FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

2 March 2026
16:30 - 18:30
Board room, Colchester Campus

ATTENDANCE

Present:	Richard Block	Governor, Chair of Finance and Resources Committee
	Chris Donovan	Governor, Vice-Chair of Finance and Resources Committee
	Lisa Blake	Governor, Chair of Corporation Board and member
	Steve Blake	Co-opted Member
	Alison Andreas	Principal and Chief Executive and member
In attendance:	Mark Emerson	Vice Principal
	Gary Horne MBE	Deputy Chief Executive
	Ali Davies	Deputy Principal
	Emma Richens	Director of Finance
	Martin Gwillim	Director of People and Culture
	Alison Bennett	Head of Governance

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Sanjeev Arya was not present and no apologies were received.

2. DECLARATION OF ANY CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

This item was recorded as a confidential Part II minute.

3. ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

None.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - CIC/FR/26/1/1

CIC/FR/26/1/1, The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2025, were agreed as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments:

- Item 11.2: Action to revisit the categories of reasons colleagues are leaving to be included.
- MPM Requirements: The ARC report to be shared with Steve following the ARC review.
- Attendance Correction: Gary Horne MBE to be recorded as not present, Martin Gwillim to be recorded as present

ACTION: Head of Governance to make requested amendments and share with Committee Chair before publishing.

5. ACTIONS TRACKER AND MATTERS ARISING NOT COVERED ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA - CIC/FR/26/1/2

1) CIC/FR/26/1/2, Action Tracker, was reviewed by the Committee. It was noted that all matters were either completed, covered within the agenda, or scheduled for future review.

2) There were no matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

6. UPDATE TO COMMITTEE ON THE 25 NOVEMBER 2025 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Committee noted that, following its previous recommendations, the Corporation Board approved:

- the Statement on Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking for the year ended 31 July 2025
- the Net Zero Strategy
- the final KPI targets for 2025–26

7. CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT REVIEW REPORT - CIC/FR/26/1/3

This item was recorded as a confidential Part II minute.

8. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS & DELEGATED AUTHORITY OF LIMITS - CIC/FR/26/1/4

CIC/FR/26/1/4, Financial Regulations and Delegated Authority of Limits, was presented for review by the committee.

Delegated Authorities - The Director of Finance explained that the finance department has carried out a review of the numbers of invoices that require approval by the College Executive over a 12-month period. The Committee were informed that in the previous 12 months, 457 invoices £5,000 or over were required to be authorised by a member of the College Executive team, 268 invoices over £10,000 were required to be approved by the Principal and 11 invoices over £75,000 required authorisation by the Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee or the Chair of the Board. It was acknowledged that this is a considerable administrative burden. The Director of Finance said that with the responsibilities held by CE, SLT and CLMG and the rigorous financial audits undertaken each year with positive outcomes, it is considered reasonable to increase the approval thresholds to reduce the administrative burden. The threshold changes were outlined within the report, and it was explained that these would reduce the number of invoices that College Executive need to authorise down to 268, the number that the Principal would need to 38 and the Chair of FRC or the Board to 1 per year.

Governors **ASKED** whether the invoices requiring approval were items already included in the budget or one-off unplanned costs. The Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that they relate to routine expenditure, such as regular utility bills, which all must be reviewed by multiple members of College Executive for approval.

Governors **QUESTIONED** how the College Executive assures itself that multiple smaller approvals do not exceed authorised limits. The Director of Finance said that a review of this process has been undertaken and are confident this has not occurred. It was also noted that procurement is an area subject to audit scrutiny.

Governors **ASKED** whether Section 6 of the document should explicitly set out responsibility for managing arrangements relating to Managing Public Money. It was agreed that this would be included.

The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the version of the document being reviewed was not the most up-to-date. It was agreed that the latest version would be circulated to the committee following the meeting. Subject to receipt of the updated version, the Committee confirmed it was content to recommend the document to the Board.

ACTIONS:
- Section 6 to explicitly set out responsibility for managing arrangements relating to Managing Public Money ahead of being recommended to the Board on 19 March.
- latest version of the Financial Regulations to be circulated to the Committee ahead of being recommended to the Board on 19 March.

DECISION: The Committee, subject to latest version being circulated, AGREED to recommend the Financial Regulations and scheme of delegation to the Board.

9. MID YEAR UPDATE ON PROGRESS TOWARDS STRATEGIC PLAN SUCCESS FACTORS - CIC/FR/26/1/5

CIC/FR/26/1/5, Mid-Year Update on Progress towards strategic plan success factors, was received. Now in the second year of the strategic plan, it was noted that that this is the first update to the Committee for the 2025/26 academic year.

The Principal explained that most factors remain unchanged. Progress remains positive and high scores in Finance and Physical resources have been maintained. In relation to the goal of 'A Fantastic Workplace' the rating relating to leadership has been upgraded based on extensive leadership CPD and anecdotal evidence from staff, coupled with a lower rate of staff turnover than has been seen in recent years.

Governors **ASKED**, in relation to table 2, what stops the College achieving a 10 for Financial Health. It was explained that uncertainty around qualification availability as a result of ongoing curriculum reforms means that current levels of FE income cannot be absolutely guaranteed in future years.

Governors sought assurance regarding the approach to AI ethics. The Vice Principal confirmed that bespoke development work is underway and is currently being tested using synthetic student data. An AI Ethics and Regulation Group is being established, comprising representatives from data protection, curriculum, and academic ethics. All AI development or adoption will be subject to assessment by this group who will consider data security, ethical considerations, and academic integrity.

The Deputy Chief Executive commented that, while the report could show greater 'dark green' indicators, there remain positive aspects to note. He added that the staff survey will be launched in April, enabling benchmarking against other colleges.

The Committee noted and welcomed the report.

10. MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT P6 (JANUARY 2026) - CIC/FR/26/1/6

CIC/FR/26/1/6, Monthly Management Report (MMR) for January 2026, was received for information.

The Director of Finance reported that January delivered another positive month.
Expenditure remains underspent, with most of the underspend attributable to staffing. The overall

vacancy rate has continued to fall, reducing to 30 vacancies in January. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) remain in good financial health, despite the loss of health points 10 points. The College currently holds 45 days of cash in hand.

Governors **QUERIED** the table within the Capital Bids Schedule, noting that £45,000 of capital requests had been submitted but no entries appeared in the 'sanctioned requests' column. It was confirmed that the approval information had been omitted from the document.

Governors **ASKED** about the difference in the requested and approved amounts for the hospitality front of house re-fresh. The Deputy Chief Executive explained that, although the original intention was to refresh the hospitality area, it became evident that a more extensive refurbishment would better support the commercial offer and provide learners with a space they can take pride in. Governors were assured that the spend fell within the Principal's delegated approval authority.

11. PROPERTY MATTERS

The Deputy Chief Executive provided a verbal update highlighting the following:

Work continues across the Colchester Campus to support delivery of the current Accommodation Masterplan. The 2026/27 Masterplan will be presented at the May meeting of the Committee.

H Block Reconfiguration - 2025/26 works are complete and awaiting an official launch event which is being arranged by the Principal's office.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Centre - Planning permission was granted in January 2026. A tender pack has been collated and distributed to 4 potential contractors (via Varsity Consulting). It is expected that they will be on-site towards the end of April.

L Block Conversion - Planning permission was approved in January 2026, subject to archaeological conditions. Asbestos removal and strip out work are complete and floor screeding is underway. Window and curtain walling specialists have started the replacement programme.

Subject to a bid to Essex County Council (ECC) for top-up funding, the intention will be to future-proof the utility infrastructure in line with the College long-term accommodation masterplan and net zero strategy (fossil fuel divestment). The aim is to ensure the College can support additional construction learners from September 2026 alongside the removal of demountable building block E.

Groundworks Phase II - Discussions continue with L Lynch Plant Hire regarding establishing a plant operator driving centre on the footprint of the former T block demountable building. An application for Bootcamp funding has been made to Essex County Council for courses commencing after 01/04/2026, supporting Sizewell C workers of the future. In the meantime, the grounds have been cleared, and compound designs are in development.

Retrofit House - Written pledges have been received for financial and project support from project partners Samsung, Saint Gobain and Gasway Services to enable this project to proceed. T Level students have completed thermal imaging of the building, with a report expected soon. A project initiation meeting will be arranged for April.

East wing and related developments - Owers Warwick Architects have been commissioned to develop a further masterplan iteration to include East Wing, Groundworks #2, Multi Use Games Area and a multideck car park on the Eastgate car park approach area. This work will lead the way to further discussions with other parties and potential funders.

Post 16 Capacity Funding Opportunity - College leaders are currently scoping a potential £5m application to this fund to support additional capacity at the Colchester Campus. J Block is the current focus for this opportunity.

Other Offsite Activities
Sale of land was recorded as a confidential item.

Tendring and Colchester Boarders Garden Community (TCBGC) - A business case commissioning template has been finalised in partnership with Essex County Council to enable a full Business Case proposal to be developed by Atkins to support a future funding bid for the c£5m needed to develop the Sustainable Skills Construction Centre on the new Garden Community. It is expected that Atkins will start this work in April. There is no news on the Garden Community planning submission at this time.

Governors **ASKED** whether there has been any progress that provides an understanding of the level of risk between the ambition of the Estates Strategy that has been signed off by the Committee and the upcoming funding rounds in terms of frequency and magnitude. The Deputy Chief Executive said that there are a number of strategies in this area. A full report on the state of J block has been commissioned that can then be shared with the DFE following scoping work which has identified the expected figure would not be enough to complete the work. The Annual Strategic Conversation will be an opportunity to emphasise to the DFE that college buildings are becoming unfit for purpose for an outstanding teaching and learning experience. Governors agreed and fully supported the college approach. Governors **ASKED** for a strategic update to provide the committee with a sense of realism.

ACTION: Deputy Chief Executive to provide the Committee with a Strategic property update at the May meeting.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY GROUP UPDATE - CIC/FR/26/1/7

CIC/FR/25/3/7, Environmental and Sustainability Group Update, was received.

The Committee was assured that the College is on course to complete the sustainability work plan for the year to include planned actions associated with the 50-point plan, FE Climate Action Roadmap and Environmental and Sustainability Strategy milestone deliverables.

The Environmental and Sustainability Officer appointment has proven to be extremely positive offering a timely injection of capacity to the various workplan deliverables. The report provided updates on performance against carbon reduction targets.

Scope 3 – Pilot data collection project is underway.

Work continues at pace to support climate action projects to implement the College's 'Wild Campus Campaign' vision. This includes Hedgehog Friendly Campus, National Education Nature Park and Rewilding Hillyfields where a number of actions have already been completed and shared with partners including Colchester Natural History Society, Essex Ecology and Colchester City Council Rangers. All of this was the subject of a presentation to the Essex Local Nature Recovery Strategy Event on 23 February.

The committee noted the minutes from the Environmental and Sustainability Group.

It was agreed that the appointment of a sustainability governor would take place at the 19 March Board meeting.

It was acknowledged that discussion around the Governor climate action plan with outcomes to be shared at the marketplace event on 09 July 2026 would take place at the 19 March Board meeting.

13. PEOPLE AND CULTURE

13.1 PEOPLE AND CULTURE UPDATE - CIC/FR/26/1/8

CIC/FR/26/1/8, People and Culture (P&C) Update, was presented by the Director of People & Culture, and reported that:

In the two months to end Jan 26, the People and Culture team have advertised 62 vacancies and dealt with 141 cases.

Audit of Sickness and absence management Procedure was conducted by Scrutton Bland and substantial assurance was received.

There is a full complement of appropriately trained and qualified staff in People and Culture.

The number of live P&C 'cases' has gone down by 22 since the last reporting period.

New Talent Acquisition Manager is supporting area heads with recruitment to reduce the time they need to spend on this process.

Back to the Floor Day proved to be a highly effective opportunity for the team to spend time in college operational areas and shadow colleagues at the point of delivery. This enabled the team to gain first-hand insight into the day-to-day challenges and pressures experienced by both academic and support staff. The experience strengthened understanding, improved empathy, and has already helped inform more practical, responsive support and decision-making from the team.

Staff Demographics remain stable. The current staff demographic profile reflects a diverse and multifaceted workforce. In terms of sex, the staff population is predominantly female. The age distribution spans multiple age ranges, with representation from individuals at various career stages, contributing a broad range of experience and perspectives. Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) data indicates a workforce comprised of both full-time and part-time employees, supporting flexible working arrangements and operational efficiency. Ethnic origin data highlights a commitment to inclusion, with staff representing a broad spectrum of nationalities and ethnicities, contributing to a richer and more dynamic organisational culture.

Following several months of detailed research, evaluation, and due diligence, the College has selected SamPeople as its new Human Resource Information System and Cintra as its payroll provider, with contracts now formally agreed. This has been a complex and rigorous process to ensure the selected systems meet the College's operational, compliance, and value-for-money requirements. The team reviewed over 15 platforms and took part in 6 full system demonstrations over a 6-month period.

Governors thanked the Director of P&C for the report and the significant amount of work that the P&C team has done in a short space of time.

Governors **ASKED** about the targeted retention initiative and whether it is externally funded. It was confirmed that it is funded by central Government.

Governors **ASKED** about the difficult to recruit roles and whether there is anything further that could be done to not lose potential applicants. The Director of P&C commented that the support being provided to Area heads will support this and enable more timely feedback to be provided to applicants.

Governors **ASKED** about the report reference to 22 core staff FTE in post at 103% and whether that was accurate due to the known vacancies. The Director of P&C said this would need to be checked.

ACTION: Director of P&C to check the percentage of core staff in FTE posts with an update to be provided at the May committee meeting.

13.2 ANNUAL WELLBEING SURVEY - CIC/FR/26/1/9

CIC/FR/26/1/9, Annual Wellbeing Survey, was presented by the Deputy Principal. The survey was carried out in partnership with Essex Working Well as part of gaining the Essex Working Well Accreditation and was carried out in June/July 2025 with time provided during professional development days for staff to complete. Staff were actively encouraged to engage, but it was not mandatory. Responses were submitted to Essex Working Well and were anonymous. A detailed report including a summary, analysis and details of comment made in free text boxes was provided to the College in September.

Governors were assured that staff wellbeing remains a key priority. Work is ongoing to further develop strategies and processes that will strengthen the College's approach to supporting staff wellbeing. Although progress towards achieving the Working Well Accreditation has been slower than expected, an increased strategic focus on wellbeing will ensure it remains a priority.

In pursuing the Working Well Accreditation, the College is able to access a wide range of wellbeing resources, including those promoted by the NHS, which are designed to enhance and support staff wellbeing.

The knowledge gained through the Senior Mental Health Lead training is being used to inform the development of wellbeing strategies. This will enable the College to take a holistic approach to addressing wellbeing and safeguarding needs for both staff and learners.

The appointment of the new director of inclusion and wellbeing will increase the capacity of the senior leadership team to prioritise wellbeing.

Governors were informed of the actions taken so far and future actions to further improve wellbeing across the College.

Governors **ASKED** whether there is anything in the results that are of concern or a surprise to the College. The Deputy Principal said that it was analysed via the working well team and was hard to benchmark but greater clarity and further actions will be identified following the forthcoming staff survey.

Governors **ASKED** whether the staff survey will cover mental health to further explore the themes from this survey. The Deputy Principal reported that the questions for this work have been developed, and further consideration would be given to how this could be addressed.

14. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2025 - CIC/FR/26/1/10

CIC/FR/26/1/10, The Committee received the Gender Pay Gap report 2025 for information ahead of publication on the College website.

15. POLICY REVIEW

15.1 RESERVES POLICY - CIC/FR/26/1/11

Reserves Policy - CIC/FR/26/1/11 was received for approval.

The Committee requested that the policy be updated in line with previous discussions in relation to the commentary to reflect college ambition and FE Commissioner benchmarking.

The Committee **ASKED** whether the sale of assets can be included in sources of income. Discussion took place around the how the funds from sale of assets can be reinvested. It was agreed that the policy would be amended to reflect the College Financial Handbook.

Governors commented on the document having a crossover between budgeting and accounting terminology which do not align.

Governors **QUERIED** the reference to the £3m figure in the Annex and sought clarification on how it was reached. It was agreed that a table outlining the potential purposes for which the College may require reserves, together with the associated amounts, would be helpful.
The Deputy Chief Executive explained that, based on current assumptions, £3m would provide approximately 25 days of cash reserves, and agreed to review the calculations for both 25 days and the target of 40 days of cash.

ACTION: The Deputy Chief Executive to review and amend the wording within the Reserves Policy to address the points raised regarding the level of reserves required to meet the College's cash-days requirement, with revised wording to be presented for approval at the May committee meeting.

DECISON: The Reserves Policy was not approved and will be reviewed again at the Committee's May meeting following the requested amendments.

15.2 ANNUAL LEAVE AND SPECIAL LEAVE POLICY - CIC/FR/26/1/12

CIC/FR/26/1/12, Annual Leave and Special Leave Policy, was presented for approval. The Committee's attention was brought to the new Time Off In Lieu section (part1, 14 page 113).

Governors **ASKED** whether there is a one-to-one conversion rate between hours worked and TOIL accrued. It was confirmed that this is the case regardless of when hours were worked.

DECISION: The Committee **APPROVED** the Annual Leave and Special Leave Policy.

16. REVIEW OF MEETING

The Committee agreed the items to be reported to the Board:

- Formal appointment of a nominated Sustainability Governor
- Agreement of the Governor climate action plan.
- Gender Pay Gap report 2025

The committee agreed the following items would be recorded as confidential:

- Curriculum plans & discussion around sale of land

17. MEETING DATES 2025-26

To **NOTE** the forthcoming meeting dates:
Tuesday 12 May 2026
Thursday 2 July

All meetings to take place at 4.30pm at the Colchester Campus