

The Corporation of New College Durham

**Minutes of the Finance and Resources Committee
meeting held on 26 November 2025**

Present:

Ben Fisher (Chair)
Andy Broadbent
Helen Golightly

Jonathan Hamill
Philip Pollard
Bethany Robson

Apologies:

Nik Whiting

In attendance:

Karl Fairley (Deputy Chief Executive)
Alison Maynard (Deputy Principal)
Paul Bradley (Chief Finance Officer)
Bob Metcalf (Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services)
Elaine Bonham (Executive Director of HR and Corporate Services)
Kimberly Stevenson (Executive Director of Estates, Facilities and Corporate Services)
Caroline Winter (Head of Governance & Corporation Secretary)

Action

25/53 Chair's introduction and starred items

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded members to declare their interests in any item of business to be discussed at the meeting. Bethany Robson sought clarification on whether it was necessary for staff governors to declare an interest in Paper E, which considered the Cost of Living Pay Award. The Head of Governance confirmed that there was no requirement for staff members to declare an interest in this item as it concerned the pay and conditions of all College staff.

Helen Golightly joined the meeting at 4.02pm.

Members **confirmed** they did not require any further discussion about the starred agenda item H.

25/54 Apologies for absence were received from Nik Whiting.

25/55 Minutes of previous meeting (Papers A1 & A2)

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2025 (including confidential minutes) were agreed as an accurate record.

25/56 Matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda

25/51 – it was confirmed that the June meeting of the Committee would be held in person.

CW

Confidential minutes:

25/45a – it was confirmed that Microsoft has implemented a change that included the Read AI at the start of the meeting and

that users could choose to accept or decline based on preference and nature of the content of the meeting.

25/57 Marketing Update (Paper B)

Francesca Smith presented Paper B, the Marketing Update.

Members were briefed on the admissions cycle for 2026/27 including the latest numbers of applications and accepted offers, attendance at IAG events, the core summer campaign to drive 2025/26 enrolments, key initiatives in the current academic year and plans for Spring and Summer 2026.

Members commented on the level of activity and were pleased to note the significant increase in applications and offers compared with the same time last year. Francesca confirmed that HE accepted offers had also seen a significant increase on last year but emphasised it was early days for that cycle.

Members noted the range of channels used for advertising and asked whether this was managed internally or by an agency. Francesca confirmed that the College worked with external agencies to manage out of home advertising and Google and Meta channels as the team did not have the resource or expertise in house. It was noted that the contracts were due to be re-tendered in advance of planning the next summer campaign. In response to a similar question on the website, Francesca explained that this would be redeveloped with the same agency that built the current site. A full tender exercise had been undertaken in 2020 to appoint the current provider, and they were well respected in the sector for site development. It was noted that continuing to work with them would mean a significantly reduced cost for the development due to the existing relationship and the work being on a lesser scale than the original site development.

In response to a member's question about the events plan Francesca confirmed that the approach had been quite reactive at times in the past and so marketing were working with curriculum teams to ensure they were aware of events, as well as monthly attendance at ELT to receive updates on activities on the horizon.

Members asked if the reason for the significant increase in 16-18 numbers was due to expanding breadth and depth of activity or more investment. Francesca explained that the budget was static but being used slightly differently this year and that other factors including demographics and school engagement work had generated a lot of early activity. The College was seeing the benefit of its brand equity after five years of the current branding and it was well recognised locally.

In response to a member's question about the approach to targeting inclusion and harder to reach communities, Francesca explained that this was to ensure activity was covering different

types of topic and content across a range of channels including Facebook, TikTok and LinkedIn. The team were continuously thinking about different audiences and looking at how to make links to work on staff wellbeing and poverty and it was noted that a dedicated open day for support services was scheduled for March. Members asked about links to the Mayor's ambition on tackling child poverty and Francesca advised that the College was looking at its response, including work with Corporate Services to create a blog that would stimulate a conversation around recognising this as a regional issue. A significant proportion of the NCD student base was in poverty compared with most colleges, which put a greater strain on resources. The College responded with a range of support to try and remove barriers for these students by providing financial support for travel and equipment.

Members thanked Francesca for the extremely positive update.

Francesca Smith left the meeting.

25/58 New College Durham Draft Annual Accounts 2024/25 (Paper C1)

Bob Metcalf presented Paper C1, the draft annual accounts of New College Durham for 2024/25.

Bob advised that there had been a significant increase in the surplus position and explained the factors that had impacted the final figures. The key changes resulted from very strong Bootcamp performance due to new and accelerated contracts secured later in the year and an increased contribution from the College's HE partnerships resulting from improved continuation and completion rates, which had boosted the income position towards the year end. Bob advised that mitigation of the financial risk of the Secretary of State's decision to de-designate OBC provision had been successful with the transfer of students to CECOS. In addition the College had received in-year 16-18 growth funding, additional OfS grant and additional post-16 government workforce support grant. Bob advised that in addition to the increased income, the cash position remained very strong and the financial health score would remain outstanding. Members noted the investment in fixed assets including the completion of key capital projects and Bob confirmed it had been a successful year culminating in an overwhelmingly positive set of accounts.

Members agreed to:

- **Note the results as shown by the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2025 (subject to any final disclosure amendments required); and**
- **recommend that Corporation receive and approve the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2025 (subject to any final disclosure amendments)**

The Chair thanked Bob Metcalf and Paul Bradley for their work in preparing the accounts.

25/59 Westfirst Draft Annual Report 2024/25 (Paper C2)

Bob Metcalf presented Paper C2, the draft annual accounts of Westfirst Limited for 2024/25.

Members reviewed the financial statements and noted that Westfirst had reported a small loss. There was no lettings income in the year and no gift aid payment made. Members noted the net liabilities position and that Corporation would be expected to agree to provide a letter of comfort to Westfirst to confirm its continuing support. Bob confirmed that as had been the position in previous years, the amount covered would fall within the permitted limits of the HMT Managing Public Money Framework. Bob advised that the accounts were in the final stages of audit and the corporation tax calculation was still awaited.

Members agreed to note the annual report and financial statements for Westfirst Limited for the financial year 2024/2025 covering the period 01 August 2024 to 31 July 2025.

25/60 Financial Regulations – Use of Single Suppliers 2024/25 (Paper C3)

Paul Bradley presented Paper C3, the annual report on the use of single suppliers of goods and services and the execution of works in 2024/25.

Paul explained that the report was a requirement of the Financial Regulations and detailed the individual instances where the requirement for a minimum number of written tenders had been waived during the year. Members noted that the majority of instances were in the event of only one supplier being available, the need to meet a specific timetable or where specialist equipment was involved.

Members asked how many occasions had been reported in the previous year. Paul confirmed that the report had covered seven instances of a waiver in the previous year and so was at a similar if slightly higher level to previous years. In response to a member's question, Paul confirmed that although the approach would depend on what was being purchased, there was no specific threshold above which the waiver would not be used. The process always involved a level of challenge and a sense check however, as well as a number of approvals being sought before submission to him for consideration as Chief Finance Officer.

Members confirmed they had received adequate assurance that the process for the use of Single Supplier Actions by the Chief Finance Officer is managed and not overly used.

25/61 Financial Monitoring to 31 October 2025 (Paper D1)

Bob Metcalf presented Paper D1, the financial monitoring report to 31 October 2025.

Members reviewed the key financial indicators and Bob explained that the level of the performance ratio was temporarily inflated due to invoices being raised in respect of HE tuition fees. Bob also briefed members on the potential for high growth funding as the DfE was reviewing all colleges' ILR numbers. Apprenticeships were performing well against target and there would be further recruitment during the year. CECOS computing had been successful in recruiting and the approval by Corporation to increase contract numbers was noted. Bob advised that the report referenced the AoC recommendation for a 4% pay award and updated on the increase to the Real Living Wage, both of which would be discussed later on the agenda. Bob confirmed he was working on the Term 1 update which would adjust the budget to account for actual student numbers and highlighted that the significant change to the surplus in the 2024/25 accounts would impact on the Term 1 position.

The Principal updated on future changes to adult funding arrangements as the North East Combined Authority (NECA) moved to operating with a single settlement. The potential for a risk of no funding provided in the period April to July was noted as NECA realigned from a government to an academic financial year. Members acknowledged that it was still early in the year and that whilst Bob was building assumptions into the budget, it was appropriate to consider the worst case scenario.

Members asked if there was an update on the T Level position given the lower numbers and Bob advised that whilst a level of provision had been included in the budget for clawback, there would be a gap and therefore a challenge to achieve a balance.

Members noted the draft financial position to the end of October 2025.

25/62 Westfirst Financial Monitoring to 31 October 2025 (Paper D2)

Paul Bradley presented Paper D2, the Westfirst Limited financial reports to 31 October 2025.

Paul drew members' attention to almost £16,000 income for the period, arising from the operation of the artificial grass pitch for the last two months. Paul explained that the lettings prices were fixed by Durham County Council and the Football Association to ensure community use. Members noted that the current use of the pitch was between 80-85% and that in the context of the business case approved by Corporation in 2023, which detailed the best and worst case scenario, the usage was higher than the expected figures. The College's legal advisers were working through the

costs of activities to agree the level of management fee. Paul proposed that the Committee receive an update on the business plan at a future meeting with a six-month position statement. As this was the first year of trading the College was still learning about how the pitch was operating. The Chair welcomed the proposal and noted this would be considered at the next meeting in February.

PB

Paul drew members' attention to the balance sheet which indicated the debt owed to the College and advised that any surplus generated by lettings should be applied to settle the debt. It would therefore be a year before it was possible to look at any potential profit share.

In response to a member's question about the risk of unauthorised use of the pitch, Paul confirmed that there had already been some incidents which had been dealt with swiftly by the security and sports teams. Paul confirmed the security measures and advised the security team were on site full-time.

Members commented that 85% usage was very positive given the newness of the facility and Paul advised that the majority of users were making block bookings for the next 12 months. In response to a question on whether this was likely to drop off in spring and summer Paul confirmed that users had been advised that any vacant bookings would be offered to others and this was likely to have resulted in users securing their bookings. Members asked if there was a need to update the company's objectives to reflect the lettings activity and Paul confirmed that this had already been done.

Members noted the Westfirst Limited financial reports to 31 October 2025.

25/63 Construction Centre of Excellence - Learning Space 2 Tender Report (Verbal update)

Paul Bradley provided a verbal update on the tender exercise for the Construction Centre of Excellence (CCoE) Learning Space 2.

Paul advised that the tender exercise had completed the day before the meeting following a request by all 3 bidders for a one week extension. Paul confirmed that each bidder's submission was within the budget envelope and that the value of the winning bid would leave an appropriate contingency in place as part of the approved budget. The works were expected to commence in early February and complete mid-August in good time for teaching in September. Paul advised that as it had not been possible to circulate the report to the Committee in time for the meeting this would be shared with committee members in advance of circulation for Corporation.

The Chair thanked Paul for the update and advised members to feed any comments on the report to Paul.

25/64 Capital Developments - Update (Paper D3)

Paul Bradley presented Paper D3, which updated on the College's major capital projects.

Paul advised that the enabling steelworks at the CCoE were due to commence the following week so that the winning contractor could start straight on site in the new year.

In respect of the Sports and Music building, Paul updated that a meeting had been arranged with the contractor later in the week to consider a revised price for the works following the pause on the project agreed earlier in the year. Paul confirmed that the business case for the project was also being reassessed and would be brought back to the Committee in February prior to consideration by Corporation.

Members noted progress on the Construction Centre of Excellence – Learning Space 2 and the update on the current Sports and Music Building Proposed Development.

25/65 Review of cost of living pay award (Paper E)

This item is recorded confidentially under confidential minute 25/65a.

25/66 Employee Satisfaction (staff survey) (Paper F1)

Elaine Bonham presented Paper F1, which summarised the results of the January 2025 staff survey.

Members reviewed the key findings, noting the College's aspiration to be an education employer of choice. Elaine confirmed that the latest survey had received the lowest response rate over the last five years and the report considered the potential reasons for the fall as staff were asked to provide details of their department or school. It was noted that the College had invested in a new survey tool that would be introduced for the next survey, with the hope that this would support an increase in response rate and more comprehensive feedback.

Members reviewed the responses to the core statements used year on year and noted a high level of positive responses. Whilst there had been some decline there were no significant or standout areas of concern and although there had been a fall against the statement 'I am proud to be a member of the college', this was not significant and would be further explored. Elaine highlighted the increase in the positive responses on professional development reflecting the strong offer for staff but noted that responses on safeguarding effectiveness had declined. This was a key issue for

the College and on review of the detailed feedback it was noted that comments included the openness of the College and comments around lanyards which were currently being piloted.

Respondents commented on the positive attitude of leaders and noted that student behaviour was a significant challenge. Elaine emphasised that the College had taken a very robust response on behaviour and were not seeing the same volume of cases this year, so it was hoped that staff would start to recognise this.

Elaine drew members' attention to the areas of strength identified in responses, noting regular themes on a supportive and engaging work environment. The areas for development were recognised and the College would continue to work on these moving forwards. Members reviewed the 'You said, We are doing' document appended to the report which fed back to staff on progress made in response to the survey. Elaine explained that over the last five years the actions in response to feedback had been quite extensive.

Members commented that the report was very comprehensive and it was helpful to see the survey results. A staff governor acknowledged that the additional detail may have had an impact on respondents' concerns around anonymity but from an individual perspective they felt it was helpful to have feedback at department level that could be discussed. Elaine welcomed the feedback and emphasised the importance of achieving the right balance. Members commented that the overall results and headlines seemed very positive and one member updated on the experience at their own place of work where the annual survey was followed up with pulse surveys. These had initially been useful but more recently there were signs of survey fatigue so this was another area requiring the right balance. Elaine advised that the team were conscious of this and would maintain an annual cycle to avoid overburdening staff.

In response to a member's question about the analysis, Elaine explained this was done internally and that every comment was reviewed. It was expected that the new system would bring more streamlined analysis of the data with different techniques, although AI had been used this year to assist the analysis. The new tool was also used by other colleges so may also provide access to benchmarking information. In response to a member's question, Elaine confirmed that the introduction of the new tool and external analysis would be communicated to staff.

Members reflected on a good discussion and noted the report.

25/67 Draft Annual Health and Safety Report 2024/25 (Paper F2)

Elaine Bonham presented Paper F2, the draft Annual Health and Safety (H&S) Report, which provided assurance to members on the implementation of health and safety requirements and provided

an overview of key Health and Safety performance measures and wider business concerns for the year 2024/2025.

Elaine advised that there should be no surprises in the report due to the regular updates and KPI reports received throughout the year. Members noted that the highest number of accidents occurred in practical subject areas and where students were new to college. Three accidents were categorised as management failures and had already been discussed with the committee including an update on actions taken. Members reviewed the position in relation to wider performance measures including contractor management, corrective actions identified through inspections, educational visits and work placements. The H&S Committee continued to meet throughout the year with the trade unions and did not identify any significant concerns. Elaine updated on contact with enforcement agencies throughout the year and advised that following enquiries by the Health and Safety Executive in respect of a whistleblowing complaint, no further action had been taken. The College continued to deliver an extensive H&S training programme and had introduced specific training in relation to educational visits. Members noted further updates in relation to health surveillance, medical management plans and evacuation plans, fire safety, the programme of formal inspections and environmental sampling.

Members confirmed there was nothing in the report that had not been covered in previous updates, and agreed to:

- note the contents of the report and to agree to the consideration of the report by Corporation
- recommend the Health and Safety Statement (Annex A) to the Corporation for consideration and approval

25/68 2024-25 Year End Report on Corporate Services Strategic KPIs - Performance and Impact (Paper G1)

Karl Fairley presented Paper G1, which updated on the year end review of progress against the Corporate Services key performance indicators (KPIs). Karl advised that the previous meeting of the Committee had received the year end position for most of the Corporate Services KPIs however the Finance and Procurement data was subject to external audit. This had now been concluded and the updated position was detailed in the report.

Members reviewed and noted the outcome of the annual Finance and Procurement KPIs for 2024/25.

25/69 Strategic KPIs 2025/26 – Update (Paper G2)

Karl Fairley presented Paper G2, which provided the latest update (to 31 October 2025) on performance against the agreed Corporate Services Strategic KPIs for the current academic year.

Members noted the KPI on vacancies over three months old was currently rated amber and Elaine explained the circumstances in each case and confirmed that she anticipated the KPI moving back to a green rating as the year progressed.

Members noted the progress on the Corporate Services KPIs at this very early stage in 2025/26.

25/70 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement (Paper H)

Members received the amended Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement and agreed to recommend that Corporation:

- approve the minor amendments made to the college's Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement for 2025-26.
- provide approval for the Principal and Chief Executive to formally sign the updated statement on behalf of the Board of Governors ready for publication on the college website.

25/71 Any other business – none.

25/72 Date of next meeting: 11 February 2026