

## SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Finance & General Purposes Committee**  
held on Wednesday 15 October 2025 at 11.00 am  
in the Boardroom, Omagh Campus

---

<b>PRESENT:</b>	Mr Michael Barnett, Committee Chair Mrs Maureen Brunt Mrs Maria Hackett Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
<b>IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body Mrs Sharon McGrath, Director of Corporate Services Mr Sean O'Donnell, Head of Finance & Governance
<b>APOLOGIES:</b>	Mrs Sandra Isherwood Dr Lynsey Quinn

### **1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES**

Mr Barnett, Committee Chair, welcomed all present to the first meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee in the 2025/26 academic year.

He went on to acknowledge the recent death of Mr Malachy McAleer, former Director & Chief Executive of South West College (SWC).

Apologies were then tendered on behalf of Mrs Isherwood and Dr Quinn.

### **2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

### **3.0 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 4 June 2025.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

### **4.0 KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 List of Key Strategic Issues.

#### **4.1 Financial Stability**

Ms McCartan reminded the meeting of the cash deficit shown in the draft 2025/26 budget presented to the Committee and the Governing Body at their June 2025 meetings and, with the support of Mr O'Donnell, outlined the additional income and savings identified in the interim to reduce this deficit significantly. She confirmed that a bid for funding under the October Monitoring Round had been submitted to the Department for the Economy (DfE), noting that this Monitoring Round had not yet been commissioned, and explained that planned expenditure may be delayed, if required, to meet budget restrictions and that resource capacity is maintained to

facilitate the timely capitalisation of funding opportunities.

The meeting was also apprised of the ongoing audit of the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements and the good financial out-turn evidenced to 31 July 2026.

Members then discussed the allocation of funding at a Northern Ireland government level, noting the inequity presented for young people choosing to study at Further Education (FE) Colleges due to the protection of schools budgets and the absence of protection for FE budgets, and agreed to raise awareness of this inequity with the Governing Body.

**ACTION: Governing Body to be apprised of the inequity posed by the protection of schools budgets and the absence of protection for FE budgets.**

#### **4.2 Further Education Transformation**

Ms McCartan reported on discussions held at recent Principals' Group meetings, confirmed the Minister for the Economy's approval of the College's Strategic Plan 2025-28 and made the Committee aware of a forthcoming sectoral financial benchmarking exercise.

In response to queries from members, Ms McCartan commented on the allocation of resources to match strategic priorities, on the College's good performance in contributing to the objectives set out in DfE's Economic Vision, on the collaborative work undertaken sectorally and on the welcome amendment to the budget allocation model to encourage adherence to the objectives set out for the sector by DfE.

#### **4.3 Sustainability**

Ms McCartan spoke of the continuing work in delivering the Net Zero Action Plan and the Sustainability Action Plan as well as the planned submission of the first Carbon Mitigation Return to the Department for Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA).

### **5.0 MANAGEMENT REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| ▪ Paper 05     | Management Report  |
| ▪ Paper 05.01  | April to August 2025 Finance Report  |
| ▪ Paper 05.02  | Budget Summary 2025/26   |
| ▪ Paper 05.03  | Draft Annual Report & Financial Statements 2024/25   |
| ▪ Paper 05.04  | Financial Management Report for Year Ended 31 July 2025                                    |
| ▪ Paper 05.05  | Report on Payments over £50k   |
| ▪ Paper 05.06  | Review of Provisions and Liabilities as at 31 July 2025                                    |
| ▪ Paper 05.07  | Report on Fixed Assets and Capital Expenditure 2024/25                                     |
| ▪ Paper 05.08  | Estates Report   |
| ▪ Paper 05.08a | Strategic Asset Management Unit Government Land & Property Register Baseline Estate Return |
| ▪ Paper 05.08b | Sustainability Case Study  |
| ▪ Paper 05.08c | Erne Campus Case Study   |
| ▪ Paper 05.09  | 2024/25 Capital Budget Report  |
| ▪ Paper 05.10  | Petty Cash & Float Policy  |
| ▪ Paper 05.11  | Procurement Policy   |
| ▪ Paper 05.12  | 2024/25 Student Hardship Fund Report   |
| ▪ Paper 05.13  | FE Circular 05/25 – Hardship Fund (Discretionary) 2025/26                                  |
| ▪ Paper 05.14  | Insurance Renewal Cost 2024 v 2025   |
| ▪ Paper 05.15  | Insurance Renewal Report 2025/26   |

- Paper 05.16 Apprenticeship NI 2025 Service Level Agreement
- Paper 05.17 Letter on Royal London Acquisition of Dalmore.

## **5.1 Budget Update 2024/25 & 2025/26**

*Ref: Management Report Section 2.0 and Papers 05.01 & 05.02*

Mr O'Donnell reminded members of the marginal overspend recorded in the DfE financial year to 31 March 2025 and confirmed that approval for the overspend has been granted by DfE.

Drawing attention to paper 05.01, he went on to highlight the predicted overspend to 31 March 2026 and advised of the income still to be accounted for as well as the bid submitted to the October Monitoring Round for outstanding pressures.

In response to queries from members, management explained that unspent capital funding may no longer be rolled over to subsequent years as a result of the anticipated change in legislation to align colleges' statutory year end with that of DfE; reported on the College's adherence to the sectoral Depreciation Policy as well as on the impact of this on the value of fixed assets; and detailed the remaining duration of the College's two PFI contracts and advised that lessons learnt from the transfer of ownership process in relation to the pending end of another PFI contract in the sector will be considered in the development of such a process in SWC in due course.

## **5.2 Financial Management / Accounting**

### **5.2.1 Draft Annual Report & Financial Statements 2024/25**

*Ref: Management Report Section 3.1 and Paper 05.03*

Mr O'Donnell confirmed the submission of the draft 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements to the NI Audit Office and commented favourably on the proceedings of the audit to date noting an ongoing query in relation to depreciation and fixed assets with a zero net book value.

### **5.2.2 Financial Management Report 2024/25**

*Ref: Management Report Section 3.2 and Paper 05.04*

Ms McCartan reflected on an analysis undertaken of the 2024/25 Financial Management Reports highlighting the general increase in income from 2023/24 figures.

In response to queries from members, management explained that internal resource promotions had impacted on the delivery of Innovation Voucher projects and provided assurances on the effectiveness of the cloud based risk management software introduced in 2024.

### **5.2.3 Payments Over £50k**

*Ref: Management Report Section 3.3 and Paper 05.05*

The Report on Payments over £50k was noted by the Committee.

### **5.2.4 Review of Provisions and Liabilities as at 31 July 2025**

*Ref: Management Report Section 3.4 and Paper 05.06*

Mr O'Donnell explained that a provision is in place in relation to backpay of holiday entitlements for overtime prior to 2021 pending conclusion of the PSNI v Agnew case. He added that holiday entitlements will be paid from 2024/25 onwards as sectorally agreed and that accruals have been recorded for such payments in the intervening years.

## 5.2.5 Report on Fixed Assets and Capital Expenditure 2024/25

*Ref: Management Report Section 3.5 and Paper 05.07*

In response to a query from the Committee Chair in relation to the value of land and buildings insured, Mr O'Donnell advised that land and buildings under PFI contracts are not included in the College's direct insurance cover.

## 5.4 Estates

### 5.4.1 Estates Report

*Ref: Management Report Section 4.1 and Papers 05.08, 05.08a, 05.08b & 05.08c*

#### 5.4.1.1 Budget

Mrs McGrath conveyed her satisfaction with the management of the Estates budget and the out-turn for the year ended 31 July 2025. She explained the impact of the late receipt of invoices in relation to works under the PFI contracts and explained that key performance indicators will be developed to address this issue.

#### 5.4.1.2 Sustainability

Mrs McGrath apprised the meeting of the ongoing work in relation to the collation of climate change mitigation data for submission to DAERA under the new Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 legislation and undertook to circulate the associated return when available. She noted that the full impact of the College's long term sustainability interventions will not be reflected in the return in light of the more recent baseline used.

**ACTION: Mrs McGrath to circulate the Climate Change Mitigation Report to the Committee when available.**

#### 5.4.1.3 Statutory Returns

With reference to paper 05.08a, 05.08b and 05.08c, Mrs McGrath confirmed the submission of the Government Land & Property Register return along with associated case studies.

#### 5.4.1.4 Health & Safety

Mrs McGrath reported an escalation of the issue relating to the damaged roof of the CREST Building at the Technology & Skills Centre campus as well as the measures implemented to mitigate health and safety risks. The Committee was made aware of the cost estimate received for a roof replacement and was advised of further investigations planned to find a solution to the issue.

#### 5.4.1.5 PFI Contracts

Mrs McGrath advised the Committee of the acquisition of the Dalmore Group by Royal London noting the lack of practical impact on the College's PFI contracts. She also referenced a forthcoming PFI Liaison Committee meeting and outlined the key issues to be discussed.

### 5.4.2 2024/25 Capital Budget Report

*Ref: Management Report Section 4.2 and Paper 05.09*

With reference to paper 05.09, Mr O'Donnell highlighted the reallocation of 2024/25 capital funding due to the likelihood of the availability of external funding for a Photovoltaic installation at the Dungannon campus.

## 5.5 **Policy Review**

*Ref: Management Report Section 5.0 and Papers 05.10 & 05.11*

Mr O'Donnell detailed the changes proposed to the Petty Cash & Float Policy and the Procurement Policy.

In response to questions and comments from members, management confirmed that an audit trail will be maintained in relation to the purchase of training vehicles and the procurement of low risk goods or services below £1,000 approved by the Principal or a Director without competition and agreed to present a report on these to the Committee annually.

**ACTION: Annual Report to be presented to the Committee on the purchase of training vehicles and the procurement of goods and services below £1,000 approved by the Principal or a Director without competition.**

**AGREED: that the Petty Cash & Float Policy and the Procurement Policy are recommended to the Governing Body for approval.**

## 5.6 **Other**

### 5.6.1 **Student Hardship Fund**

*Ref: Management Report Section 6.1 and Papers 05.12 & 05.13*

Ms McCartan explained that the surplus 2024/25 Student Hardship funding had been incorporated into the sectoral 2025/26 budget and that it may be possible to commit surplus 2024/25 full-time Higher Education funding for additional student supports.

### 5.6.2 **Insurance Renewal 2025/26**

*Ref: Management Report Section 6.2 and Papers 05.14 & 05.15*

Mr O'Donnell made the meeting aware of the reduction in the baseline insurance cost following a change in provider as well as of the enhanced cyber insurance cover requirement for the new ApprenticeshipsNI contract and of the significant additional unbudgeted cost involved.

### 5.6.3 **ApprenticeshipsNI 2025 Service Level Agreement**

*Ref: Management Report Section 6.3 and Paper 05.16*

The Service Level Agreement between the College and DfE for the delivery of the ApprenticeshipsNI 2025 programme was noted by the Committee.

### 5.6.4 **Acquisition of Dalmore Group**

*Ref: Management Report Section 6.4 and Paper 05.17*

The letter on Royal London's acquisition of the Dalmore Group was noted by the Committee.

### 5.6.5 **2024/25 Consultancy Expenditure**

In response to a query from the Committee Chair, Mr O'Donnell confirmed a nil return in relation to 2024/25 consultancy expenditure.

## 6.0 **REVIEW OF FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01                      Finance & General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference

- Paper 06.02 Proposed Amendment to Terms of Reference.

It was noted that an amendment to the Terms of Reference was proposed to accurately reflect the College's Sustainability Action Plan and commitments in light of recent developments.

**AGREED: to recommend the revised Finance & General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference to the Governing Body for approval.**

## **7.0 PROPOSED 2025/26 PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07 Finance & General Purposes Committee Programme of Business 2025/26.

**AGREED: acceptance of the proposed 2025/26 Programme of Business.**

## **8.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08 List of Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that the appropriate placement of the College's strategic priorities within the key strategic issues of committees would be finalised in the forthcoming weeks.

A revised list of outstanding actions is included as Appendix A.

## **9.0 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of the impact of Finance Team resourcing pressures within another college in the sector. She went on to reflect on the lean structure of the Finance Team within SWC and sought approval to procure external financial support, if required, to mitigate the risk of similar impacts in SWC.

The Committee Chair commented on the importance of the provision of quality information to the Committee and the Governing Body and on the governance impacts of a reduction in the quality of such information due to resource pressures.

The Committee agreed to endorse the proposal to procure external financial support, if required.

**AGREED: endorsement of the procurement of external financial support, if required.**

## **10.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING**

Members commented favourably on the effectiveness of the meeting.

*The meeting concluded at 1:10 pm.*

**CONFIRMED AND ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY  
19 NOVEMBER 2025**

**GB CHAIRPERSON**



**DATE** 19/11/2025

## SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

Item	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	04/06/2025	4.3	Ms McCartan and Mrs McCauley to consider the appropriate placement of the College's strategic priorities within the key strategic issues of committees.
2	15/10/2025	4.1	Governing Body to be apprised of the inequity posed by the protection of schools budgets and the absence of protection for FE budgets.
3	15/10/2025	5.4.1.2	Mrs McGrath to circulate the Climate Change Mitigation Report to the Committee when available.
4	15/10/2025	5.5	Annual Report to be scheduled on the purchase of training vehicles and the procurement of goods and services below £1,000 approved by the Principal or a Director without competition.