



THE WINDSOR FOREST COLLEGES GROUP

BOARD OF GOVERNORS

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATION

Held on Zoom on Wednesday 9 July 2025 at 4.30pm

PRESENT:

Jo Croft (**Chair**)
Kerry Blandin
Jacob Clay
Tina Coates
Louise Fellows
Nathan Garat
Anthony Haines
Rob Lewis
Sam Marshall-Davies
Gillian May (*Group Principal & CEO*)
Antonia Spinks
Signe Sutherland
Ian Thomson
Sarah Waller
Alison Wheatley

APOLOGIES:

Sam Foley
Paul Britton
Student Governors

IN ATTENDANCE:

Amanda Down	Principal Sixth Form
Anne Entwistle	Principal, FE
Lucy Gill	Group Finance Director
Karen Griffiths	Group Vice Principal
Tracy Reeve	Group Director of Governance

PART I

MINUTE NO.

ACTION

1.

Health & Safety Housekeeping

The Chair (JC) welcomed everyone to the meeting and apologised for the late change to the format of the meeting which had been moved online. JC welcomed newly appointed governors KB and SMD to their first meeting and asked them to introduce themselves. The new governors shared their intention to contribute to the Board. JC also reminded governors of the 1:1 meetings that she would be having with all governors over the summer.

2.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received as detailed above.

3.

AOB (Any Other Business)

The Director of Governance (TR) informed the meeting that a short additional funding and performance summary paper for 2024/25 was being brought as AOB by the CEO. This had been added to the Board Intelligence pack and circulated by email earlier in the day. There would also be a verbal update on the Mirror Board.

There was no other urgent AOB notified.

4.

Declarations of Interest

There were no other declarations of interest.

5. **Minutes of the Previous Meetings held on 13 June 2025**

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 June 2025, having been previously circulated to members, were agreed as a true record and would be taken as signed by the Chair.

All Members were agreed.

6. **Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meetings held on 13 June 2025**

The Director of Governance presented a report which updated the meeting on the current status of 'matters arising'. All matters were included on the agenda.

NOTED

7. **Governor updates**

7.1 **Staff Governors:**

Support Staff Governor: AW provided an update on the successful taster sessions held at Slough & Langley College, particularly for their schools provision. Staff had been working with RBWM, London Borough of Hillingdon and Slough Borough Council to coordinate this schools work. The 14-16 hairdressing group for 2025-26 was now full and had a waiting list and the beauty group and motor vehicles had also received strong application numbers. The meeting was reminded that there was a new Head of Department driving this provision.

Teaching Governor FE: SW reported on various staff and student achievements, including student spotlight awards, staff star awards, and end-of-year student celebration evenings at both FE colleges. There had been a lot of work undertaken on end of year CPD for staff with a number of pedagogical and student behavioural talks on offer for FE staff to attend. SW highlighted the new teaching and learning project across FE which was asking all teaching staff to sign up to a CPD Pledge to undertake some research in 2025-26 which explored pedagogical practices that would improve learner outcomes and experiences. These pledges could address the individual's or departmental development and could be an individual project, group project or whole-team project. Collaboration between different curriculum areas was being encouraged. SW also highlighted the new Employee Assistance Programme provider, Education Support, who would be taking over WFCG's services starting from 1st September. This non-profit charity specialised in promoting mental health and wellbeing in the education sector and their team of counsellors had experience of the unique challenges faced by staff in FE. The meeting noted that term would end on Thursday 10 July with an afternoon of wellbeing and leisure offerings for staff e.g. art classes, archery, zoo visits, carpentry workshops.

Teaching Governor Sixth Form: JC shared an update on all the sixth-form events that had happened during the last month including open evenings and student union activities. The prize giving ceremonies had happened at Windsor and Strode's campuses. There had also been a busy open evening for year 10 learners across the Sixth Form colleges. Welcome Day events for new applicants 2025-26 were also now underway. The Student elections had taken place and the new Sixth Form student president had been announced.

7.2 **External Governors:**

Link governors reported no updates since the last meeting in June.

The Governor updates were NOTED

[Tina Coates joined the meeting at 4.40pm]

8. **Budget 2025/26 and Financial Plan 2026/27**

The Group Finance Director (LG) presented the budget 2025/26 and the revised financial forecast through to 2026/27. LG highlighted that the outturn was based on actuals for the first ten months (to the end of May 2025). Governors were assured that the budgets for FY25 and FY26 had been produced on a prudent basis. LG reminded the meeting that this budget followed on from what had been presented and discussed at the Governors Strategy event on 13 June. The meeting noted and discussed the following Executive Summary:

Income

- o **DfE 16 to 19 income** based on the DfE March 2025 allocation statement with funding rates increased as announced in May 2025. This indicated that income for FY26 was expected to be at £35.112m including the NI grant. A provision for a decrease in T-level student numbers against the allocation had been set at £200,000. Offers accepted for ESFA full term provision were 2% ahead of prior year but there was no assumption of further DfE growth in FY26 (or lagged funding in FY27). The meeting discussed the largely flat student numbers other than at Slough & Langley College which – for budgeting purposes – had been assumed to carry forward into stable enrolment for 2026/27.
- o **Adult Education income** including Greater London Authority (GLA) devolved funding was expected to be £3.365m in FY26, down from £3.494m in FY25. Thereafter the assumption was that FY27 income would remain at the same level reflecting the unlikelihood of any growth in adult funding. LG confirmed that there was nothing included in the budget for the possible additional 10% ASF or 3% extra Greater London Authority (GLA) funding as there was no certainty around the college earning this extra income.
- o **Apprenticeship income** was forecast to grow by 2.5% from 32.7m in FY25 to £2.784m in FY26; an additional 2.5% growth was also included for FY27. This steady growth was based on current pipeline strength and employer demand.
- o **High Needs income** was forecast to continue to grow due to sustained high demand. The group had 503 DfE funded places confirmed for FY26 (up from 480 in FY25) which would generate 'element 2' revenue of £3.018m. The 'element 3' funding from local authorities was projected to remain consistent with FY25 levels at £3.518m with an expected 4.5% increase for FY27. LG reminded the meeting that a two-year funding settlement had been agreed with local authorities so there would be no increase in element 3 funding rates for FY26. Even if there were more high needs students in 2025/26 the mix within funding bands could not be predicted; this made it sensible to maintain income at FY25 levels. LG confirmed that the college would renegotiate a further 2-year deal with local authorities during 2025/26 for FY27 and FY28.
- o **Other income streams** had been increased by 2.5% on all non-DfE income streams. The government grant for the additional Teachers Pension Scheme (TPS) costs would continue but the amount was reduced from the previous year.

Pay Costs

- o Pay costs would continue to put pressure on the financial performance of the College. The budget assumed a total pay cost increase of 4% (£1.438m) for FY26 and 2.8% (£1.039m) for FY27 as discussed at the Board meeting on 13 June 2025. The meeting noted that the AoC had not yet announced their pay recommendation. LG confirmed that as discussed in detail on 13 June the 4% cost of living (COL) increase included all the salary on-costs. It was noted that the 2.8% COL increase for FY27 might not be realistic in terms of pay pressure and inflation but it was a sensible forecast at this stage.
- o Automatic pay progression (606 staff) would result in additional pay costs of £720K for FY26. A further 1.7% consolidated cost of living pay award for all staff would cost £625k. There would also be a non-consolidated payment in December of £250 for staff earning below £30,250 which would cost an additional £93k.
- o With 16-18 student numbers at a static level for FY26 and FY27, pay as a percentage of revenue was forecast to remain above the benchmark of 65%; FY25, 69.66%, FY26 68.28%, FY27 70.59%. The budget was not assuming any increase in headcount for staff as learner numbers were assumed to be static.

Non-pay costs

- o A 2.5% inflationary assumption had been made on all non-pay costs for both years, except for exam fees for FY26 at 3.5% and bus transport costs at 5% for FY26.
- o Forecast operating expenditure was: FY25 £12.664m, FY26 £12.935m, FY27 £13.073m. The meeting agreed that this would help the bottom line but would require a really tight adherence to cost control by all staff. LG highlighted that the marketing budget had been

reinstated to the level that it was at two years ago after having been reduced. This increase would be important to allow the marketing team to deliver targeted marketing and ensure that there was sufficient mitigation against a decline in student numbers due to a static or falling demographic.

- Utility contracts would be renewed in autumn 2025 and forecast savings were £645k per annum. This would partially offset inflationary pressures and allow investment in infrastructure projects to transition HR and accounting data to externally hosted cloud servers for enhanced security.

Capital expenditure

- Capital grant expenditure against allocation for FY26 would be £2.075m for IT infrastructure and estates, and £220k for T level specialist equipment (media and marketing).
- College funded capital expenditure in FY26 would be a total £730k of which £500k would be on leased IT equipment (this would be discussed later in the meeting). College funded capital expenditure FY27 would be £1.150m of which £250k would be on leased IT equipment. LG confirmed that tight control of capital expenditure would help the college rebuild its cash reserves to reach the suggested FEC benchmark of 40 days cash (from January 2026).

Outputs

- EBITDA was forecast to be £2.765m positive in FY25, moving to £4.423m positive in FY26 and £2.927m positive in FY27. LG highlighted that this would be the first time the WFCG had generated cash from operation for many years.
- Year-end cash balances were forecast to be £4.295m in FY25 moving to £8.075m in FY26 and £9.645m in FY27. Cash days would reach and remain above the new FEC benchmark of 40 from January 2026 onwards. LG confirmed that she believed that 40 days was an absolute minimum as it would cover a full month payroll plus a few contingencies.
- Financial health for FY25 was forecast to be 210 points (Good); this was ahead of forecast by 30 points due to improved cash and the return to positive EBITDA. This would move to 270 points (Outstanding) in FY26 and 240 points (Outstanding) for FY27. The 30 point drop year-on-year would take the score to the minimum points level for Outstanding and was due to a 0.39% drop in the EBITDA ratio offset by higher cash. LG confirmed that although a grade of Outstanding in FY27 was achievable it would become harder in light of static student numbers.

LG reminded the meeting that the College was required to submit the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR) to the ESFA by 31 July 2025. LG assured the meeting that the narrative commentary to accompany the CFFR would be more fulsome than in the prior year and would fully meet the requirements of DfE. The CEO (GM) highlighted section 10 of the budget paper which showed the financial recovery and progress against the FE Commissioner financial benchmarks over the budget and plan period. GM asserted that this clearly demonstrated that the forecast three-year post-merger recovery period had proved to be accurate. The meeting commended the strong recovery in-year from a substantial deficit in FY24 to a very small deficit in FY25 and a surplus of circa £0.5m forecast for FY26.

Governors (AH) sought clarity in relation to the increased National Insurance (NI) on payroll and whether the budget included any assumption of further support from DfE for this increase into FY26. LG confirmed that there was no assumption of receiving this funding past April 2026 (payment for the 12 months from April 2025 had already been confirmed). The meeting was reminded that this funding would not be received until September 2025 even though costs were incurred from April 2025; four months money would be accrued for 2024-25.

Governors (IT) sought clarity on why the restricted cash disappeared quickly on the year-end balance sheet. LG informed the meeting that this money was for specific IT infrastructure projects (solar panels etc.) that were due to be completed during Summer 2025 however, if there was any delay these might not happen until summer 2026. The money would remain in restricted cash until the projects were completed.

The meeting thanked the Group Finance Director (LG) for the clear narrative and budget paperwork. LG reaffirmed the cautious approach to the FY27 forecast as there were so many uncertainties. GM commended the improvement in the cash position of the college and the much more positive financial picture than had been the case one year ago. The Group Director of Governance reminded the meeting that the Resources Committee were recommending this budget and financial plan for approval.

The meeting APPROVED the budget 2025/26 and the financial plan 2026/27 as recommended by Resources Committee.

All Members were agreed

ACTION: CFFR to be submitted to the DfE to meet the deadline of 3 July 2025.

LG

9. **Leasing proposal for WFCG digital strategy**

The Group Finance Director presented a paper which proposed the introduction of a leasing facility for key IT equipment. This strategic shift would optimise WFCG's capital expenditure, improve cash flow management, and provide greater flexibility in upgrading technology. The meeting agreed that in the current evolving educational landscape, access to up-to-date technology was paramount for both staff and students. LG highlighted that leasing would provide a proactive solution to the challenge of keeping IT equipment current and would allow the group to replace equipment that had reached the end of its usable life, without significant upfront capital outlay. This would ensure that WFCG's learning and working environments were equipped with the best tools available, compliant with security recommendations, enhancing productivity and the overall educational experience. The meeting also noted that another key driver for exploring a leasing option was to ease the pressure on cash flow related to capital expenditure. Instead of large, infrequent outlays for IT equipment, leasing would allow the cost to be spread over time through predictable monthly or quarterly payments. This would free up capital cashflow that could be used for other strategic initiatives or used to build financial reserves, providing greater financial stability for the WFCG.

Governors noted that the proposal was for a phased approach to implementing this leasing strategy, beginning with staff laptops. This initial phase would allow the group to establish the leasing framework, understand the operational implications, and demonstrate the benefits before expanding. There would then be potential for steady growth as follows:

- ***Student Laptops:*** Current plans were for an investment of £250,000 in leasing student laptops for the 2025-26 academic year. This would begin the process of ensuring students had access to the necessary technology for their studies, supporting our commitment to digital skills.
- ***Teaching Walls:*** There would also be potential to extend the leasing facility to other critical IT infrastructure, such as teaching walls, representing an additional potential investment of £250,000. The meeting noted that there were a significant number of aging interactive whiteboards and projectors predominantly at Strode's College and Slough & Langley which could potentially impact teaching and learning.

The meeting noted that this tender process had been conducted by sector specialists Unilink (identified through the Crescent Purchasing Consortium). A number of suppliers had provided quotes including Lombard, Lenovo Financial services, HP Financial services as well as other CPC approved lease suppliers. The college was looking for the option to purchase or return the equipment at the end of the contract and sought the best compliant value. It was noted that the college IT team would identify the laptops that they wanted and then the lease company would buy them. LG highlighted the preferred option in the paper to go with a lease option with CHG Meridian Operating Lease over three years. For the anticipated staff laptops, the initial quote (yet to be finalised) was £118,400; the costs would be £9,203 per quarter over three years and the residual purchase value at the end of the contract would be £24,864 (21% of the initial costs). LG confirmed that in line with IFRS16 the assets would be on the WFCG's balance sheet. The meeting was also assured that these costs for the staff laptops as well as the first phase of student devices were included in the CFFR 2025/26.

Governors (NG) sought clarity on any operational risks in relation to a possible loss of control of critical processes if the college was dependent on a third-party supplier. LG highlighted

that the phased approach would limit risk and the fact that the college was dictating which laptops to buy would maintain a high degree of autonomy. Risks were also reduced as the tender had gone through the recognised CPC framework. **However, it was agreed that LG would seek clarity on any control risks and possible vulnerabilities from the IT Team.**

Governors (AH) also sought clarity on whether this proposal would save money and whether a baseline for costs had been considered i.e. purchase costs versus lease costs. LG assured the meeting that the tender process had gone through the necessary due diligence to ensure value for money even though interest was chargeable on the lease costs. LG highlighted the major driver for the change being cash management and allowing the college to update its IT equipment more regularly. Leasing would help the college plan its replacement asset cycle more effectively. Also, the use of a lease company would allow the college to manage the on-boarding of new equipment better. LG informed the meeting that within the tender process the team had looked at quarterly payments versus cash outflow. In addition, WFCG was looking to make a bigger order so would benefit from bulk pricing and better planned pricing over a two-year cycle. The CEO (GM) confirmed that although the college was getting a very good deal on pricing the major financial driver was to protect the cash position of WFCG and to break the cycle of all laptops reaching end of life at the same time.

After discussion the meeting agreed that the proposal to move to the leasing scheme should be deferred to a decision outside the meeting (by written resolution) once the additional question in relation to operational risk had been answered. The meeting noted that this matter was being recommended by the Resources Committee who has asked for a review of how well the leasing project was working at the end of the first two years. However, the Chair asked management to take stock of progress with the leasing agreement at the end of Year 2 to ensure that it was still beneficial and the best way to proceed.

The Board AGREED to defer this decision to a written resolution outside of the meeting after the additional information requested above was provided.

ACTION:

- i. Additional clarity to be provided on risks in relation to loss of control of critical process (by email on 10 July 2025)**
- ii. Written resolution to be circulated to WFCG governors.**
- iii. If leasing proposal was approved and adopted then a review of the IT leasing to be undertaken at the end of the first two years (September 2027).**

LG

TR

Exec

All Members were agreed.

10. **Legacy NatWest bank account: East Berkshire College**

The meeting considered a paper which was presented by the Group Finance Director (LG). Governors noted that the AP Student Services Sixth Form had recently discovered a legacy NatWest Current Account in the name of 'East Berkshire College Student Union'. LG confirmed that this Student Union Account was a designated legacy account that had been used for the management of funds raised and spent by the Student Union Executive at East Berkshire College (EBC). This account was now dormant with a balance of approximately £15,000 remaining but it had not been discovered or dealt with during the due diligence for the merger between EBC and Strode's College in May 2017. The meeting noted that the £15,000 balance had come from Strode's College Student Union so would be ring-fenced for their use once reclaimed from the dormant account. Governors noted that the named signatory on the account was no longer an employee of the Windsor Forest Colleges Group (WFCG). If the funds remained unclaimed, they would eventually be redistributed to community and charitable organisations.

LG informed the meeting that in order for WFCG to assert ownership of the account and the £15,000 balance, NatWest were asking for a minuted record of Governors' approval that this account was now owned by WFCG. The meeting noted the request from NatWest for the WFCG Corporation to agree to the recommendations outlined below in relation to the transfer of the dormant NatWest bank account and its associated funds.

The Board was assured that the Resources Committee meeting (26 June 2025) had considered this matter and were recommending that the Board approved all three actions that NatWest were asking WFCG Governors to agree to. LG informed the meeting that

Resources Committee had suggested that it would be prudent to have more than two signatories on the account moving forward for tight control.

The WFCG Corporation AGREED to:

- **Confirm that the legacy account was under the ownership of Windsor Forest Colleges Group (previously known as East Berkshire College).**
- **Endorse the request to reclaim funds from a dormant NatWest Current Account.**
- **Confirm that at least two new signatories would be supplied in relation to the future account management of the bank account (the college would prefer to have more than two signatories).**

All Members were agreed.

11.

Risk Register

The CEO/ Group Principal (GM) presented the Risk Register for 2024/25 which continued to be reviewed and updated by the Senior Leadership Team. GM highlighted that this Risk Register had been considered in detail by each of the sub-committees during June 2025. The meeting noted the highest scoring risks and the updated narrative explaining current risk scores, mitigation and assurance levels.

- **Risk 1 Failure to meet budget forecast (risk score remains at 16 'amber'):** Acute risk linked to financial health; the upwards pressure on pay was still a very real concern. Pay costs as a percentage of income were still above the 68% target at 70% but had shown improvement since the prior year. GM informed the meeting that the Resources Committee (26 June 2025) had considered whether this risk score was still at the correct level or whether it should be reviewed. However, although predictions for the year-end July 2025 were strong it had been agreed that it would be prudent for the year-end accounts July 2025 to be finalised before a review was considered.
- **Risk 2 IT Failure with loss of data for staff or students (risk score remains at 16 'amber'):** This key risk was now classified as number two on the Risk Register and Governors were reminded that capital had been ringfenced during 2024/25 for essential IT improvements. The systems upgrades (in IT, HR and Finance) to increase efficiency and resilience had been discussed at recent committee meetings and the strategy day and were now being actioned as a priority. Governors had received regular assurance that good progress was being made on system upgrades.
- **Risk 3 Uncertainty and risks associated with emerging national curriculum reforms (risk score remains at 12 'amber'):** This key 'acute' risk was being well managed and senior staff continued to be engaged in advisory groups linked to reform. The T Level roll out across WFCG was now confirmed and costed with a clear curriculum plan in place. The meeting was reminded that a revised WFCG Curriculum & Skills Strategy had been approved by the Board in March 2025. GM suggested that this risk score might be reduced in the autumn as the risk of defunding of some of the BTECs had now receded.
- **Risk 4 External Safeguarding Risks (risk score remains at 12 'amber'):** The meeting was assured that the Executive Team continued to work with all relevant agencies in relation to any safeguarding incidents. This had been discussed in detail during the Governors' update safeguarding training at the Strategy Day on 13 June 2025.
- **Risk 5 Poor student outcome data in some curriculum areas results in a challenge to the Good Ofsted rating and the resulting impact on quality and reputation (risk score reduced to 8 'green'):** The CEO confirmed that this continued to be a focus for management to ensure consistency across the four campuses. The CEO reminded the meeting that a more detailed Curriculum Risk Register was a standing report to the Quality & Curriculum Committee (last considered on 12 June 2025).
- **Risk 6 Changes to external funding risk future financial sustainability (risk score reduced to 9 'green'):** The CEO reminded the meeting of the pro-active approach to adult education in Slough which had been driven forward over the last year following the rebranding of Slough and Langley College. Curriculum planning had been adjusted and WFCG had maximised its adult allocation as well as the 10% growth allocation in adult

funding for FY25. The adult funding for 2025/26 would also allow for potential 10% growth.

- *Risk 8 Insufficiently developed succession planning/ staff retention strategies (risk score remains at 9 'green')*: The CEO reminded the meeting of the clear planning now in place to restructure the senior postholder (SPH) team across WFCG to reflect the resignations of the two principals. Work was currently underway to restructure the middle management tier to support this new SPH structure. GM assured the meeting that any risks associated with the loss of AD in August 2025 and AE in December 2025 were being well managed.

The meeting NOTED and APPROVED the updated WFCG Risk Register.

All Members were agreed.

12.

Governance Update

12.1

Board Membership

The Director of Governance (TR) presented a paper which detailed the Members of the Corporation with cessation dates, and sub-committee membership. Governors were reminded that the current Board membership of TWFCG was determined at 19 members and there was no vacancy. However, the Board was still actively seeking a qualified accountant to join the Board and the Audit Committee.

➤ *Vacancy for Vice-Chair of the Corporation*

The Group Director of Governance (TR) informed the meeting that she had not received any nominations for the Vice-Chair role at WFCG; this arose when Rob Lewis took on the role of Senior Independent Governor at the end of May 2025. TR informed the meeting that this matter would be deferred for consideration over the summer.

- *Committee Membership & Link Governor scheme*

TR informed the meeting that committee membership and the link scheme would also be reviewed at the start of 2025/26. The Chair (JC) had suggested routing links more closely to committee membership and taking link governor reports via sub committees. Governors were reminded that JC would be undertaking online 1:1 meetings with all governors over the summer; these were currently being arranged.

12.2

WFCG Corporation and sub-committee meeting timetable 2025/26

The Director of Governance (TR) presented a final schedule of Corporation & Committee meetings for the academic year 2025/26. TR confirmed that this schedule was based on the prior year timetable. TR informed the meeting that these dates had been taken to each of the sub-committee meetings in June to allow Member to advise of any non-availability.

The meeting timetable 2025/26 was APPROVED.

ACTION: Calendar invitations and Zoom links for all committee meetings to be circulated before 31 July 2025.

All Members were agreed.

TR

12.3

Use of the College Seal

The meeting noted that there had been no use of the WFCG seal since the last timetabled Corporation meeting on 13 June 2025.

The Governance update report was NOTED and RECEIVED.

13.

Academic Report

13.1

In-year performance 2024-25

The meeting noted an update report on performance year-to-date against the College KPIs. The report on key performance indicators including attendance and retention was taken as read.

- **Progress against Quality Improvement Plans (QIP) 2024/5**

The meeting noted the detailed updates which tracked progress against the Sixth Form and Further Education (FE) QIPs for 2024-25.

13.2

Apprenticeships

This report was taken as read as Governors had received a detailed update on apprenticeships at the recent Governors Strategy Day (13 June).

13.3

Higher Education (HE) & Access to HE: The meeting noted the update report for HE and Access Courses. The meeting noted that HE student enrolment continued to be positive with growth in enrolment numbers for 2024-25 achieved across the college group. There were now 175 students enrolled on HE courses, including 56 on Level 4 courses in Hair and Beauty, Education and Training, Performance and the Creatives, and 66 enrolled on Access to HE courses. This compared to 167 students on Higher Education courses, and 41 students enrolled on Access to HE in 2023-24. Further plans to grow and develop the provision were in place and include the introduction of a new L5 apprenticeship and an access to HE course in policing. Good progress had also been made towards the consolidation of WFCG's university partners in the delivery of our HE programmes. The detailed offer numbers for 2025 were noted by the meeting and governors were pleased to note the growth.

The academic report was NOTED and RECEIVED

14.

Finance Report

14.1

Management Accounts

Group Finance Director (LG) presented the management accounts for May 2025 which had previously been circulated to all governors by email earlier in June. Governors noted that the accounts continued to be presented on a prudent basis reflecting the performance to date and the on-going cost challenges that the group was facing in the current financial year.

The final key financial indicators for the first ten months of the financial year were noted as follows against the February 2025 reforecast budget:

- **Income:** Total income to the end of May was £43.662m which was £1.999m favourable against the budget.
 - **Adults:** Strong performance in the Adult Education Budget (AEB) including Greater London Authority (GLA) earnings would result in favourable earnings for the full year. Full year income was estimated to be £3.494m against a forecast of £3.252m.
 - **Full cost income:** Strong performance in Skills Bootcamps and Multiply (maths courses) had also improved this income stream and revenue was expected to be £0.293m ahead of the budget/ CFFR.
 - **High Needs income:** The full year forecast for high needs funding was expected to be £0.626m more than budget, now reflected in the full year forecast.
 - **Apprenticeship income** was £0.348m ahead of the budget/ CFFR due to strong continuing enrolments. The meeting was assured that the pipeline remained strong.
- **Payroll** remained high and continued to be the largest risk to the ongoing financial health of the college group. The first ten months payroll was tracking £0.647m above CFFR/ budget; this included the additional NI costs from April 2025 which amounted to £62,000 per month (£248,000 for the four months in 2024/25). It had now been confirmed that the government would fund 80% of this increase for 2024/25 and through to April 2026. Staff costs as a percentage of adjusted income was 68.62% at the end of May and the full year forecast was 69.07% (against the benchmarks of GFE < 65% and SFC < 70%). Governors were assured that the senior team continued to monitor and act where appropriate to reduce the risk associated with this expenditure.
- **Non-pay costs** continued to be well controlled and managed, there were no run rate concerns. It was noted that facilities and exams had done really well to control their costs and curriculum costs were only slightly over budget despite growth in learner numbers. The year end position was forecast to be a positive variance of £0.165m.

- **Year-end forecast:** The updated FY25 forecast was a positive EBITDA of £2.767m (a positive variance of £1.001m) resulting in a DfE financial health grade of Good at 210 points (30 points ahead of the CFFR forecast).
- **Cash balance:** The cash balance on 31 May was £5.227m, which was £1.138m higher than forecast. The cash days on 31 May were 42 days which was confirmed as just above the new FE Commissioner benchmark of 40. However, when the DfE grants balance of £0.980m was excluded this reduced the cash days to 34. The forecast cash balance at year end was £4.295m which was £0.959m ahead of the forecast/ CFFR.

The meeting took the detailed Management Accounts as read; the budget 2024/25 agenda item had discussed much of the detail. The meeting commended the optimistic position against forecast due to the positive learner numbers.

The Management Accounts May 2025 were NOTED and RECEIVED

14.2 **DfE Financial Dashboard**

The CEO presented a paper which presented the latest iteration of the DfE Financial Dashboard for WFCG along with the covering letter received from DfE at the end of April 2025. The paper updated Governors on progress against the financial control issues highlighted during the 2023/24 external audit process, as detailed in the DfE Financial Statements Review letter and supported by internal management updates.

The meeting noted that the dashboard confirmed financial health for 2023/24 was graded as Requires Improvement but the forecast for 2024/25 was Good. Predictions for 2025/26 were for WFCG to be at the top end of Good but it would take until January 2026 for the new FE Commissioner benchmark for 40 cash days to be realised.

NOTED

15. **Estates Update: sale of land off Honey Lane, BCA**

The meeting noted an update report which confirmed that progress on the land sale at Honey Lane (BCA) to Elivia Homes was progressing as planned. Elivia had submitted the full 'reserved matters' package for appearance and landscaping to the planning department at RBWM on 28 March 2025. It was expected that the planners would need a five-month period for review and comment. GM confirmed that this extended timeline between exchange and completion was usual for development sites. It was also noted that the Director of Estates at BCA maintained very close direct contact with the developers and was fully up to date with progress. GM highlighted the reference to the additional 73 flats being converted on the Hurley Road which local residents were concerned about increasing traffic and confirmed that this would not affect the Elivia Honey Lane proposal.

The meeting also noted that the heritage repair and restoration project for Hall Place was now 'on pause' until there was certainty around receipt of funds. This decision had been a recommendation from Capital Development Steering Group (CDSG) in order to mitigate any financial exposure for the college during 2024/25 before receipt of the ring-fenced capital funds. However, there was significant urgency to address the building condition of South Wing and the stable block (Clock Cottage). Priority would be given to these buildings once the heritage project recommenced. A new project timeline would be discussed with project managers – Coreus – in November 2025.

Governors were assured that the external auditors MHA were fully aware that the capital receipt for the sale of Honey Lane might be delayed until after the Financial Statements 2025 were finalised and submitted (deadline 31 December 2025).

The update on the land sale at Honey Lane (BCA) was NOTED

16. **Applications Report**

16.1 **Enrolment 2025/26**

The meeting noted the current applications report for 16-18 programmes at 17/06/25 which showed that the applications for the Group were -3% (-144 learners) behind the same

position in the prior year. The current change in applications by college was BCA -7% (-139), Langley +11% (+134), Strode's -2% (-20) and Windsor -13% (-119). The meeting also noted the offers accepted by college which was running 2% ahead of the prior year; BCA -5% (-74 learners), Langley +22% (133), Strode's +2% (+20), and Windsor -5% (-25). The meeting took the applications report as read, it was circulated to all governors on a weekly basis and had been discussed in detail at the last Board meeting (13 June).

The Applications update was NOTED

16.2 **Direct Entry 14-16 provision**

The Principal FE presented this paper which outlined this new strategic development for WFCG. AE reminded the meeting that WFCG was planning the establishment of a direct entry 14-16 schools provision, complementing the existing part-time provision for this age group. The Direct Entry 14-16 initiative aimed to offer a vocationally focused educational pathway within a college environment for students who were disengaged from, or unable to fully access traditional schooling.

AE informed the meeting that for a September 2026 direct entry start date the Group had been required to apply to the Department for Education by August 2025. WFCG had now completed and submitted the DfE's direct funding application and the Readiness-to-Open Checklist, confirming that the college satisfied all relevant requirements, including those related to safeguarding, curriculum, dedicated leadership and facilities, and policies covering admissions, attendance, exclusions, and careers guidance. The meeting was pleased to note that WFCG had now received the necessary approval from DfE to start this provision from September 2026. Current forecasts were that this would involve 100 full-time direct-entry learners studying Early Years, ESOL or SEND. AE confirmed that there were already 120 applicants for the 14-16 part-time programme at Slough and Langley College from September 2025. AE informed the meeting that she had recently visited Hull College – who were exemplars in this provision – to look at best practice and possible pitfalls. It had become very apparent from anecdotal evidence at Hull that the key factor in quality 14-16 provision was ensuring that the staffing was right; the environment and space allocated was also important. Governors were assured that management would continue to engage with stakeholders to ensure alignment with local priorities and that appropriate protocols were in place to support the successful introduction of this 14-16 provision.

The update on 14-16 direct entry provision was NOTED

17. **Minutes from Strategy Governance & Search Committee – 10 June 2025**

The draft minutes from 10 June 2025 were NOTED and RECEIVED

18. **Minutes from Quality & Curriculum Committee – 12 June 2025**

The draft minutes from 12 June 2025 were NOTED and RECEIVED

19. **Minutes from Audit Committee – 25 June 2025**

The draft minutes from 25 June 2025 were NOTED and RECEIVED

20. **Minutes from Resources Committee – 26 June 2025**

The draft minutes from 26 June were NOTED and RECEIVED

21. **Dates and Times of Future Meetings and Events**

The dates and times of future meetings for 2025/26 had been discussed earlier in the meeting. TR confirmed that the first Corporation meeting of 2025/26 was scheduled on:

- Wednesday, 8 October 2025, 5.00pm at Langley College

NOTED

ACTION: Calendar invites for all sub-committee and Board meetings in 2025/26 to be circulated before 31 July 2025.

TR

22. **Any Urgent Business**22.1 **Funding & Performance**

The CEO introduced a paper which had been circulated earlier in the day as a matter arising. This paper had been written by WFCG Director of MIS and presented a short holistic summary of 2024/25 performance at WFCG across several aspects of funding and performance.

- **16-18 learner number allocation** for 2025-26 had grown by 503 since 2022-2023 (12% increase). During the same period 16-18 income had risen from £29.1m to £40.3m (+ 38%). The meeting commended the growth year on year.
- **16-18 retention** for 2024-25 was 89%, this was an increase of 1% on last year and 4% on 22-23. This level of retention was now into the upper quartile and supported the funding allocation and student outcomes. The individual areas of very high retention – in some cases at 98% - were noted by college.
- **Adult** funding claim had increased year on year since 2022-2023. In 2024-2025 WFCG was showing growth of £245k on 2023-2024. Enrolment numbers had stayed fairly static between 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 but increases to funding rates (more learners doing larger courses) had helped to push the funding up.
- **Apprenticeship** funding had grown by £724,052 or 37% since 2022-2023. Learner numbers had also increased by 189 (from 663 to 852) since 2022-2023. Early projections for 2025-2026 showed that the College was on course to grow funding again in 2025-2026.

The meeting agreed that this paper clearly demonstrated the progress made since merger and confirmed that all colleges had benefitted from the merger. GM confirmed that 2024-25 was the first year that WFCG had met all of its funding targets for 15 years.

NOTED22.2 **Mirror Board update**

The CEO (GM) gave the meeting a verbal update on the recent Mirror Board meeting which had been held on 8 July. Governors noted that the Group Director of Governance (TR) had also attended this meeting to provide a closer loop with governance.

GM informed governors that the Mirror Board had reviewed the new induction process which had been developed for staff after their feedback earlier in the year; this was a clear example of direct Mirror Board impact. The meeting also received a presentation on the budget and financial plan from the Group FD to get their view on the staff understanding of financial levers and the need for future financial viability for WFCG. The meeting had also discussed the possibility of setting up an Employee Representative Board and whether this would be built around the Mirror Board membership; there was a strong preference for this from mirror board members.

TR highlighted the discussion that had taken place at Audit Committee around the importance for policies to be embedded and for an organisation to have the correct culture to ensure people were aware of and adhered to policies. Mirror Board members had discussed this and the HR Team had taken away an action to include annual updates for all staff on key policies not just at induction. TR commended the strong views expressed by the Mirror Board and their appreciation of the culture of transparency and openness from management at WFCG. LG confirmed that she had been impressed with the informed comments and contributions made by Mirror Board members who used their lived experience of the FE sector to inform their view. TR suggested that governors should be able to attend Mirror Board meetings (one or two at a time).

The meeting agreed that it would make sense for the Mirror Board to take on the role of the ERB – with strengthened membership (there were currently 3 or 4 vacancies). It was positive that the Mirror Board wanted to take on this extended remit as it would strengthen the whole process without any overlap of function.

The verbal update was NOTED

ACTION: Invite Governors to future Mirror Board meetings (on a staggered basis).

TR

22.3

Retirement of Governors

The Chair highlighted that there were two governors who would be leaving the Corporation at the end of July 2025 so this was their last meeting.

Tina Coates (TC): TC's current term of office (an exceptional two-year third term) would end on 31 July 2025. TC had been a governor at East Berkshire College and latterly WFCG since October 2015 and was a key member of the Governing Body which had steered the College through two successful mergers. The Corporation minuted thanks to TC for her role as Chair of Quality & Curriculum Committee and Strategy Governance & Search Committee throughout her term. Her support, challenge and rigour would be very missed by WFCG.

Alison Wheatley (AW): Support staff governor AW would also come to the end of her four-year term of office on 31 July 2025. The meeting thanked AW for her input to governance and bringing her HE expertise and her honest input as a member of staff to both the Board and the Quality and Curriculum Committee.

22.4

Principal Sixth Form

The meeting was reminded that this would be Amanda Down's last Corporation meeting as she would be leaving WFCG at the end of August 2025. The CEO gave a summary of AD's career during her 21 year tenure at Strode's College; she had held seven different roles during this time. GM asserted that AD's promotion every 3 years said a great deal about her tenacity and willingness to take on new challenges. Group Vice Principal also spoke as she had worked with AD for many years – when KG started at Strode's as a part-time English teacher AD had been her Head of Department. The meeting wished AD well in her future endeavours which included doing a Masters in English Literature, it was agreed that she would be very missed.

There was no other urgent business.

The Part I meeting ended at 5.55pm

At this stage of the meeting, it was agreed by all members present that matters of a private and confidential nature were to be discussed and had there been any members of the public present they would have been asked to leave the meeting.