CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Governors held on Thursday 14 May 2026 at 5pm at Wellington Road

PRESENT

Mr Mike Hastings - Chair	Ms Louise Fall – Principal and Chief Executive
Ms Dionne Barrett – from 5.25pm	Mr Phil Loach
Ms Abigail Chesterton	Ms Sonia Sahnan
Mr Simon Evans	Mr Darren Shaw – from 5.10pm
Ms Wendy Harris	Ms Doina Surchicin
Ms Jemma Hodgson	

IN ATTENDANCE

Ms Rachael Aston	Assistant Principal Quality and Engagement
Mrs Alison Buick	Head of Governance
Mr Paul Davies	Assistant Principal Finance IT and Commercial
Mr Mike Dixon	Assistant Principal Curriculum and Innovation
Mr Richard Hewitt	Assistant Principal Business and Growth
Mr Peter Merry	Deputy Principal and Chief Executive
Mr Anil Sharma - part	Head of Safeguarding, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting and thanked Governors for attending

Governors were thanked for attending a range of recent link visits and the Strategy Day on 7 May 2026.

Wendy Harris was congratulated on her recent appointment as Head of Participation, which unfortunately did mean that she would be stepping down as Staff Governor at the end of this academic year.

The recent resignation of Susan Lawrence was also noted.

Governors were reminded to continue to submit link reports following visits to college, to check their college email addresses at least weekly and to note the Prevent training that had been arranged for 18 May 2026 at 5pm. This would be led by the local Prevent Coordinator.

<u>EDI Training</u>

The Chair welcomed Anil Sharma, Head of Safeguarding, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, to the meeting.

A presentation, including a short video, was shared on screen for Governors to view. It was a condensed version of what was used with staff and covered the following areas:

- Why EDI matters in FE
- Legal framework
- Understanding the learner population
- EDI Charter

The presentation slides would be circulated after the meeting and added to the Board portal.
<u>Action</u>: Head of Governance.

It was agreed to take the Safeguarding report as the next agenda item

52/26 SAFEGUARDING REPORT - IN YEAR (ITEM 7E)

The report had been provided with the meeting papers. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive is the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) but the day-to-day activities are overseen by the Head of Safeguarding, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Safeguarding practice at the college was effective.

A table showing summarised safeguarding data for the year to 20 April was included in the report. This showed a reduction to 349 cases compared to 411 in the same time period last year and was against an increase in learner numbers of around 7%. Significant areas of reduction were IT security breaches and offender assessments. None of the breaches had been linked to radicalisation or extremism. The majority of the offender assessments related to partner activity, predominantly with NIS. This type of activity was reducing overall. An increase in cases related to mental health had been seen. A high number of cases had been effectively closed down.

There were regular reminders that safeguarding was everyone's responsibility. All new staff had a mandatory half day training session as part of their induction.

Provision of mental health first aiders was being reviewed. There was a long waiting time for access to CAMHS services. However, staff from the Reflexions service did visit college to meet students.

The Safeguarding Policy was reviewed annually and reflected changes to statutory guidance in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE). A revised version of KCSIE had been issued for consultation but was not yet finalised. It would be in place for September 2026.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor noted lower referral rates for partners and apprentices and asked if management were confident that this was a true reflection of these areas being lower risk, or whether there was potential under reporting. The Head of Safeguarding and the Assistant Principal Business and Growth both commented that the age profile of students was different and that there was confidence in the staff ability to spot concerns. Staff worked closely with the safeguarding team and were highly experienced. Progress reviews with partners and apprentices were held regularly and included discussions on safeguarding.

The Student Governor confirmed that the Student Union had met with the Reflexions service to discuss becoming ambassadors.

The Head of Safeguarding, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was thanked for his presentation and report and left at 5.45pm

53/26 <u>APOLOGIES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (ITEM 1)</u>

Apologies were received and accepted from John Bradford, Jane Carter, Ronnie Robinson and Mark Taylor.

54/26 <u>MINUTES (ITEM 2)</u>

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2026 were **approved.**

55/26 MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS (ITEM 3)

Governors reviewed the actions from the previous meeting and noted that both would be covered in agenda items for this meeting.

56/26 CHAIR'S ACTIONS (ITEM 4)

Since the last meeting of the Board, one decision had been taken under Chair's Action. This related to approval to execute an updated amendment letter to the College's Department for Education (DfE) loan facility, enabling retained proceeds from the future disposal of the Paget Road campus to be applied to the City Learning Quarter (CLQ) project.

The need for Chair's Action arose following receipt of a revised engrossment version of the amendment letter from the DfE's legal advisers in April. Independent legal advice confirmed that these changes were not material or controversial and did not alter the underlying commercial or risk position previously approved by the Board.

Resolved – that the Chair's Actions were approved.

57/26 CORRESPONDENCE (ITEM 5)

Two recent items of correspondence had been provided for information. One related to the Advanced Manufacturing Technical Excellence College and the other to DfE's review of the 2024/25 financial statements.

58/26 PROPERTY UPDATE (ITEM 6)

The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive summarised the areas set out in his written report:

Paget Road Disposal
There remained some challenges with the disposal process and the preferred developer had now withdrawn from the process. The site was not currently being marketed.

Site security was a concern as there had been recent break ins and theft of power cables. Security measures had been increased but at a cost of around £4k per week currently.

Ways to expedite the sale were being considered so that the proceeds could be realised and the amount of interest paid on college debt could be reduced.

The emergency services telecoms equipment was still on the roof. Notice had been given to vacate this week, but there were a number of legal considerations.

It was intended to submit a planning application to demolish the buildings and it was hoped that the site would be ready for re-marketing in the early autumn. Governors would be kept informed of progress.

Telford
Remedial works in unit B3 were being completed.

Bentley Bridge
Electric vehicle provision via DBS had moved to ATAC. There had been agreement with the landlord to surrender the property early, on 22 May 2026. This generated a saving of around £11k per month.

Further Education College Condition Allocation (FECCA)
The college had received £1.88m in 2025 and had recently been allocated a further £1.92m in April 2026. A grant expenditure plan was being developed to propose how the money would be spent across the coming financial years. £174.4k of the first round of funding had already been spent on known critical condition issues. The funding would be used to address the most urgent issues identified in a recently commissioned condition survey, focusing on the Wellington Road campus. It was important to ensure equity of facilities between the campuses.

A Governor asked if the Paget Road disposal was likely to realise lower than originally anticipated funds. Management felt that it was difficult to determine this at this time. The college aimed to de-risk the position as far as possible but planning laws and other assumptions by potential developers would affect the outcome.

The Chair asked if there were any plans to upgrade the sports pitches at Wellington Road. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive confirmed not before summer 2027 at the earliest.

The Chair asked whether the football club were still interested in part of the Paget Road site. It was confirmed that dialogue with the football club was continuing.

59/26 COLLEGE REPORTS (ITEM 7)

College Overview
The Principal and Chief Executive had provided brief updates in a number of areas for information:

- Invitation from the Further Education Commissioner to contribute to national work on quality improvement. The Assistant Principal Quality and Engagement would represent the college in this.
- Positive working relationships with unions. Previously announced strike action earlier in the year had been called off.
- Planning for qualification reform, including changes to T Levels and introduction of V Levels.
- The Advanced Manufacturing TEC, the first DfE meeting for which was scheduled in the following week.
- Support for national policy issues and AOC campaigns including pay and hybrid working.

A Governor asked about plans for hybrid working. It was confirmed that a college policy was being developed.

A Governor noted difficulties in recruiting college sector staff compared to schools due to pay disparity. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that this continued to be an issue in some curriculum and support areas. Some recently advertised posts had received queries about the salary offered. There was a degree of competition for staff with other local colleges as well as schools for some posts.

Qualification Achievement Rates
The Assistant Principal Curriculum and Innovation explained that the 2024/25 Qualification Achievement Rates had been published by DfE. These showed a strong performance by the college, which ranked 18th out of 156 General Further Education colleges nationally, placing it in the top 12% in England, and showing consistently high achievement, retention and pass rates across youth and adult provision. Regionally, the college had outperformed all Black Country and West Midlands providers.

Further details were provided in the written report.

The Assistant Principal Business and Growth added further details in respect of apprenticeships. In the previous year there had been a significant improvement in achievement rates. This had continued with all framework metrics being positive, and lower numbers of withdrawals and out of funded learners. The focus for term 3 was on achievement rates for 2025/26., which were expected to be higher than last year.

It was also noted that development teams were looking at further enhancements to reporting tools for apprenticeships and to ensure that all data was robust.

The restructuring of apprenticeships and the review of the offer was complete. The offer included construction, engineering, automotive, business and leadership. There was a good level of interest from large employers. Approval had also been received this week for apprenticeship units in engineering and AI.

Questions and comments were invited.

Governors hoped that the successes were being promoted. The Principal and Chief Executive confirmed that marketing messages were being sent out.

Apprenticeship achievement rates were discussed. The college now compared very favourably to other West Midland colleges.

Governors were pleased to see the outcomes for 2024/25.

Predicted Achievement 25/26

Overall retention across Classroom-Based Learning was 95.8%. Current predictions indicated that core vocational achievement (ie the main qualification aim) would be around 90%. A Level achievement was predicted at approximately 70%, broadly in line with last year, but with a lower proportion of high-grades as indicated by mock exam results. The Head of Faculty had an action plan in place to address some of the concerns. A full assessment of final achievement, including higher grades, would be completed after results publication in August 2026.

The first Maths GCSE paper had been earlier in the day. Attendance had been 93%, which was the highest ever level.

A Governor noted the focus on A levels and asked if there were alternative pathways for future students who were unlikely to meet the A Level entry criteria. The Assistant Principal Curriculum and Innovation explained alternative BTECs in some areas such as Science. A review of this year’s cohort against the new criteria had identified that those who would not have been offered A Level places were mostly in Science subjects.

Student Voice: On Programme Survey

2,254 students participated in the on-programme student survey; an increase of 439 compared to the previous year. The on-programme survey was a formal way of capturing feedback twice per year.

Evidence indicated consistently high levels of student satisfaction, and that students felt safe, supported and confident in college. All areas had scored a satisfaction of at least 90%

There were now two specific areas of focus from the feedback:

- IT access – the college had started a £75k project to renew the wi-fi network at Wellington Road. The Head of IT was meeting Curriculum Managers and teaching staff to identify issues to be addressed. There was also work in progress to test IT systems ahead of bulk enrolment for September 2026.
- Review of progress and interventions for Maths and English led by the Interim Head of Faculty. Use of Maths and English Hubs, AI tools such as Century Tech and other interventions, were explained.

Governors also noted plans to have more learners doing November re-sits next year.

A Governor asked what the college had done differently to get 400 more learners to respond to the latest survey. The Assistant Principal stated that there had been close monitoring and follow up during the three-week survey window. The sequencing of surveys had been considered by EMT to minimise survey fatigue as there were several across the year, some of which were optional. There had been a particularly good return rate to a PSHE survey through continuous focus.

A Governor asked how students received feedback on issues raised in surveys. The Assistant Principal explained the use of student reps, the Student Union and focus groups. However, this was an area that needed to be strengthened. A 'You Said, We Did' approach was to be brought back.

A Governor asked if survey data was analysed by EDI group. The Assistant Principal Quality and Engagement confirmed not as this particular survey was anonymous. The merits of anonymous surveys were discussed. This was only one of a number of feedback routes for students. In future there would be focus groups with feedback sought specifically from different inclusion groups.

<u>Safeguarding Report</u>
Covered earlier and nothing to add.

60/26 <u>PARTNERSHIPS (ITEM 8)</u>

<u>Overview</u>
The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive gave a short overview of the current partners working with the college:
- NIS – rail, civil engineering, infrastructure
- DBS – boot camps and social media
- Black Rook – boot camps
- Wolves Foundation – sport

Governors were aware of the WMCA audit and the work associated with this. The Principal would cover this in more detail later.

Boot camps were delivered as part of a wider regional activity. The college had worked with DBS for around five years and was currently considering arrangements for next year in light of changes to WMCA funding and the overall college partnership strategy. Next year's bootcamp funding was yet to be confirmed but expected to be around £2m.

A request to approve next year's partnership activity would be brought to the next Board meeting.

Governors discussed possible changes to partnership provision, including any risks. Management did not foresee any significant risks as a result of changes. The additional costs from the work commissioned with Blueprint Education Services were noted. The Principal was confident that this added capacity to improve controls in this area.

WMCA Review
For reasons of confidentiality, discussion of this agenda item has been recorded separately.

61/26 FINANCE REPORT (ITEM 9)

Management Accounts – March 2026
The Assistant Principal Finance IT and Commercial had provided the management accounts to March 2026.

- EBITDA to March was £2.766k (11.07%), higher than budget. College contribution relative to the partner contribution continued to improve.
- There was a year-to-date shortfall in income which was principally related to changes in partnership activities. Governors were aware of in year re-profiling of funding for rail provision. The college base income was improving.
- The impact of the changes to partnerships had been included in the budget forecast.
- The overall budget to year end was on track, including the adult, apprenticeships and HE elements.
- Tuition fee and catering income were both tracking below budget, but other commercial income was strong. There was a positive pipeline for polymer apprentices.
- Pay cost savings of £476k were being monitored but offset by agency costs, which included some senior level interim posts. The Finance team was reviewing costs for sickness cover and looking to identify ways of managing this down. The impact of the pay award would be seen in the management accounts from April 2026.
- The budget included provision for re-structuring costs but there had been none in the year to date.
- The pay to income ratio was 72%.
- Year to date overhead savings continued to be achieved.
- The majority of capital spend for the year had been allocated.
- The overall cash position was healthy and reserves were improving.
- Governors were aware of the NIS debtor and agreed payment profile and delivery plan to clear this by year end.
- The health score forecast was 200 points, which was Good. As previously reported, the sale of Paget Road had been excluded from this due to timing as this was not now expected to complete in year.

Questions and comments were invited.

A Governor asked how the college long term sickness compared to other colleges. This information was not to hand but was reported through HR data shared at Finance and Resources Committee. The focus of the finance team was on managing the costs of supply cover and challenging staff to review the processes to minimise recruitment delays and costs.

A Governor asked if there were any possible actions to further improve EBITDA. The Assistant Principal responded that this depended on the ability to improve partnership margins. There was also some headroom in re-structuring contingency costs and in ongoing overhead savings. The eventual sale of Paget Road would significantly reduce the amount of college debt, so would further improve EBITDA. The sale was likely to reduce the gearing ratio to below 20%.

Governors discussed the sale of Paget Road and other factors affecting financial health.

2026/27 Budget Update

- Work continued to develop the draft budget.
- There was significant growth in EBITDA due to increases to 16-19 income as a result of a growth of 181 extra learners. This was partially offset by demographic growth nationally, which had meant that the base rate uplift was small overall.
- Despite the increase in learner numbers there was no significant demand for additional staff so the cost base was expected to be similar to this year.
- There was reduced reliance on partnership income.
- Changes to element 3 funding for High Needs learners and LGPS costs were noted. The reduction in LGPS costs was significant.
- Some technical changes in accounting for finance leases would increase the EBITDA.
- The adult funding assumptions were outlined.
- £2.7m of apprenticeship income was budgeted. There was some potential upside risk to this if there was more engagement with new employers.
- There was potential for further income growth at Telford.
- Pay costs were based on the forecast outturn for 2025/26 plus uplifts for assumed changes.
- Overheads were also based on 2025/26 forecast outturn. Energy costs were expected to be affected by global events. There were no dual running costs now that Paget Road was closed.
- Capital allocations were based on requests from managers. The condition survey was complete so an action plan for the FECCA funding allocated was being prepared.
- Cash growth continued to be a priority. It was hoped that financial health could improve to outstanding. Sale proceeds from NAC had been used to reduce the college debt with DfE.
- The final draft budget would be presented for review at the Finance and Resources Committee in June and then brought back for Board approval in July.

62/26 HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT TERM 2 (ITEM 10)

The term 2 Health and Safety report had been provided. The highlights were noted as follows:

- KPI table showed data for accidents, near misses, RIDOOR events and insurance claims in year, compared to 2024/25 and to target. There had been one RIDDOR incident and one insurance claim in the year to date.
- The Health and Safety action plan was being progressed. The RAG rating of this did not indicate any concerns.

The Chair asked if the Health and Safety action plan would inform any of the planned capital investment in the estate. The Deputy Principal and Chief Executive indicated that it could. There would be particular focus on safeguarding, college entry points, speed gates and toilet configurations.

63/26 GOVERNANCE MATTERS (ITEM 11)

Committee Minutes
The minutes of the following recent meetings were available for review on the Board Portal:

- Search and Governance Committee 2 March 2026
- Finance and Resources Committee 5 March 2026
- Audit Committee 25 March 2026

The Board of Governors received the committee reports.

Link Governor Reports
Four Link Governor reports had been received since the last meeting and were available for information on the Board Portal.

Whistleblowing Policy
The Whistleblowing policy had been reviewed and was presented for approval. It had been streamlined and continued to meet the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. A small number of queries had been raised by a Governor. Any resulting points of clarification would be addressed.

Resolved – that the Whistleblowing Policy was approved.

Scheme of Delegation
The Scheme of Delegation had been reviewed and was presented for approval. It set out authority levels in key areas at Board and management level.

Resolved – that the Scheme of Delegation was approved.

Proposed Meetings Dates for 2026/27
The final draft of potential meeting dates for 2026/27 was presented for approval. A Governor had noted difficulties with two dates in September and March so it was proposed to change these and circulate a final list.

Resolved – that the meeting dates for 2026/27 were approved.

64/26 CONFIDENTIALITY (ITEM 14)

It was resolved that the following reports would remain confidential:

- **Property Update**
- **WMCA Review**

65/26 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING (ITEM 15)

Thursday 9 July 2026 at 5pm at Wellington Road.

The meeting ended at 7.25pm.