

# Resources, Culture & Impact Committee MINUTES

Date	6 <sup>th</sup> March 2025	Time	15:00-17:00
Venue	Virtual Meeting		
Chair	Andy Davy		

**Membership** – Andy Davy (Committee Chair), Becky Cooke (Committee Vice Chair), Rebecca Conroy (CEO & Principal), Lionel Bunting, Graham Cook, Izzy Cremin, Ashley Heminway, Ian Mehrtens

In Attendance – Hannah Caldwell (Chief Operating Officer), Sam Brasier (Executive Director of Finance), Nick Backstrom (Deputy Principal), Simon Rose (Director of People), Belle Howard (Director of Governance – minutes)

**Quorum:** The meeting was quorate throughout.

Apologies: None

#	Item			
1)	WELCOME, APOLOGIES & DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST 15:02			
	warm weld	come to co	ulture & Impact (RC&I) Committee Chair opened the mee olleagues. The RC&I Committee Chair particularly welcom imon Rose and newly elected Student Governor for Lewe	ed newly appointed
	1.2 There were no apologies as all participants were in attendance.			
	1.3 There were no new declarations of interest received.			
2)	MINUTES	OF THE LA	ST MEETING & MATTERS ARISING	15:06
	2.1 Approval			
	• Go	<ul> <li>Governors considered the minutes of the last meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024.</li> <li>Governors agreed that the minutes were a true and accurate record of what was discussed.</li> <li>2.2 Matters Arising</li> <li>Governors considered the actions arising from the previous meeting and noted that all had been completed, with the following exceptions:</li> </ul>		
	• Go			
	Item	Owner	Action	Due Date
	3.2.1	LC/BC	Explore possible levy transfer options with local	Pending – action
			authority organisations within the East Sussex region,	deferred pending
			for possible management related apprenticeship	onboarding of new



Item	Owner	Action	<b>Due Date</b>
3.2.3	LC	Assess the feasibility of implementing mandatory	Pending – action
		disclosures for DEI information during the candidate	deferred pending
		application process, whilst still ensuring the anonymity	onboarding of new
		of DEI data.	Director of People.

3) FINANCE UPDATE 15:07

#### 3.1 Department for Education (DfE) Funding Update

- The Chief Operating Officer shared the following update:
  - As part of the Government's Autumn Budget, £300m in revenue and £300m in capital funding was announced for colleges. However, there were then extended delays in the DfE communicating specific funding allocations for colleges.
  - A communication had initially been anticipated on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2025, but this was subsequently delayed until 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025. Key updates were as follows:
    - 16-18 Funding Rates these had now been confirmed, alongside an allocation calculation toolkit, enabling colleges to model funding allocations for 2025-26. However, formal allocation statements would not be received until April which was later than previous years and impacted business planning and budget setting milestones for next academic year.
    - In Year Growth Funding there had been a significant increase in the number of 16-19 students in FE for 2024-25, which had exceeded the DfE's expectations. Funding would therefore be based upon a new methodology, which would result in reduced allocations, where colleges were expected to receive ¾ of the funding they had otherwise anticipated. Confirmation of actual amounts would be advised by the end of the month, with funding due to be received in May 2025.
    - Post-16 Budget Grant (April-July 2025) colleges could expect to receive more information on the methodology, individual allocations and conditions of funding in May, with payment expected to (date still to be confirmed).
    - Employer National Insurance (NI) Contributions further information was still awaited from the DfE on employer support for NI contributions. There remained confusion as to whether the support would form part of the Post-16 budget grant or whether this would be handled separately. This information was particularly crucial from a budget planning perspective. Subsequent to the meeting the DfE advised that NI contributions would be funded separately, with further details to be communicated in due course.
- Governors expressed grave concern on this issue and discussion focussed on the following:
  - Forecasting pending receipt of the allocation toolkit from the DfE, it was not yet possible to accurately forecast additional income levels for in year growth. There had also been lower-than-expected recruitment levels for the T Level provision, which was expected to result in a clawback or reduction in associated funding.
  - Student Recruitment Implications moving forward, the Board would need to carefully consider how over subscription should be handled, given that in year growth was not expected to match the funding levels of prior years, creating key ethical considerations for the College, as well as a potential impact to the student experience. It was agreed that this matter would be raised at the Board meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, with appropriate recommendations from the Executive Team.



- Provision Delivery Implications where possible, efforts had focussed upon absorbing additional costs into provision delivery. However, this had been less feasible for students with complex or high needs, or where additional class groups had been necessary. Similarly, the local authorities had an obligation to ensure that an appropriate educational provision was in place for high needs students. Negotiations were ongoing with the local authorities, and particular concern had been expressed regarding a lack of timely communication on this matter by the DfE.
- Broader FE Sector it would be important to consider the Association of Colleges
   (AoC) response to this position, given the significant impact for colleges at a national
   level. It was also noted that an AoC Funding Briefing Note had recently been issued,
   which would inform business planning processes and a refresh of the Five-Year
   Financial Plan moving forward. Furthermore, it was anticipated that this matter
   would be a priority focus area for the forthcoming round of AoC networking events.
- Action 3.1.1 Leverage the forthcoming AoC programme of networking events for Chairs,
   CEO & Principals and Finance Directors to gain additional insights regarding the recent DfE funding update.
- Action 3.1.2 Lobby local Members of Parliament to raise concerns regarding the impact of the recent DfE funding update on the College.
- Action 3.1.3 Include a DfE funding update within the Executive Report to Board, along with appropriate recommendations, with a view to initiate Governor discussion regarding the associated implications for student recruitment at the College moving forward.

#### 3.2 January 2025 Management Accounts

- The Executive Director of Finance presented an update as follows:
  - The Month 6 Management Accounts showed a slight improvement over the previous month's forecast, stabilising at £1.57 million.
  - The forecast for 16-18 income had been adjusted to align with the original allocation, which had assumed a £500,000 shortfall due to T-level clawback, with overall income remaining stable.
  - However, the Management Accounts had not currently reflected increased National Insurance (NI) contributions or the additional funding grant, nor had associated costs been included, due to uncertainty around the funding rules.
  - Pay costs remained at risk but stable in the forecast, with a £500,000 variance over budget, which included an assumption of £250,000 in additional NI costs between April and July. The continued use of agency staff had also contributed to the pay cost variance.
  - The establishment was currently 10 FTE higher than originally budgeted staffing levels, due to the ongoing transition of sessional staff into established teaching staff.
  - Non-pay costs remained stable overall, though exam costs were under pressure due to the increased student cohort. Partnership or subcontracting costs were expected to fully deliver the Adult Skills Fund allocation, as forecast for this year. Non-pay spending was being closely monitored to ensure stability.
  - The cash position at the end of January 2025 was £0.55m and the College continued to be challenged on negative operational cash throughout 2024-25.
  - The Management Accounts currently reported a worst-case scenario position.

IM/RC/ SB

RC/HC

RC/HC



#### 3.3 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- The Executive Director of Finance shared the following update:
  - There had been a moderate improvement in the KPI metrics, with the 'Adjusted Current Ratio' slightly below target.
  - The 'Debt Service Cover Ratio' was trending with a 'Red' RAG rating, due to comparatively low cash levels relative to liabilities over assets, as indicated on the balance sheet.
  - 'Cash Days in Hand' had decreased, whilst 'Debtor and Creditor Days' had remained stable. There had been targeted focus on aged debt, significantly reducing monies owed to suppliers over 30 and 60 days, through careful cash management.
  - 'Covenants Met/Breached' whilst additional DfE funding would enhance the financial position if cash was retained, rising creditors could offset these gains. A key next step would be to determine whether to maintain a lower cashflow position to manage supplier challenges or to increase cash reserves, which would be easier to report but may not fully reflect the improved credit position.
- A robust Governor discussion occurred, focused on the following areas:
  - Financial Health Grade Governors considered how the College was currently
    performing relative to other colleges. Anecdotally, it was noted that whilst some,
    typically smaller colleges were in a stronger position, many college groups were
    significantly struggling from a financial standpoint. Moving forward, it would be
    important to undertake a comparative benchmarking exercise to enable a
    proportional view of the College's current position.
    - Action 3.3.1 Source Financial Health Grade benchmarking data from across the Sussex area, with a view to share additional insights on the College's current financial health position at the next meeting.
  - Creditors there had been some delays in the College fulfilling payments to its suppliers and had resulted in additional pressure on the Finance Team. Pending completion of outstanding payments, two (larger) suppliers had currently placed the College on 'stop' for any additional purchases. That said, most suppliers continued to receive payments in line with existing Direct Debit mandate schedules, with smaller/local suppliers being prioritised for timely payment. Whilst the overall impact had been moderate, some goodwill with the College's suppliers may have been detrimentally impacted.
  - Cost Management further transitioning sessional to fractional contracts may be needed, to enable better management of agency expenditure and exam costs. However, it was clarified that increased levels of spending had followed a recent £120K invoice from an exam supplier, which had caused a timing variance in the Management Accounts. Overall expenditure was being carefully monitored and cost savings, particularly in variable pay, continued to be sought. Furthermore, the current variance in agency costs was due to this not initially being budgeted for in 2024-25, though the full Curriculum Plan and sessional hours had been incorporated. The transition from sessional to established staff had been successful, although exact savings were hard to quantify due to factors like maternity leave and sickness.

SB



- Agency Costs Careful consideration would be given to agency spend as part of the business planning process for 2025-26. Work was currently underway to develop a preferred supplier list as part of ongoing negotiations and a categorisation process. It was tentatively anticipated that this process would result in a 6.5% decrease in agency costs, as well as reduce 'temp-to-perm' fees and induction fees moving forward.
- Staff & Student Impact whilst the current financial position was challenging, particularly in the recruitment of staff for difficult to fill roles, staff had generally responded well to cost reduction efforts. There had been no impact to students from a provision delivery perspective.

#### 3.4 Covenant Breach Waiver Letters & Amendment to Borrowing Facilities

- Governors noted the associated papers, and the Chief Operating Officer shared the following update:
  - The related documentation had now been submitted to the DfE as evidence for the moderation of the College's financial health grade for 2023-24.
  - o Initial feedback from the DfE had been positive, confirming that the College's current position was understood. A final decision was awaited.

#### 4) **2025-26 BUSINESS PLANNING UPDATE**

15:47

#### 4.1 Key Risks & Assumptions

- The Executive Director of Finance directed participants to the associated paper and shared the following update:
  - The annual business planning process is currently underway and on track, with the 2025-26 Budget due to be reviewed at the next meeting and submitted for Board approval on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025.
  - The Five-Year Financial Plan would also be subject to an annual review process, and would reflect changes to assumptions and incorporate key insights arising from the Curriculum planning process.
  - Year 2 of the plan (2025-26) had forecast a £3.1m surplus, though the current forecast now indicated a variance of £1.5m overall. Whilst this was substantial, it was anticipated that this would largely be mitigated by the lagged funding methodology, following significant in year growth in the 16-18 provision for 2024-25.
  - Delays in receipt of the College's allocation toolkit from the DfE had impacted the usual progression of the business planning process.
- Governor discussion focussed on the following key areas:
  - Timetable there had been some early slippage in the business planning schedule by approximately 2 weeks, as a result of the recent Ofsted inspection process.
     However, there had since been targeted focus to bring the schedule back on track.



- 'Failure to Attract Students' Risk due to the unique challenges for the Higher Education (HE) sector, consideration may need to be given to tracking and mitigating against this issue separately from the College's Further Education (FE) provision. Three new degree courses had recently been validated by the University of East Anglia, namely 'Engineering', 'Computing & Games Design' and 'Film & Media'. With fewer students currently opting to move away to university, the College's HE provision was all the more attractive. Moving forward, a key focus area would be upon promoting clear HE progression pathways for students, as well as celebrating the achievements of the College's alumni.
- Pay Costs it was noted that the current 2024-25 forecast represented a £228K increase in administration pay costs. It was clarified that this had been, in part, due to the recent staff pay award, though this variance was relatively moderate against a £9.4m budget.

#### 5) **PEOPLE SERVICES REPORT & DASHBOARD**

16:01

#### **5.1** Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- The Chief Operating Officer presented a summary update on the following areas:
  - Most People & Culture KPIs were currently on track, with either stable or improved positions.
  - The two priority Board KPIs were 'Staff Declaration of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
    (DEI) Data' and '% of Staff PROUD to Work at the College', both of which were
    'Green' RAG rated and above target.
  - Staff Declaration of DEI Data:
    - Further focus on DEI Declarations was still needed as not all protected characteristics were consistently being declared by staff, affecting representation data.
    - Existing staff were more likely to share their DEI information than newer staff members, which was seen as a positive trend. Further actions were being planned to improve staff comfort in sharing DEI data.
  - Established Turnover & Sickness Absence these metrics were currently trending below KPI targets.
  - My Review Check-Ins there had been a slight reduction in the volume of staff check-in conversations being recorded, which had continued to tail off as the year progressed. Moving forward, there would be further focus on making it even easier for managers to record staff check-in conversations.
  - Apprenticeship Levy there had been a 2% reduction in deployment and use. This
    remained a key area of challenge for colleges across the sector.
  - Time to Fill there had been a decrease against this metric, though this still remained above target.
  - New Starter Survey 52 responses had been received as at January 2025, with consistently high results from respondents.
  - 24 employees (12.64 FTE) had now transitioned from sessional to established staff.
  - **Essential Training** additional mop up training sessions were currently being planned, with a view for these to again be held in person.
  - People Services Master Plan an action plan was currently under development.
  - Employment Legislation there had been several key legislative developments, including the new Employment Rights Bill and a further update would follow shortly.



	<ul> <li>Action 5.1.1 – Distribute a copy of the People &amp; Culture presentation slides to RC&amp;I Committee members, along with the meeting minutes.</li> </ul>					
	<ul> <li>Action 5.1.2 – Draft a summary paper outlining the key developments in employment legislation, with a view for the Director of Governance to cascade this to RC&amp;I Committee members.</li> </ul>					
	Governor discussion focussed on the following areas:					
	<ul> <li>DEI Declarations – it was noted that some staff may prefer not to share certain DEI information for individual reasons, and this was not necessarily dependent upon them feeling safe to do so at the College.</li> </ul>					
	<ul> <li>Apprenticeship Levy – this would shortly become the 'Growth &amp; Skills Levy', with greater flexibility on how the funds may be used, including the completion of shorter course programmes. A new Management Level 3/5 apprenticeship qualification was currently being launched, for which there had already been high levels of interest from staff members.</li> </ul>					
	<ul> <li>New Starter Survey – Governors celebrated the high level of staff engagement with the survey and the highly positive results.</li> </ul>					
	<ul> <li>Sexual Orientation Data – a query was raised regarding the presentation of related cross college data. Subsequent to the meeting, it was clarified that 'cross college' related to members of staff who worked at multiple campuses, rather than provide a consolidate view of all campuses.</li> </ul>					
	<ul> <li>Staff Exit Survey – survey question on 'College is well led/managed' had produced varying responses and consideration was given as to whether this area required further focus. It was, however, noted that this perspective was not representative of all staff.</li> </ul>					
6)	RC&I COMMITTEE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 16:19					
	6.1 Progress Update					
	The Executive Director of Finance presented a summary update, which focused on the key strategic priority areas – 'Control of Pay Costs' and 'Utilisation of Pay Budget'.					
	<ul> <li>Action 6.1.1 – Cascade a copy of the RC&amp;I Committee Strategic Priorities presentation to RC&amp;I Committee members.</li> </ul>					
7)	GOVERNANCE MATTERS 16:27					
	7.1 Governance Improvement Plan – Progress Update					
	<ul> <li>The Director of Governance directed participants to the associated paper and shared the following update:</li> </ul>					
	<ul> <li>The Governance Improvement Plan (GIP) reflected the key priorities for 2024-25.</li> <li>The 'Strategic Focus' objective had remained under the purview of the RC&amp;I Committee, responsibility for which was shared with the Board.</li> </ul>					



- Solid progress had been made in the period, in terms of finalising the ESCG Strategic Plan, refreshing the Board's Risk Appetite and the Five-Year Financial Strategy.
- The amber RAG rating was due to the College's current financial health grade position, which would continue to remain a priority focus area for the RC&I Committee.
- Moving forward, deeper discussions would be undertaken at Board level for any GIP areas that had been rated red or amber. The update at the next Board meeting would focus on the 'College Reputation & Community Engagement' objective.
- Governors noted the paper.

#### 8) INTER-COMMITTEE REFERRAL

16:29

#### 8.1 The Implications of Local Government Devolution

- The Chair of the Board shared the following context:
  - The Government had recently approved a proposal to proceed with local government devolution across the Sussex region. This would enable key funding and decision-making powers to be managed at local, rather than national level.
  - A new mayor for the Sussex area would be elected in 2026, along with representatives from East Sussex County Council, West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council, thereby forming a mayoral combined county authority for Sussex.
  - Moving forward, the College would need to proactively consider any resultant implications, as well as engage with the consultation process currently underway.
- The following discussion then occurred:
  - Consultation Process the Executive Team would shortly be drafting a College response to the devolution proposal, ahead of the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2025 deadline. This would also be a priority discussion item at the next Board meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and the forthcoming Strategy Day on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025. Work was underway to gather key insights and best practice from other colleges who had already been through a local government devolution process.
  - Adult Skills Fund the devolution process would create a range of new advantages and opportunities, with greater flexibility and decision-making powers for Sussex in the distribution of funding. In short, a more collaborative funding model and approach would likely better meet the needs of local residents. However, it would be important to guard against the excessive fragmentation of funding, as this could result in a lack of understanding of the broader impacts to organisations as a whole.
  - FE Sussex this organisation was well positioned to capitalise on key relationships within its existing membership as well as with other key partners. There may be value in establishing a federation of key partners across the region, with a view to develop and deliver a new model for local provision. Governors noted that the CEO & Principal had recently been appointed as the new Chair of FE Sussex.
  - Outlook Governors reflected that the key benefits of the devolution process, were not necessarily related to cost savings, but to more effectively meet local skills needs and to maximise opportunities for collaboration and partnership.



### **Policy Review**

#### 9) **POLICIES & KEY DOCUMENTS**

16:39

#### 9.1 Environmental & Sustainability Policy

- Governors noted that this policy was due for joint review with the Audit, Risk & Compliance Committee.
- Governors also noted that relatively minor changes had been made to the policy.
- RESOLUTION The RC&I Committee agreed to recommend the Environmental & Sustainability Policy to the Board for approval.

#### 9.2 Expenses Policy

- Governors noted that there had only been minor updates made to this policy.
- RESOLUTION The RC&I Committee agreed to recommend the Expenses Policy to the Board for approval.

#### 9.3 Health, Safety & Welfare Policy

- Governors noted that this policy was due for joint review with the Audit, Risk & Compliance Committee.
- Governors also noted that there had been comparatively moderate changes to the policy.
- RESOLUTION The RC&I Committee agreed to recommend the Health, Safety & Welfare Policy to the Board for approval.

#### 9.4 Tuition & Fees Policy

- Governors noted that minor amendments had been made to the policy.
- Governor discussion focussed on the following areas:
  - Instances of student non-payment were managed through the College Financial Regulations Policy.
  - It was clarified that costs associated with payments received via credit and debit cards were absorbed by the College, rather than passed onto students. Flexible payment arrangements were in place to support individual student circumstances.
- RESOLUTION The RC&I Committee agreed to recommend the Tuition & Fees Policy to the Board for approval.

#### Close

10) ANY OTHER BUSINESS 16:47

10.1 There were no additional items raised for discussion.



11)	DATE OF NEXT MEETING					
		Governors noted that the next meeting had been scheduled for $19^{th}$ June 2025, 15 h would be based at the Eastbourne Campus.	:00-17:00,			
2)	LIVE	COMMITTEE SELF-ASSESSMENT	16:49			
	12.1 Four responses were received from Governors, as follows:					
	#	ASSESSMENT QUESTION	RESULT			
	1.	Was the agenda sufficiently balanced between core governance business and strategic priorities?	100%			
	2.	Where the papers succinct, with clarity in the information being communicated and the action required by Governors?	100%			
	3.	Did you have all the information you needed to fully participate in discussion and decisions?	100%			
	4.	Was there sufficient time to debate priority items in depth?	100%			
	5.	Were you satisfied that decisions were arrived at in a proper manner?	100%			
	6.	Was the student experience at the heart of decision making?	100%			
	7.	Did the Chair facilitate the meeting effectively, enabling adequate focus on strategic priorities and creating an environment where a range of perspectives were considered?	100%			
	8.	Were opportunities created to invite input from Student and Staff Governors?	100%			
	9.	Any comments or suggestions?	None			
)	CLOSE 16:50					
	13.1	The meeting closed at 16:50.				

## **Action Summary**

Item	Owner	Action	Due Date
3.1.1	IM/RC/ SB	Leverage the forthcoming AoC programme of networking events for Chairs, CEO & Principals and Finance Directors to gain additional insights regarding the recent DfE funding update.	Complete
3.1.2	RC/HC	Lobby local Members of Parliament to raise concerns regarding the impact of the recent DfE funding update on the College.	Complete
3.1.3	RC/HC	Include a DfE funding update within the Executive Report to Board, along with appropriate recommendations, with a view to initiate Governor discussion regarding the associated implications for student recruitment at the College moving forward.	Complete
3.3.1	SB	Source Financial Health Grade benchmarking data from across the Sussex area, with a view to share additional insights on the College's current financial health position at the next meeting.	In Progress
5.1.2	ВН	Distribute a copy of the People & Culture presentation slides to RC&I Committee members, along with the meeting minutes.	Complete
5.1.2	SR/BH	Draft a summary paper outlining the key developments in employment legislation, with a view for the Director of Governance to cascade this to RC&I Committee members.	Complete
6.1.1	ВН	Cascade a copy of the RC&I Committee Strategic Priorities presentation to RC&I Committee members.	Complete