

**Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Corporation held on
Tuesday 12 May 2026 at 5:15pm in the Banqueting Hall at Kirkley Hall
Campus and via Teams Conferencing**

Present: Louise Bradford, Vice Chair
Ian Brown
Nick Collins
Pamela Dawson (via Teams)
Louise Doyle (via Teams)
Jessany Dumble, Staff Governor
Lina Ferreccio, FE Student Governor (via Teams)(joined after item 94)
Julia Fox
Chris Jones
Alexandra Lilley, co-opted Student member
Simon Marshall
Toni Rhodes, Chief Executive
Ian Ritchey (arrived during item 95)
Alison Shaw, Chair
Richard Sterry
Chris Walker

In Attendance: David Howells, Chief Financial Officer
Sonya Anderson, Campus Principal Sunderland College (City and HICSA)
Mike Chapman, Campus Principal Sunderland College (Bede)
Lee Lister, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Kirkley Hall)
Judith Quinn, Campus Principal Northumberland College (Ashington)
Iain Nixon, Group Executive Principal, Regional Skills
Naomi Robson, Vice Principal Corporate Services
Emma Cottle, Vice Principal Marketing Strategy and Communications
Jane Varey, Head of Corporate Governance and Policy
Donna Swan, Governance Officer

Bd/25-26/90 Chair's Welcome

The Chair welcomed new Governors Marshall, Sterry and Walker to their first meeting of the Board and introduced Jane Varey who had recently taken up her post as Head of Corporate Governance and Policy (HCGP) to those members of the Board yet to meet her.

The Chair referred to her conversations with the Board about how we run our meetings and events; feedback to date indicated agreement on the importance of in-person meetings to foster strong relationships and a positive Board culture, whilst recognising the part the virtual environment had to play in modern governance. She asked that Governors continue to provide feedback and comment. She also advised Board members that the annual Chair 1 to 1 meetings will take place in July and August 2026 this year.

The Chair referred to the College Governor On-line Financial Dashboard training from the Department for Education (DfE) and encouraged members of the Board to view the recording of the session.

Bd/25-26/91 Apologies and consent for absence, attendance and declarations of interest

There were apologies for absence from Governors Choudhary, O’Leary, Schneider, Sterling and Stuart.

Apologies were also given for Vikkie Morton, Campus Principal - Hartlepool Sixth Form College, who could not be in attendance.

The Attendance Report was noted.

There were no declarations of interest made.

The following item was taken out of order:

Bd/25-26/89 EPNE Story of Inclusion

The Vice Principal, Marketing Strategy and Communications (VP-MSc) presented a short video made by an Animal Management Student at Kirkley Hall Campus in which they shared their journey and life experience whilst a student at the College. Governors felt that this brief glimpse into the student’s experience was full of the ethos and values that drive the College’s provision and the clarity they had around their career path was impressive.

Bd/25-26/92 Minutes of previous meeting held on 03 March 2026 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the regular minutes of the meeting held on 03 March 2026.

The Board agreed the confidential minutes presented as an accurate record of the meeting held on 03 March 2026 with these minutes being maintained separately.

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

ACTION: The Chair advised that she had requested the HCGP to review the way in which Action Logs were used within the College as a tool to manage the Board’s business and to report back to the Governance Committee at the Autumn meeting.

Bd/25-26/93 Minutes of special meeting held on 24 April 2026 and Matters Arising

The Board agreed the confidential minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2026 with these minutes being maintained separately. There were no matters arising.

Bd/25-26/94 Chief Executive’s Report and Reflections

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

The following item was taken out of order:

Bd/25-26/96 SEND Reform Update

The Campus Principal, Kirkley Hall and Strategic Lead for SEND (CP-KH) delivered a presentation in which he briefed the Board on the following:

- SEND Reform and its implications for the College both strategically and operationally, and
- A brief summary of the SEND Centre for Excellence work that is being undertaken.

Schools White Paper: Every Child Achieving and Thriving (White Paper)

The White Paper describes a ten-year vision for education in England, describing SEND reform, curriculum changes, funding, attendance, behaviour and the structure of the school system itself. Consultation on the White Paper closes on 18 May 2026.

The CP-KH highlighted the key implications of the White Paper on the College's SEND provision as follows:

- For children with the most complex needs, new nationally defined Specialist Provision Packages will be developed by an independent expert panel and will be legally enforced. These will underpin future EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plan) from 2030 and aim to bring greater consistency to what children across the country are entitled to.
- New Individual Support Plans for all young people with SEND identified as needing targeted support. These are a digital record of the learner's needs and day-to-day support.
- The use and quality of Individual Support Plans and SEND provision will be part of Ofsted inspections.

Changes

- The current 3 tier model will be replaced by a 4-tier pyramid model rising in ascending order from: the Universal Offer (all students), Targeted Support (all students with SEND), Targeted Plus (all students with SEND who need expert support) and Specialist "Experts at Hand" (students with complex needs).
- EHCPs will be retained and improved for those with the most complex needs, over and above what can be routinely provided in mainstream education.
- Transition processes from school to college will be improved and will begin 12 months in advance to enable young people to be supported to access further education from Day 1.
- There will be a stronger focus on preparing young people with SEND for adult life, employment, higher education and independent living including the new 16 to 19 "stepping stone" maths and English offer.

Funding

- £1.6bn Inclusive Mainstream Fund from 2026/27,
- £1.8bn to support the Experts at Hand service,
- £200m+ for SEND CPD training for all school staff,
- £3.7bn+ capital investment in new specialist places, inclusion bases and estate adaptations,
- Pupil Premium already over £3bn for 2025/26 with a new disadvantage fund model under development.

It is currently unclear how funding for College settings will change, but funding will be more challenging in the interim period.

The proposed timeline is:

- Phase 1 – 2026-2028 Investment and building a new system (workforce training for all staff; all settings receive inclusive mainstream fund; Experts on Hand resource implemented; publication of Specialist Provision Packages; and National Inclusion standards).
- Phase 2 – 2028-2029 Improved Support (continued investment/building of the new system, new legislation implemented).
- Phase 3 – School year 2029/30 Future System (new assessments commence in schools; legislation enacted; first children using Specialist Support Packages; 60,000 new places for children in special schools and inclusion bases).

Key Implications for the College

Collaboration

- Stronger relationships with Local Authorities are required leading to a review of the commissioning approach once the funding methodology is known,
- Review of funding and income,
- Deeper alignment when working with schools to improve early transition, and
- More effective working with multi agency specialists via the local authority.

Leadership and Governance

- Enhanced strategic leadership and Governance of Inclusion,
- Ensure SEND is explicit within the College Inclusion Strategy, and
- Organisational planning to implement reforms once confirmed.

Operational

- Strengthen earlier transition processes,
- Communicate and deliver expectations around the implementation of Individual Support Plans and Specialist Provision Packages.

In answer to questions raised by Governors, the CP-KH spoke of the need to build confidence in parents that the new system will work better which needs to begin in the primary schools. It will be at least ten years before outcomes can be fully evaluated and there is uncertainty as to where resources to support the reforms will come from. He stressed the need to work closely with Local Authorities as well as his confidence that the internal resource to implement the reforms is in place within the College and that further funding will come in time.

The Board referred to current difficulties with data sharing which the CP-KH acknowledged but stated the College's intent to improve this. He also was clear that the College will work in partnership with Local Authorities and not, as has been seen in other parts of the country, attempt to 'hold them to ransom'. The aim will be to avoid any dip in service provision in the transition to the new system, the challenge being to avoid the situation getting worse before it gets better. The CP-KH briefly described the College's ability to shift resource where necessary to ensure that it will continue to discharge its statutory duty.

Centre for Excellence Project

The CP-KH then provided an update on the College's delivery of this DfE funded programme, where each of four Centres of Excellence were allocated a theme with the intent that SEND experts in post-16 provision would share best practice, support colleges to deliver better SEND and Inclusion practice and raise sector awareness.

The College has ‘over performed’ against its KPIs for the project and has now had the project contract extended by one year. The College has also been recognised in a number of other ways which place it firmly on the national stage. The Chair congratulated the CP-KH and the project team.

AGREED: to note the report.

Bd/25-26/95 Accountability Agreement 2026/27 and the Local Needs Duty

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/97 Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Annual Report 2024/25

The CP-KH presented the DEIB Report on behalf of the Campus Principal, Hartlepool and Strategic Lead for Students (CP-H), highlighting the following:

- The DEIB Report provides assurance to the Board on the College’s compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- The DEIB Report demonstrates how DEIB principles are embedded across strategy, governance, curriculum, student experience, workforce and community engagement.
- The DEIB Report highlights strong outcomes for students with barriers to education; significant progress in community cohesion activity; continued focus on narrowing achievement gaps and on strengthening a culture of belonging across the College.
- Section 4 outlines the priorities for 2025/26, the final year of the DEIB Framework, which include workforce diversification, harassment reporting, inclusion strategy refresh and continued poverty proofing.
- New objectives for 2026-2030 form part of the new Inclusion Framework which will be presented to the Board at the June Board meeting.

The DEIB Report was warmly received by the Board with Governors commenting positively on the examples of good practice included within it.

AGREED: to approve the DEIB Annual Report 2024/25 for publication on the College’s website.

Bd/25-26/98 Committee Recommendation

The Vice Principal, Marketing, Strategy and Communications (VP-MSC) reminded the Board that the HE Admissions Policy had been withdrawn from the agenda of the Board meeting on 3 March 2026 pending receipt of legal advice from the College’s solicitor. The draft policy before the Board for consideration had been subsequently amended (as indicated by the amendments tracked within the document) in line with that legal advice and was recommended for approval following scrutiny by the Curriculum Quality and Student Experience Committee at its meeting on 19 March 2026.

AGREED: the following item was approved on the recommendation of the Curriculum Quality and Student Experience Committee:

- HE Admissions Policy

Bd/25-26/99 Management Accounts and Golden Rules

Governor Fox, Chair of the Finance Resources and Projects Committee introduced the Management Accounts and Golden Rules Report, which had been the subject of scrutiny by the Committee, describing the outcomes as being very impressive. She then handed over to the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) to take Governors through the detail of the Group Operating Position, Balance Sheet and Cash Flow position to 31 March 2026 (FY 2025/26) as follows:

- Appendix 1 shows the Group actual Educational EBITDA for the eight months to March 2026 is £4,664k (10.06%).
- In terms of cash, in June 2025 the College received just over £3m of Condition Fund capital grant from the DfE. This money must be spent by March 2028. The DfE instructed Colleges to show all grant committed to spend in 2025/26 as “unrestricted cash” in the 2024/25 accounts, along with a corresponding amount showing as a creditor due in less than one year. The remaining cash not committed until 2026/27 must be shown as “restricted” with a corresponding amount shown as a creditor due in more than one year.
- For the purposes of transparency, the underlying cash balance (that is, excluding all capital grant) was £6,661k in March 26 which is £1,412k higher than the £5,249k that was forecast. Including the grant the total of all cash at bank was £9,697k of which £8,511k was unrestricted.
- Actual Education Funding Agency (ESFA) 16-18 learners enrolled on the ILR at the time of writing are approximately 5,349, equating to 102% of the original funded learner number (5,229). This figure is also 63 above the Curriculum Planning target of 5,286.

With regards to performance against the Golden Rules, the following results were achieved:

- Gearing : borrowings must be less than 30% Income – 12.2%
- Leverage: borrowings less than 2.75 times Actual EBITDA – 1.19
- Debt servicing cover: cash generated from operations must be more than 1.25 times debt servicing costs – 2.89
- Cash Days: cash balances must be at least 25 cash days – 39 days
- Profitability: EBITDA must exceed 10% in each financial year – 10.06%
- Pay Costs: pay costs must not exceed 65% of income – 64.2%

The CFO advised that the Golden Rule the College is watching most closely is Pay Costs , which are currently within tolerance.

The Board asked whether the Golden Rules were an effective early warning system or is there a risk of being too late to respond to some financial question. The CFO responded that the Golden Rules would not be specifically responsive if they were just set and not carefully monitored. The Finance team carry out regular financial forecast updates which pick up emerging pressures, enabling effective intervention.

The Board asked how secure the underlying liquidity position is long term. The CFO stated that liquidity has been very closely monitored over the last few years. It has been gradually improving but there cannot be any room for complacency. He noted that there may be a need to review the Golden Rules regularly and that they may need to flex over time.

The DfE financial health assessment for 2024/25 financial statements has been confirmed as GOOD and in 2026/26 should achieve OUTSTANDING.

However, the uplift in 16-18 learner funding rates is 0.5% which is not sufficient to keep pace with pre-existing inflationary pressures, and reductions in additional funding demonstrate a tightening of the financial position of the FE sector.

At this point the CFO indicated that he would be updating the Board as to the progress with the Washington disposal. Accordingly, Governor Marshall declared a conflict of interest arising from his employment with Sunderland City Council and withdrew from the meeting.

The remainder of the item was deemed to be confidential with minutes maintained separately. At the conclusion of the CFO's update, Governor Marshall rejoined the meeting.

AGREED: to note the report.

Bd/25-26/100 Stronger Communities Progress Report

The GEP-RS presented the report, on behalf of the CP-H, highlighting the following:

- The College approved the Stronger Communities Framework in the Autumn of 2025. The framework underpins the College's place-based approach to addressing inequality, preventing disengagement and strengthening partnerships across Sunderland, Hartlepool and Northumberland. Initial delivery is underway as follows:
 - Delivery: Targeted programmes are in place, including 14-16 Electively Home Educated provision, NEET (Young people not in Education, Employment or Training) prevention activity through Family Hubs, Bumps to Babies in Sunderland and continued delivery of the Youth Trainee Detective Programme.
 - Partnerships: The framework has been endorsed by Sunderland City Council, Hartlepool Borough Council and Northumbria Police with strengthened data sharing and joint working with Together for Children.
 - Capability: Six staff workshops delivered to build confidence in place-based, participatory and community engaged curriculum design.
 - Momentum: Joint logic-model workshops scheduled with strategic partners, including Northumbria police and the Department for Work and Pensions, to support shared outcomes and system working.
- The next steps will be:
 - Securing remaining strategic partner endorsements,
 - Developing shared logic models with strategic partners,
 - Embedding the framework consistently across all campuses and service areas,
 - Strengthening evaluation and impact reporting, including participatory approaches, and
 - Establishing a Stronger Communities Steering Group to provide oversight and challenge.

The Board commended the CP-H for the impact this work is already having, notwithstanding that it has only been a few months since some of the delivery commenced. There was enthusiastic support for the work being undertaken with regards to maths, the Electively Home Educated provision and the NEET prevention work. The Board also recognised that this work is underpinned by data and relies on getting the curriculum right.

AGREED: to note the progress made against the Stronger Communities Framework.

Bd/25-26/101 OfS Conditions of Registration Compliance Report

The Campus Principal, Ashington (CP-A) presented the OfS Conditions of Registration Compliance Report highlighting that The College is compliant with all conditions and has strong evidence to support conditions including the B conditions (quality of education) and the E conditions (governance). The following four conditions have, however, been identified where there is a medium risk to continued compliance:

- C1 Consumer Protection Law,
- E4 Notification of Changes,
- E6 Harassment and Sexual Misconduct, and
- F2 Student Transfer Arrangements.

The controls and mitigating actions are set out within the report, but the main reason these conditions were judged as being at medium risk was the introduction of new codes of practice that were introduced for 2025/26. It has been agreed that these new conditions will be closely monitored throughout the academic year whilst the new provisions are implemented before being reassessed at the end of the year.

AGREED: to note the report.

Bd/25-26/102 Committee Chair Updates

Curriculum Quality and Student Experience Committee – 19 March 2026

The Chair of the Committee, Governor Jones, highlighted the following significant items which had been the subject of scrutiny and challenge:

- Early indications of the work required around the Government's Reform Agenda were discussed, and
- An exciting report about The Changemaker Exchange, a reverse mentoring programme involving students and Governors, with a pilot being launched June/July was enthusiastically supported.

Finance Resources and Projects Committee – 29 April 2026

The Chair of the Committee, Governor Fox, highlighted the following significant items which had been the subject of scrutiny and challenge:

- The Procurement Waiver Annual Report.

It was noted that the draft minutes of committees and significant reports were available for scrutiny by Governors within the Informational Papers (items 104 and 105).

Bd/25-26/103 Lead Governor Updates

- Lead Governor for Safeguarding – Governor Brown reported that, as he had only recently taken on responsibility for the role, he has been undertaking additional specialised training and receiving a useful induction from the CP-H
- Lead Governor for SEND – Governor Doyle reported that she will be visiting the SEND provision as soon as a suitable date has been found. However, the Board might need to reconfigure or bolster the College's governance arrangements to support the transition to

the new SEND environment. Governor Doyle stressed the amount of work that will be needed to ensure the transition is successful.

ACTION: The Chair of the Governance Committee undertook to review governance arrangements around the implementation of the SEND reforms at a future meeting in 2026/27.

Bd/25-26/104 Draft minutes of the Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/105 Papers from Committees

This item was deemed confidential with minutes maintained separately.

Bd/25-26/106 Any Other Business

Governor Ferreccio raised a question pertaining to the processes in place to support students who are feeling overwhelmed or distressed in the classroom environment. The CP-KH agreed to meet with Governor Ferreccio to explain the processes outside of the meeting. The Chair requested that she be advised if there were any issues that ought to come back to the Board arising from this meeting.

Governor Fox advised Governors that this would be her last in person Board meeting prior to her retirement at the end of this academic year after seven years of service to the College. She spoke of how privileged she felt in working with colleagues, both Board members and officers, in bringing about transformation, improvement and the difference made to the College in that time, alluding to the journey from the merger to being judged outstanding.

The Chair responded that everyone recognised the enormous contribution Governor Fox had brought to the College, particularly through her leadership of the Finance Resources and Projects Committee. The Chair commented that strong financial governance is the foundation of all good governance and that Governor Fox had provided leadership in this area throughout her tenure. She expressed the College's gratitude for Governor Fox's hard work and amazing service.

Governor Doyle and other Board members joined in thanking Governor Fox and wishing her well in her future activities and endeavours.

The Chair advised that:

- Governor Ritchey will pick up the reins as Chair of the Finance Resources and Projects Committee in 2026/27
- There will be a tour for Governors of the new Wansbeck College Campus at Ashington on 25 June 2026 at 3:00pm. Governors wishing to attend were requested to contact the HCGP.

Finally, the Chair mentioned that she had received a letter from a member of the public who, having been involved in a road traffic accident in which their partner had been injured, had received exemplary care and assistance from one of our students. The student's kindness has been recognised by the College but the Chair wanted the Board to be aware of their actions and for the matter to be noted in the minutes of the meeting.

There were no further items of business.

Bd/25-26/107 Date, time, and venue of the next meeting

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

- Tuesday 30 June 2026 at 6:00pm venue to be confirmed.

Bd/25-26/108 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. She thanked the Executive Leadership for the way in which the agenda items had been delivered and explained. She also sought that governors communicate any feedback on the conduct of the meeting or suggestions for improvements.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8:10pm.

These minutes were approved by the Board at its meeting held on 30 June 2026 pursuant to minute Bd/25-26/112.