

9. Any Other Business

N/A

F/355

10. Date of the next meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Friday 22 May 2026 at 9.00am.