Waltham Forest College

THE CORPORATION OF WALTHAM FOREST COLLEGE

FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 MARCH 2026

MEMBERSHIP

Amir Seyyad (Chair), Remi Iyun (Vice Chair), Paul Butler, John Bell, Leon Smith, Janet Gardner (Principal), Darren Talbot (co-opted member)

IN ATTENDANCE

Richard Harris	**Governor- observing**
Abena Rodman-Tay	**Deputy CEO (DCEO)**
Melanie Price	**Director of HR (DoHR) (Items 226 – 230ii only)**
Rajnesh Malhans	**Head of Finance- observing**

CLERK TO THE CORPORATION:

Naomi Shoffman	**Director of Governance (DoGov)**

226. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies. The Chair advised that due to scheduling conflict he would be required to leave the meeting by 6.45 pm and that the Vice Chair would cover any remaining items if the agenda was not completed by then.

227. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no issues included on the agenda for the meeting in which they had a personal interest relative to the College.

228. FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 DECEMBER 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2025 were agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

229. HR REPORT

The DoHR presented the Human Resources report, outlining key workforce metrics, recruitment activity, and employee relations updates.

Workforce Metrics

- The workforce remains stable at 416 staff, slightly below the previous year due to current vacancies. Numbers are expected to increase as recruitment progresses.
- Turnover remains low, attributed to effective onboarding, retention strategies, and continued investment in staff culture and wellbeing.
- Absence levels are low, with long-term absence recorded at 3.4%.

Recruitment

- Recruitment activity is ongoing, particularly in hard-to-fill specialist areas such as electrical, automotive, and ALS roles.
- The use of a managed service provider has improved recruitment outcomes in difficult areas and delivered cost efficiencies in temporary staffing (£1m year-to-date compared to £1.6m in the previous year)

Employee Relations and Union Activity

- An increase in UCU activity across London and within the College was reported.
- Although the College was not part of the most recent ballot, there has been a rise in union engagement and multiple formal requests, including Section 181 information requests
- The College is maintaining a constructive approach to union engagement while remaining alert to the risk of potential industrial action.

Discussion

A member queried the drivers behind increased UCU activity. The Principal and DoHR explained this is linked to National campaigns on pay and conditions, Local pay dynamics and Influence of more militant elements within union membership

A Governor raised concerns regarding:

- The potential impact of the Employment Rights Act
- Increased risks of industrial action
- The need for robust contingency planning

The DoHR confirmed that the College is well-prepared, with updated policies and procedures in place Preparations include managing risks such as extended tribunal claim timelines and changes to unfair dismissal protections (e.g. after six months' service)

The Committee noted that union membership within the College remains comparatively low relative to other London Colleges. This was recognised as both a positive indicator of internal engagement and a factor requiring continued monitoring given wider sector trends.

The Committee acknowledged the overall stability of the workforce, alongside effective recruitment strategies and strong HR performance. It was agreed that Union activity and employment law changes remain key risks and these should continue to be closely monitored

The Committee Noted the report.

230. <u>REVIEW OF POLICIES</u>

The Committee reviewed the following policies:

i. Grievance Policy
ii. Disciplinary Policy
iii. Investment Policy
iv. Financial Regulations (including procurement updates)

The DoHR presented the **Grievance and Disciplinary Policies** for review.

Grievance Policy - The policy has been updated to incorporate senior postholder processes, which were previously contained in a separate document, improving accessibility and consistency.

Disciplinary Policy - Several enhancements were introduced, including:

- Expanded informal process to encourage early resolution and reduce escalation to formal procedures
- Updates to job titles
- Inclusion of an additional authorised role for suspension decisions

The updates aim to strengthen clarity, consistency, and early intervention in employee relations matters.

A member sought assurance on mediation progress, which was confirmed as well advanced. The HR team now includes qualified mediators, with additional staff undergoing training. Mediation is intended to support the informal resolution process and reduce reliance on formal procedures.

The Vice Chair queried how policy updates would be communicated. The DoHR confirmed that rollout will include the use of the new Learning Management System (LMS) and Manager training clinics to ensure understanding and consistent application. Policies will also be communicated to staff and unions following final approval. The Committee noted that both policies had been reviewed with unions, supporting transparency and engagement.

The DoHR withdrew from the meeting

The DCEO presented the **Investment Policy** and **Financial Regulations** for review.

Investment Policy
The new Investment Policy which was introduced following auditor recommendations. The policy establishes a framework for future investment activity, including ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) expectations, Long-term return benchmarks (e.g. CPI +2%)and Governance arrangements, including quarterly reporting from fund managers. The DCEO advised that although the College does not currently hold long-term investments, the policy ensures readiness for future investment opportunities and strengthens governance. The Committee agreed the introduction of the Investment Policy is a positive governance development

Financial Regulations
The Financial Regulations were updated to reflect legislative and operational changes, particularly in procurement. Key Updates include

- Adjustments to procurement thresholds in line with statutory changes
- Minor revisions to ensure continued compliance and operational relevance

The DCEO advised that a more comprehensive review of the regulations is planned for June

The Committee discussed the impact of reduced procurement thresholds, particularly in an inflationary environment. The Vice Chair raised concerns regarding potential operational pressures. The DCEO confirmed that the impact is expected to be limited and would mainly apply to specific areas for example security and catering.

All policies reviewed were considered fit for purpose and aligned with current operational and regulatory requirements.

The Committee Recommended approval of all four policies presented.

231. <u>THE 31 JANUARY 2026 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS AND UPDATE FOR POSITION THIS YEAR</u>

The DCEO presented the January 2026 Management Accounts, providing an overview of the College's actual income and expenditure, balance sheet position, and cash flow forecast, with performance assessed against budget. She highlighted the following:

- The College is reporting a strong financial performance, with a projected year-end surplus for 2025–26.
- Key performance indicators, including EBITDA, are on an upward trajectory, with confidence that financial targets will be achieved by year-end.
- Improved pension fund valuations are expected to reduce annual deficit contributions and pay on cost , reflecting stronger fund performance.
- The reclassification of investments as fixed assets was noted; however, recent investment sales mean this is no longer materially relevant.

Discussion

At the Vice Chair's request the DCEO provided a detailed explanation of the T-level funding model. She emphasised that Clawback funding should be retained until final reconciliation at year-end, this mitigates the risk of financial shortfall if learners withdraw.

In response to another query the DCEO advised that In-year growth funding remains uncertain due to delays in government confirmation. Despite this, the College's prudent budgeting approach ensures resilience under different funding scenarios.

The Chair raised concerns regarding the EBITDA target of >6%, questioning its achievability. The DCEO confirmed that while challenging, the target is typically achieved by year-end and this is supported by conservative financial planning and forecasting.

The Chair asked how the College's performance compares with other Colleges the DCEO advised that the Department for Education (DfE) produces a dashboard that provides comparative data on College financial performance and is intended to support benchmarking and transparency. At the Chair`s request it was agreed that the DCEO would obtain and share the latest DfE dashboard data with the Corporation at its meeting the following week..

The Committee noted the positive financial position and strong performance against budget. It was agreed that Financial planning remains robust and prudent and continued monitoring is required in relation to Funding uncertainty and Year-end reconciliation adjustments

The Committee Noted:

- **The Management Accounts to 31 January 2026.**
- **The key financial risks being managed, and the mitigating actions being taken by the College.**

232. <u>SUB-CONTRACTING & STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS</u>

The DCEO provided an update on the performance and oversight of subcontracted provision.

Overall, most subcontractors are performing in line with expectations and are on track to meet their contractual targets. However, one subcontractor, was identified as a significant concern. They have failed to deliver as per the contract terms including the KPIs. They have also been unsuccessful in recruiting the next cohort of learners. A formal notice to improve letter has been issued to them outlining contractual obligations and concerns. Accordingly the contract with them is likely to be terminated and no further contracts will be awarded due to non-compliance

The DCEO further advised that approval has been obtained from the Department for Education (DfE) for an exemption to exceed the 25% subcontracting threshold for out of area adult funding . This exemption was required due to the restrictive nature of out-of-area funding rules, which are based on learner headcount rather than funding value. The exemption enables the College to maintain funding needs for learners outside London and mitigate compliance risk associated with subcontracting limits.

Discussion

The Chair questioned whether the issues with the sub contractor indicated potential weaknesses in the selection and assessment process for subcontractors. The DCEO explained that the procurement framework is robust and compliant but can sometimes favour organisations with strong bid-writing capabilities rather than delivery performance. To mitigate this risk, new subcontractors are initially awarded smaller contracts and are closely monitored. A member suggested introducing social value scoring as part of the procurement and evaluation process to better assess delivery capability. This was welcomed, and further discussion will take place outside the meeting.

Committee members raised questions regarding the impact on learners. The Principal and DCEO clarified that previous cohorts delivered by this subcontractor were successful. The issues relate specifically to future delivery and recruitment and appropriate steps will be taken to ensure no adverse impact on current learners. The Committee supported the decision to terminate the contract in due course if contractual obligations are not met.

The Committee agreed to:

- **Note current subcontracted activity for the year 2025/2026 as at R06.**
- **Note the mechanisms used by the College to monitor and support the quality and compliance of all subcontracted** activities.

The update on progress with the capital projects was presented and discussed at this point in the meeting but has been recorded under Part 2. Following this item, the Chair left the meeting, and the Vice Chair assumed the chair.

233. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY UPDATE

The DCEO presented the Environmental and Sustainability Report, outlining progress to date, current priorities, and future targets.

The College has made good progress on sustainability initiatives, including:

- Building fabric improvements
- Insulation upgrades
- Lighting enhancements
- Window replacements
- Solar panel installations
- Water conservation measures

The College has been proactive in securing external funding to support sustainability projects.

A condition survey has been undertaken to identify further opportunities for improvement across the estate.

The DCEO advised the Committee of the government's shift in the net zero target from 2030 to 2050, primarily due to funding constraints. Despite this, the College remains committed to Its internal sustainability targets for 2025–26 and continuing progress towards long-term environmental goals

The DCEO reviewed KPIs for 2024–25, noting that some targets were not fully achieved, largely due to disruption from extensive building works. New targets for 2025–26 were agreed, with a focus on delivering measurable improvements.

Discussion and Priorities

- The Committee discussed how best to prioritise sustainability investment to meet upcoming targets. The DCEO advised of the Key priority areas identified which will be aligned to the building condition surveys

The Committee recognised that progress must be balanced with operational demands and capital constraints and that a phased and prioritised approach is required to achieve targets effectively

The Committee Noted the report.

234. HEALTH & SAFETY UPDATE

The DCEO presented the Health and Safety Update for Term 2 (Spring Term 2025/26).

- The College continues to maintain a positive health and safety record.
- A reportable slip-and-fall incident occurred in the car park. The incident was attributed to inadequate gritting by a contracted company.
- The report confirmed ongoing compliance with health and safety regulations, including:
  - First aid training
  - Fire safety and evacuation procedures
  - Emergency evacuation processes

Health & Safety / Operational Compliance - The Committee noted continued progress in operational risk management, including:

- Updated risk assessments
- Ongoing first aid and fire safety training
- Preparations for compliance with Martyn's Law

Discussion

The Committee discussed the incident and emphasised The importance of contractor accountability ensuring preventative measures are consistently implemented. It was noted that the issue was isolated and appropriate corrective actions and learning had been identified

The Committee noted the report.

235. REVIEW OF RISK REGISTER – FINANCE RISKS

The DCEO presented the updated College Risk Register, outlining changes since the previous meeting and addressing prior actions, including the incorporation of estimated financial impacts where appropriate. The principal risks identified were:

Cyber Security Risk – This risk remains significant and inherent, despite mitigation measures including:

- Investment in systems and infrastructure
- Staff training
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The Committee acknowledged:

- The high potential impact of a cyber incident
- The need for ongoing vigilance and continuous mitigation

Estates and Capacity Risk - Estates-related risks were discussed in the context of:

- Capacity constraints
- Environmental considerations

It was noted that:

- Capacity risk is being actively addressed through the proposed additional site
- Environmental risks linked to the government's 2050 net zero target are currently less immediate, due to limited investment and longer timelines

People Risk (Leadership Transition) - A key risk identified relates to the transition of the current Principal and CEO. The Committee agreed that the leadership transition must be carefully managed to mitigate organisational risk.

Apprenticeship Achievement Risk - A new risk was introduced relating to apprenticeship achievement rates. The risk has been formally added to the risk register for monitoring and mitigation.

Discussion

The Committee reviewed the Risk Register and emphasised the importance of maintaining a robust, dynamic and proactive approach to risk management.

The Committee highlighted:

- The importance of continuous monitoring and regular reassessment of risks
- Ensuring that mitigation strategies remain proportionate, effective, and responsive
- The need to adopt a forward-looking approach, particularly in identifying and managing emerging risks

The Committee acknowledged positive progress since the previous meeting, specifically:

- Improved visibility and transparency of risks
- Enhanced reporting of financial impacts associated with key risks

The Committee received and noted the updated College Risk Register.

236. ANY OTHER ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

NONE

237. DATE OF FUTURE MEETING

Tuesday 30 June 2026

238. **ITEMS TO BE ADDRESSED AT FUTURE MEETINGS OF THE FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

The Committee is asked to note that the agendas for future meetings will include the items as per agreed business cycle for 2025/26.

19.15 finish

These minutes have been approved by the Finance and Resources Committee and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

…………………Amir Seyyad …………………………….   …………30 June 2026……………………..

Signed   **Date**