Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Corporation held on Tuesday 14 October 2025 at 6:00pm in the City Bistro, City Campus, and via Teams Conferencing

Present:	Louise Bradford, Vice Chair -South Ian Brown Modaser Choudhary Pamela Dawson (via Teams) Louise Doyle (via Teams departing at item 25) Julia Fox Chris Jones (via Teams) Lyndsey O'Leary (via Teams departing at item 28) Ian Ritchey Alison Shaw, Vice Chair –North Darren Sterling (via Teams departing at item 23) James Stuart, Chair Ellen Thinnesen, Chief Executive
In Attendance:	David Howells, Chief Financial Officer Toni Rhodes, Deputy Chief Executive Sonya Anderson, Campus Principal Sunderland College (City and HICSA) Mike Chapman, Campus Principal Sunderland College (Bede) Lee Lister, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Kirkley Hall) Vikkie Morton, Vice Principal Student Life and Stronger Communities Judith Quinn, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Ashington) Naomi Robson, Vice Principal Corporate Services Emma Cottle, Vice Principal Strategy and Engagement Jessany Dumble, Staff Governor Designee (as observer) Christine Stretesky, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting, with special welcome to Jessany Dumble, the newly appointed Staff Governor. He shared words of thanks to outgoing Staff Governor, Susan Pollard and read a statement from Governor Pollard expressing her thanks for the experience of being Staff Governor.

Bd/25-26/14 Apologies and consent for absence, attendance and declarations of interest

Apologies were received from Susan Pollard.

The Chair directed attention to the Attendance Log noting attendance last year was an improvement on the previous year.

There were no declarations of interest made. The Chair noted due to the nature of Item 28, staff will be asked to leave for that item.

Bd/25-26/15 Minutes of previous meeting held on 24 June 2025 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the regular minutes of the meeting held on 24 June 2025.

The Board agreed the confidential minutes presented as an accurate record of the meeting held on 24 June 2025 with these minutes being maintained separately.

The Action Log was reviewed and noted. There were no matters arising.

Bd/25-26/16 Minutes of the special meeting held on 27 August 2025 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the confidential minutes of the Special Meeting held on 27 August 2025 with minor changes. It was noted these minutes will be maintained separately.

There were no matters arising.

Bd/25-26/17 Minutes of the special meeting held on 11 September 2025 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the regular minutes of the Special Meeting held on 11 September 2025.

The Board agreed the confidential minutes presented as an accurate record of the meeting held on 11 September 2025 with these minutes being maintained separately.

There were no matters arising.

Bd/25-26/18 Strategic Goal Plan 3 – Changemaking People

The Chair reminded members that the Strategic Goal Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs) are internal facing performance indicators and the booklets associated with them are confidential.

The Vice Principal Corporate Services (VPCS) presented the SPIs for Goal 3 highlighting:

- Goal 3 aims to transform the student and staff experience through exceptional services, aligning with the Strategic Plan 2025–2030.
- The SPIs are designed to measure progress and impact across six key service areas and will be reviewed annually.
- Six strategic themes underpin the goal:
    - Changemaking skill sets,
    - Empowering Employee Changemakers,
    - Employer Brand and Employee Value Proposition,
    - Succession planning,
    - Learning and Development, and
    - Talent Acquisition
- Each theme includes annual performance indicators from 2025–2030.
- Monitoring and review of SPIs is proposed through the Board of Corporation.

- Impact to students include improved staff skills sets, improved staff retention and candidate attraction.
- The ways in which Goal 3 activity helps contribute to and support the other Strategic Goals – time was spent working on this to ensure there was synergy and to make clear it is not just the People team who would be delivering actions.
- Asked for volunteers to help with certain of the more strategic actions planned for future years.
- Risks were identified as implementation delays, investment and resource constraints and silo working. Mitigation was identified to respond to the risks including phased rollouts, cross-functional collaboration and annual reviews.

The Chair asked whether the discussions held at the Executive Leadership Team meeting led to any changes to the proposed SPIs. The VPCS stated that prior to formal presentation, the SPIs were shaped by directors of corporate services, the CE, DCE and CFO making the creation of them a collaborative effort.

The Board reflected on the sequencing of SPIs questioning in particular the introduction of 360 feedback training and a dedicated coaching model developed three years later. The Board questioned how issues that arise from the 360 Feedback will be actioned and monitored. The VPCS stated that coaching has already begun for senior leadership and will be rolled out sooner than 2028/29 for middle leaders and managers; the SPI in 2028-29 is around having a very strong formal programme in place.

Continuing on the theme of sequencing, the Board queried why the creation of a dashboard was planned for the final year of the strategic cycle as its benefit could be used in each year. The VPCS stated that the actual dashboard is what is planned for delivery but the work being shared through the dashboard is planned to be completed prior to the last year. Governor Fox shared there will be a paper going to the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee next month on the improved reporting of the new people system which may help shed some light on what a dashboard may be able to include.

The Board asked for clarity on the SPI around 25% FE staff engaging in external research and scholarly activity by 2029-2030. The Campus Principal, Ashington shared that the aim was for 100% of those staff teaching on higher education programmes would be engaged in research and scholarly activity with the VPCS sharing the plan for a HE Conference to be held during the January CPD day.

The Board noted the need to work on the current staff base and development, with the CE sharing the culture of continuous improvement at all levels. The Board agreed the language of the SPIs should be reviewed to ensure it matches the language the College will be judged on in the future with an aim for CPD to help drive continuous improvement.

AGREED: to approve subject to clarification on points discussed and language change as discussed

Bd/25-26/19 Strategic Goal Plan 4 – Changemaking Services

The Vice Principal Student Life and Stronger Communities (VPSLSC) and Vice Principal Marketing, Strategy and Communications (VPMSC) presented the SPIs for Goal 4 – Changemaking Services highlighting the following:

- Goal 4 aims to transform the student and staff experience through exceptional services, aligning with the Strategic Plan 2025–2030.
- The SPIs are designed to measure progress and impact across six key service areas including

- Corporate Services,
  - Cyber & Tech,
  - Inclusive Practice,
  - Student Experience,
  - Campus Experience, and
  - Strategic Communications.
- Each theme includes annual performance indicators from 2025–2030.
- Monitoring and review of SPIs is proposed through the Board of Corporation.
- Impact to students include improved services, digital tools and inclusive practice. Students will be directly involved in shaping serval initiatives.
- The ways in which Goal 4 activity helps contribute to and support the other Strategic Goals
- Risks were identified as implementation delays, resource constraints and silo working. Mitigation was identified to respond to the risks including phased rollouts, cross-functional collaboration and annual reviews.
- The SPIs were shaped with corporate services directors to make sure they understand their purpose. Students will create and collaborate with staff as much as possible and are currently doing this with the new College app.

The Board noted the sequencing and timing of SPIs and suggested the benchmark of external perception research can be moved forward so that activity to deliver the Strategic Plan can sharpen the perception.

Focusing on AI, the Board queried the risks around AI and understanding which tools enable our workforce and which tools should be taught to our students. The Board actioned itself to look into the risks posed by AI and its governance. The VPSLSC noted AI activity planned to be delivered in every year of the strategic plan, working within areas such as careers, inclusive practice, student services, and communications. The Deputy Chief Executive noted the need to review the infrastructure around technology. The VPCS shared she recently attended a conference at Northumbria University on the ethical use of AI.

ACTION: VPCS and HCGP to meet to discuss learning from the conference.

The Board asked for clarification on what is meant by an ‘evaluation impact report’ on the Strategic Plan. The VPMSC stated it will be a formal report created in connection with the improved communications plan to provide a report on the progression of the plan and the impact planned activity is having. The Board suggested this type of report should be reviewed by the Board regularly and noted that impact is a hard metric to report against as it can turn into boasting points rather than real impact. The Board noted research and scholarly activity can aid with this measuring impact by the positive change we have achieved.

The HCGP shared a question provided by Governor Pollard noting the mention of teaching staff or corporate services staff within the planned activity but it not being apparent those staff who fall outside of those two categories (for example technicians and business support) will be part of this strategic aim. The VPCS stated that all staff at all levels are included in the planned activity with technicians being part of the ‘teaching staff’ and that those who consider themselves ‘business support’ are included and will benefit in work to progress the approach to reimagine corporate services departments connect and contribute to the College’s purpose.

The Board suggested a review of the language used to describe the SPIs noting a need to be specific and where inclusion is a focus, specify all learners with a physical and cognitive disability not just those with SEND.

AGREED subject to clarity and language changes as discussed

Bd/25-26/20 Washington Campus Update

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/21 Recommendations from Committees

The Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (HCGP) confirmed there were no requests to discuss the one item within the Committee Recommendations. The Board AGREED to the extension of the appointment of Catherine Magog as co-optee to the Audit and Risk Committee for a period of one year.

Bd/25-26/22 Centre of Technical Excellence -Construction

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

AGREED: to note the content of the report

Bd/25-26/23 SEND Reform and Centre of Technical Excellence -SEND

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

AGREED: to note the content of the report.

Bd/25-26/24 Student Achievement 2024/25

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

AGREED: to note the content of the report.

Bd/25-26/25 Management Accounts and Golden Rules

The CFO delivered the Management Accounts for the period ending 31 July 2025 and the Golden Rules. With regard to both he highlighted:

- Educational EBITDA for the twelve months to July 2025 is £6,424k (!0.05%).
- Pay is running at 64.9% of income.
- Adjusted current ratio is 0.97.
- Cash balances are 32 cash days.
- Borrowings are 13.8% of income.
- The College is compliant with its Golden Rules.
- The overall financial health is relatively strong Good at 220 points.

The CFO shared the DfE has provided the College just over £3m of Condition Fund capital grant which is to be spent by March 2028. The funds have been accounted for in the manner required by the DfE (with some as unrestricted cash in the 2024-25 accounts and remaining, non-committed as restricted). This has an effect on how cash looks in the accounts.

Governor Fox suggested as we have another year of unfunded growth, the Finance, Resources and Projects Committee will need to talk about the over recruitment and what the impact is on the College's limited resources.

The Board noted the content of the report and affirmed the Golden Rules presentation to be clear and helpful to their understanding of the financial health of the College.

AGREED: to note the content of the report.

Bd/25-26/26 Safeguarding and Prevent Monitoring Annual Report and Action Plan

The VPSLSC reminded the Board of its statutory responsibilities over safeguarding arrangements and duty to ensure the legislation is complied with including ensuring the policies, procedures and training at the College is effective.

From the report she highlighted:

- Staff compliance with mandatory training was at 98% (Safeguarding) and 97% (PREVENT) at the end of the reporting period but is now at 100%
- There were 6 concerns related to staff with 0 requiring referral to the Designated Officer at the local authority.
- There were a total of 830 student safeguarding concerns across the Group for 2024-25 (a decrease of 11% compared to the previous year)
- There have been 4 concerns related to PREVENT in the last year with none requiring further intervention or referral.
- Bullying cases have increased at Hartlepool Sixth Form, decreased at Sunderland College and remained the same at Northumberland College
- Mental Health concerns have decreased by 2% from the previous year. There is a programme of activity planned for 2025-26 to further enhance the offer from 2024-25.
- Risks identified within local communities we serve are shared through meetings with local neighbourhood police inspector meetings, Hate Crimes and Community Tensions monitoring groups and Local Authority Safeguarding forums and then shared with staff as part of termly safeguarding bulletins.
- The majority of online safety concerns are low-pastoral including inappropriate language and behaviour/communication amongst peers. Regionally, cyber-bullying, harmful content and radicalisation requires enhanced digital literacy.
- The current Threat Assessment for the UK is at 'substantial' defined as an attack is likely. The College's PREVENT Risk Assessment and Action Plan attached to the paper has been reviewed and updated with actions monitored by the Executive Leadership Team.
- No reports of sexual harassment and misconduct were from HE students

The Board noted the thoroughness of the report and thanked the VPSLSC and her team for their hard work. They commented on the reassurance provided in the reporting on mental health issues and the steady enhancement of the services provided for these. They noted no questions acknowledging the low risk reported.

AGREED: to note the content of the report.

Bd/25-26/27 Governance Update

The Chair shared that this item and future items like this were born out of his routine conversations with the HCGP where she provides governance or legislative updates. The HCGP took the paper providing a brief update on the Public Office Transparency Act noting it is in the very early days of the legislative process as read. There were no questions.

AGREED: to note the information.

The following item was taken out of order to accommodate the excusing of staff present for item 28.

Bd/25-26/30 Any Other Business

There were two items of other business:

- The HCGP updated members on the recruitment of student governors. As of the date of the meeting there were 17 FE students who had applied and 3 HE students. She asked for volunteers to interview the candidates.
- The CPA shared former HE Student Governor Katie Carnegie had shared at NC Graduation Ceremony about her very positive experience on this Board.

Staff were asked to leave the meeting.

Bd/25-26/28 Update on Chief Executive Recruitment

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/29 Subcontracting: Clarification on High Value Contract (Zenith Training)

AGREED: to receive the report for information.

Bd/25-26/31 Date, time, and venue of the next meeting

The Board noted the arrangements for the next regularly scheduled meeting as follows:

- Tuesday 16 December 2025 at 6:00pm. Venue to be confirmed.

Bd/25-26/32 Meeting Wrap-up

The Chair asked the governors to reflect on whether they have exhibited the College values during the meeting, asking if they have been courageous, authentic, respectful and pitched for excellence. The Board thanked the Executive Leadership for the way in which the agenda items have been delivered and explained.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:30pm.

These minutes were approved by the Board at its meeting on 16 December 2025 pursuant to minute Bd/25-26/44.