

COLCHESTER INSTITUTE CORPORATIONMeeting of the
FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEEHeld on Tuesday 15 July 2025
4.30pm, at the Colchester Campus**Committee Membership:**

Richard Block – Committee Chair
Lisa Blake – Corporation Chair
Alison Andreas – Principal and Chief Executive
Steve Blake – Co-opted Governor
Chris Donovan - Governor

In attendance:

Alison Bennett – Head of Governance
Mark Emerson – Vice Principal
Gary Horne MBE– Deputy Chief Executive
Emma Richens – Director of Finance
Martin Gwillim – Director of People and Culture

1. **Apologies for Absence**
No apologies for absence were received.
Sally Conner was not present.
2. **Declaration of any conflicts of interest**
No member of the committee or staff declared any financial or other interests in the business to be discussed.
3. **Any other Urgent Business**
A Part II paper had been circulated in advance of the meeting. The committee agreed to discuss it under item 8, and that it would be recorded as a confidential minute.
4. **Minutes of meeting held on 20 May 2025**
CIC/FR/25/3/1, minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2025, were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate record.
5. **Action Sheet and Matters Arising from the Minutes**
Governors **RECEIVED** and **NOTED** the Finance and Resources Committee Action Sheet 2024-25 with the update for item CIC/FR/25/3/2 taken as a confidential minute.
6. **Digital Strategy 2025 – 2028**
CIC/FR/25/3/3, Digital Strategy 2025-2028, presented for information.
The Vice Principal provided an overview of how the Digital Strategy 2025–2028 will support the College in delivering its overarching strategic objectives. Stakeholder engagement activities have been undertaken to incorporate views from students, staff, and external partners, as well as including sector and industry best practice.
A digital survey was carried out and saw participation from over 1,000 students and 170 members of staff. The strategy’s core digital themes have been mapped to the College’s

strategic aims, with some themes crossing multiple objectives. It was emphasised that this is not simply an ILT strategy, but a college-wide digital strategy.

While the College's digital infrastructure is built on strong foundations, ongoing development is essential. The committee was informed that the College has been chosen by Jisc as one of 10 institutions to take part in an AI Marking and Feedback pilot, starting in September 2025. This presents an opportunity to utilise emerging technologies to enhance the learner experience and reduce staff workload. The strategy is about purposeful innovation, identifying current and future challenges before investing in solutions. Digital inclusion also presents the opportunity to break down barriers for learners with additional needs and to create genuine personalised learning.

Each digital theme will be supported by defined success factors and key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs are currently being developed to ensure they are both ambitious and achievable.

Governors commented that the strategy was comprehensive but queried its level of ambition. Governors **ASKED** how the strategy is aligned with the 2025–26 corporate budget and the overall cost of implementing the strategy. Governors **QUESTIONED** whether the strategy could be approved without detailed costings, and whether the proposed new HR system is included in the scope. It was confirmed that dedicated funding has been included in the 2025–26 budget to support the strategy's activities, with further detail to be provided under item 8. The strategy is expected to generate savings over time, although it was acknowledged that capacity will need to be built during the first year. An audit of current ILT assets and expenditure has identified areas where savings can be made which will also contribute to funding. It was stressed that this provides a very real opportunity to develop bespoke AI solutions to support personalised learning. In terms of ambition, the College aims to be seen as a sector leader in the use of such tools. It was explained that the planned new HR system is not included in the current year budget, as costs will likely to fall into the following year. Instead, the current focus is on the implementation of a new finance system during the Autumn term. Governors **ASKED** why a single system covering Finance, Payroll, and HR was not being pursued. The Deputy Chief Executive replied that it would be unusual to identify such a workable solution to support FE College complexities.. The Director of People & Culture intends to undertake a discovery exercise to identify the most appropriate system, with a proposal expected to be brought to the committee in Spring 2026.

Two new, permanent, ILT posts have been included, with two existing vacancies that will also be used to support the strategy.

Additional queries were raised regarding data protection and the College's confidence in its software's ability to prevent unauthorised data sharing. The Vice Principal confirmed that safeguards are in place to monitor AI software use, with a zero-tolerance policy on the use of personal likenesses. The strategy promotes collective responsibility for digital ethics and data security across the College.

The committee agreed the need to be clear in the expectations of Governors in the delivering of the strategy.

The committee expressed support for the strategic direction that the Digital Strategy 2025–2028 will take the College in but added that further clarity is required on associated costs and expectations.

7. **Management Report and Accounts May 2025**

CIC/FR/25/3/4, Monthly Management Report and Accounts May 2025, was received and noted. It was reported that:

- May 2025 was a positive month with a £253k improvement over the budgeted surplus due to additional EFSA funding that was received in month.
- There was an overspend on hourly pay due to an increased spend on LSPs, however the additional high needs funding received from ECC covers this.
- The full year forecast operating surplus increased to £1.36m.
- Forecast Financial Health moved up 10 health points to 210 (Good).

- Positive cash position at year end (£5.6m) against budget (£3.5m)

The Committee commented that college finances continue to follow the same positive trajectory that it has been on through the year.

8. **Corporate Budget 2025-26**

CIC/FR/25/3/5, Corporate Budget 2025-2026, was received and considered. The detailed discussion is recorded as a separate, confidential minute due to key aspects of the business plan.

It was **AGREED** to recommend the Corporate Budget 2025-2026 to the Board for approval.

9. **College Financial Forecasting Return**

A verbal update was received on the College Financial Forecasting Return (CFFR). The committee was informed that the CFFR incorporates an outturn statement for the year 2024-25, approved budget 2025-26 and forecast plans for the year 2026-27. The submission date, post board approval, is 31 July 2025. Full details will be provided at the Board meeting on 22 July, for final approval.

10. **Property Matters**

A verbal update was received. It was reported that East Wing designs have been received with ground surveys being carried out in the coming weeks. The DfE have been to visit the College, and the DfE's appointed condition surveyors will be on site in early August.

11. **Update on Strategic Plan One Year Action Plan 2025**

CIC/FR/25/3/6, Update on the Strategic Plan Goals, was received and considered. It was reported that good progress is being made. The committee commented that the format of the report was helpful in highlighting any issues or areas of concern.

12. **People and Culture**

CIC/FR/25/3/7, Key Priorities and People and Culture Management Dashboard, was received and considered. The following was noted:

The committee was informed of the resignation of the Learning and Development Manager. Interviews for the position are scheduled to take place, with a strong shortlist of candidates who bring relevant Learning and Development experience. A recruitment specialist is joining the team on a fixed-term contract to provide additional support on filling staffing vacancies over the summer.

At the previous meeting an increase in sickness absence was highlighted. The Director of People and Culture said that while it remains difficult to identify clear trends, mental health issues continue to be the leading cause of absence, however, a reduction was recorded between March and April 2025. The other top six sickness categories all showed a small increase over the same period.

Twelve staff members have now completed Mental Health First Aid training and will be available to support colleagues.

The College delivered another successful period of Learning and Development activity. Over two designated training days, 21 sessions were delivered with a total of 1,316 bookings made by 450 staff members.

The Principal expressed concern that, following the traditionally high staff turnover in Additional Learning Support, the department with the next highest number of leavers is FE Mechanical and Electrical Services, an area at high-risk for staff recruitment, and as such will be prioritised for support.

13. **Policy Review**

The Committee received, considered and **APPROVED**

- 13.1. CIC/FR/25/3/8, Employer Co-investment Policy
- 13.2. CIC/FR/25/3/9, Subcontractor Policy 2025-26
- 13.3. CIC/FR/25/3/10, UCC Student Protection Plan

The Committee received, considered and **APPROVED FOR RECOMMENDATION TO THE BOARD:**

- 13.4. CIC/FR/25/3/11, Financial Regulations 2025-26
- 13.5. CIC/FR/25/3/12, Disciplinary Policy and Procedure for Staff

14. **Review of Meeting**

14.1 The committee agreed the items to be reported to the Board:

- Digital Strategy
- Property matters.
- Financial Regulations 2025-26
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure for Staff

14.2 The committee agreed the items to be treated confidentially.

- Corporate Budget 2025-26

15. **2025-26 Meeting dates**

To be confirmed