Finance & Resources Committee

Thursday 12 March 2026, 6:00 – 7:35pm
Block 1 Boardroom (1.204)

Meeting papers link: 12 March 2026 (GovernorHub)

Committee members:
Jo Chilton
Stuart Fisher (Committee Vice Chair)
Andrew Hanson (Committee Chair)

Officers in attendance:
Rich Franks, Assistant Principal (1-3.3)
Steph Morley, Director of Governance
Jon Priest, Chief Information Officer (1-3.1)
Andrew Woodford, Vice Principal & CFO

APPROVED MINUTES

Item	Discussion	Action
1	**Welcome** The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all in attendance.	
2	**Procedural matters**	
2.1	Apologies Apologies were received and accepted from J. Carman.	
2.2	Declarations of interest There were no declarations of interest for this meeting.	
2.3	Confidential item(s) There were no items to be discussed under Confidential session.	
2.4	Minutes of last meeting and actions/matters arising The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2025 as a true record. All actions were reported as completed/closed.	
2.5	Approvals since last meeting There had been no offline approvals since the last meeting.	
3	**Estates, capital and IT**	
3.1	Digital Strategy J. Priest presented the revised Digital Strategy for review and recommendation by the Committee. He explained it had been updated to reflect the current pace of change and recognise both the challenges and opportunities for the college. He informed the Committee the strategy was built around the following five pillars: 1. Empowering people (staff and students) 2. Enriching teaching and learning 3. Modernising infrastructure and systems 4. Inclusive, safe and ethical digital culture 5. Partnership and lifelong learning	

The Committee acknowledged the work undertaken to update the strategy and set out an approach that felt specific to the college. Committee members asked if a delivery plan had also been produced and if third party assurance was required as part of the approval process. J. Priest advised the implementation plan would be developed following approval of the strategy and the appointment of the new Digital Learning Manager (now in post), and that third party advice had been sought via JISC.

The Committee requested the following be reflected within the strategy: **JP**

- Reference to Freedom of Speech within Pillar 4 (Inclusive, safe and ethical digital culture)
- Reference to the college's strategic objective of being an anchor institution

The Committee asked if the link governor for digital/IT would be part of the Digital Strategy Steering Group – J. Priest confirmed they would. S.Morley advised the draft strategy had been reviewed by S. Chagan and G. Johnson given their professional expertise and link governor roles – both governors had supported the recommendation to approve. J. Priest confirmed a paragraph under a new heading of 'Assurance, Governance and Deliverables' had been drafted in response to their welcomed feedback.

The Committee acknowledged the amount of work outlined within the strategy and asked if sufficient capacity was in place to deliver. A. Woodford advised investment had been made to ensure sufficient capacity – three roles including the new post of Digital Learning Manager, the engagement of consultants following the end of the Innovate programme and the introduction of Digital Gurus throughout the college. He confirmed once the funding allocations had been published by the DfE, the budget for delivering the strategy and its implementation plan would be worked on. J. Priest informed the Committee he was confident the capacity in place was sufficient and reported AI was used where appropriate to produce some of the outputs, with staff still involved in a quality assurance role.

The Committee **recommended** the Digital Strategy for approval by the Corporation.

3.2 <u>Estates and capital update</u>

A. Woodford introduced the item and R. Franks, who he explained played a key role in ensuring a joined-up approach to the college's curriculum and resource planning - including the involvement of curriculum teams in the design stage of the capital projects.

R. Franks provided the Committee with the rationale for the required capital works and office relocations, in particular the rise in applications requiring the equivalent of 27 additional classrooms. He explained this was also in the context of the new Construction curriculum and the need for more social/enrichment space for students.

The Committee was supportive of the need to increase estate capacity as a result of growth and the involvement of staff in the design stages. Regarding the changes at the Whittingham Road campus, the Committee asked where the safeguarding team would be located. A. Woodford advised the team would be moving to the refurbished ground floor of Block 1, alongside other student-facing services. It was noted private meeting space was also planned for Block 1, as well as the trial of bookable meeting pods across the campus.

A. Woodford referred the Committee to the paper shared in advance, which had been requested by the Corporation to provide a more detailed picture of the procurement undertaken/planned for the capital programme. The report set out, for each individual project, its capital value, funding method and procurement route. It was noted, across a total programme value of £16m, the procurement for four smaller projects totalling £1.6m had been waivered for reasons of completion for September 2026; savings from the contractor already having plans and surveys from previous work; and direct experience of the contractor's reliability, quality and capacity to deliver.

The Committee acknowledged the report and agreed it addressed issues recently raised by the Corporation. The Committee asked how procurement waivers were logged. A. Woodford advised procurement waivers were not the standard approach and only undertaken where necessary. He confirmed a formal log of waivers was kept and each instance reported to the F&R/Audit Committees, alongside the rationale for the decision.

The Committee **noted** the report provided, in particular the projects where procurement had been waived and the rationale for these decisions.

3.3 Estates Strategy and national policy

A. Woodford informed the Committee the finalisation of an updated Estates Strategy had been postponed to the next round of meetings due to the delay in capital funding announcements and clarification from the DfE. He advised, from what had been published to date, that there would new focus for capital funding, with an emphasis on colleges being safe, suitable, sustainable and sufficiently sized and improving existing estate rather than new builds. He reported a new DfE portal was planned, containing advice and resources, and that an annual buildings return had been proposed.

The Committee **noted** the verbal update provided and welcomed the presentation of the updated Estates Strategy during the Summer term. **AW**

4 2025/26 financial year

4.1 College management accounts – Jan 2026

A. Woodford referred the Committee to the college's management accounts for January 2026 and the following was highlighted/discussed:

- The financial position was broadly in line with budget
- Fee income (from a number of different streams) was adverse to budget
- Apprenticeship income was below budget but was not a concern at this time
- Non-pay savings helped to mitigate the income variations above

The Committee asked if the cost of agency staffing was correct as was low compared to previous reports. A. Woodford advised this was an error and would be corrected. The **AW**
Committee discussed how agency and consultancy costs should be presented within the management accounts and it was agreed these would be separated going forward. **AW**

The Committee asked at what point would the cash flow cause concern if the LUF/LRF monies had still not been received from DMBC. A. Woodford reported the progress that had been made since the Corporation's discussion – fortnightly meetings took place and paperwork had been issued for completion by the college. He informed the Committee he had requested the college be paid upfront for the works, rather than be claimed after payment to the contractor had been made, which would remove concerns about the college's cash flow. He advised works would be prioritised based on immediate accommodation need - Trinity Point works were critical; however, the majority of the LUF funding related to other town centre projects which could be delayed if required. The Committee acknowledged this update, stressed the importance of a letter of comfort being received given the delay to receipt of the funds and suggested the local authority be asked to underwrite the contracts for the approved works.

The Committee **noted** the college's management accounts for January 2026.

4.2 HCE management accounts – Jan 2026

A. Woodford referred the Committee to HCE's management accounts for January 2026 discussed by the HCE Board earlier that day, and the following was highlighted/discussed:

- The company continued to perform well, with some variances to budget but nothing causing concern
- Pay was over budget due to the need to engage agency staff (for the first time) within the retail team
- The college closures due to snow/ice in January 2026 had significantly affected income for that month (equated to a loss of £10k)

The Committee **noted** HCE's management accounts for January 2026.

4.3 Revised budget forecast 2 – College and HCE

A. Woodford presented the revised budget forecast 2 (RBF2) and the following was highlighted/discussed:

- The revision reflected reduced income (across different streams) totalling £738k
- Pay costs were in line with the previous forecast, with in-year savings offset by the recruitment of staff for the new Construction curriculum
- Savings had been seen across non-pay budget lines and the exams budget had been increased to reflect the increase in learner numbers
- Assumptions relating to in-year growth had not changed since RBF1, as information relating to this and 2026/27 funding had not yet been confirmed by the DfE
- Based on the revision, a year-end EBITDA of £2.7m was forecast, which remained above the 6% target
- The budget revision for HCE had been approved by the HCE Board at its meeting earlier that day and was presented for information

The Committee asked, based on the discussion under the previous item, whether the cash flow would lead to a 'Requires improvement' rating for financial health. A. Woodford reported this was would not be the case. The Committee acknowledged the main measure that would be affected would be cash in-hand days and the possibility this could fall below the FEC benchmark of 40 days for a short time while waiting for LUF monies. J. Chilton confirmed this had been discussed with the FEC team by J. Carman, and A. Woodford advised the college was able to submit an explanation within the narrative provided alongside the financial return to the DfE.

The Committee:

- **Endorsed** the college's revised budget forecast (RBF2) for 2025/26; and
- **Noted** HCE's revised budget forecast for 2025/26

4.4 Committee-allocated risks (dashboard)

A. Woodford presented the risk dashboard and highlighted the risks allocated to the F&R Committee.

The Committee referred to the risk relating to the single coach provider for and asked why it remained high-level/red given the mitigating action. A. Woodford explained the reasons why the senior management team had reached this decision and the risks associated with using a smaller, single provider for all the college's student transport needs.

The Committee identified a number of risks where the residual score was high, despite the underlying measures being medium. A. Woodford advised the dashboard and risk register was in the process of being refreshed; therefore, any errors would be addressed.

The Committee noted the main risks highlighted reflected recent agendas for both the Committee and Corporation - meeting financial targets, balancing financial resilience with the need to invest and ensuring proper processes/value for money for capital projects.

The Committee acknowledged the continued impact on SLT capacity due to senior officer vacancies and requested, given the increased workload due to capital projects and national policy change/uncertainty, infrastructure for both Finance and Quality be added to the risk register. J. Chilton informed the Committee that senior management was an ongoing discussion with J. Carman and she had asked for proposals for improving capacity to be presented at the Corporation's strategic review meeting in June 2026. **AW**

The Committee **noted** the updated risk position.

5 Policy and compliance

5.1 Health & Safety Policy
A. Woodford presented the policy, which had been updated to reflect A. Hanson's comments.

The Committee requested the following be reflected in the finalised version: **AW**

- Reference to the lockdown in the list of procedures on Page 12
- Consideration of aspects of safeguarding and HR policies that may be impacted in an emergency/right to life situation

The Committee **recommended** the Health & Safety Policy for approval by the Corporation.

5.2 Marketing Strategy
A. Woodford presented the strategy, which had undergone considerable review and was presented for recommendation to the Corporation.

The Committee asked how student engagement would be linked to this work. A. Woodford explained the detail of linked student engagement activity would be within the more operational document supporting delivery of the strategy. He advised there was an acknowledgement that the college's preferred student social media platforms were not those commonly used by students and involving students in the work of the Marketing team had been discussed as a way of improving young people's engagement with the college's marketing activity.

The Committee welcomed the reviewed strategy and requested the following be reflected in the finalised version: **AW**

- Removal of the reference to the Rotary Club (as winding down)
- Governor recruitment alongside reference to staff recruitment on social media

The Committee **recommended** the Marketing Strategy for approval by the Corporation.

5.3 Procurement Policy
A.Woodford presented the policy, which had been updated to reflect the changes to the designated thresholds in the UK Government's 'Find A Tender service'.

The Committee **approved** the updated Procurement Policy.

5.4 Tuition Fees Policy 2026/27
A.Woodford presented the policy, which had undergone its annual update.

The Committee **recommended** the Tuition Fees Policy 2026/27 for approval by the Corporation.

6 By exception reports

6.1 Fraud, bribery and money laundering
Nothing to report at this time.

6.2 IT and digital
Nothing to report at this time.

6.3 Procurement waivers
Discussed under Item 3.2.

6.4 Regulatory compliance
Nothing to report at this time.

6.5 Sector issues/feedback – SPH remuneration code
S. Morley referred the Committee to the briefing paper produced in response to the AoC's publication of a consultation draft for an update to the Senior Post Holder's Remuneration Code. She advised her request to extend the short deadline had not been granted; however, feedback could be submitted following the Corporation meeting on 17/03/26.

The Committee acknowledged the importance of having such a code in place and that, rather than place any new requirements onto colleges, the update primarily reflected the change in the sector; however, members expressed disappointment in the AoC's refusal to grant an extension to allow considered discussion and feedback from colleges.

The Committee**:**
- **noted** the briefing paper provided; and
- **agreed** to send feedback for inclusion with the Corporation's formal response to the consultation draft

7 Any other business
There was no further business for discussion and the Chair closed the meeting at 7:35pm.

2025/26 meeting dates:
- ~~18 September 2025~~
- ~~27 November 2025~~
- ~~12 March 2026~~
- 25 June 2026

Actions from this meeting:

Finance & Resources Committee – 12 March 2026			
Ref	**Action**	**Owner**	**Timescale**
1	3.1/Digital Strategy: make requested amendments to finalised version	JP	ASAP
2	3.2/Estates Strategy: present updated strategy in Summer 2026	AW	Jun26
3	4.1/Mgt accts: correct agency costs	AW	ASAP
4	4.1/Mgt accts: separate agency and consultancy costs going forward	AW	Apr26
5	4.4/Risk: add finance and quality infrastructure/capacity to risk register	AW	May26
6	5/Policy review: make requested changes and present to Corporation	AW	17/03/26
7	6.5/SPH Remuneration Code: provide feedback to SM	F&R	13/03/26