The City of Liverpool College

Meeting of the Board held on 3rd February 2026, 1.30pm

Present: Chisom Akwukwaegbu (student), Louise Barry, Saonli Basu (staff), Elaine Bowker (Principal), Tony Cobain (Chair), Paul Coyle, Cheryl Denny, Matty Hughson (staff), Suaad Hussain, Sian Taylor (Vice Chair).

In Attendance: Julie Barnes (Deputy Chief Executive), Neil Borg-Olivier (VP Curriculum Development and Innovation), Damien Kilkenny (Deputy Principal), Christine Lenderyou (Clerk), Gill Williams (Vice Principal Student Development and Participation).

For part of meeting: Aamir Butt (Director of Student Support and Wellbeing).

26.1 Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from: Viv Lacey, Nicola O'Donoghue, Ruth Slater, Athaliah Timile,

Matty Hughson indicated an early departure due to student commitments.

Quorum: The meeting was quorate for standard business (7 required) and for confidential business (6 required).

26.2 Minutes, Actions, and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record subject to the Director of IT confirming the technical points covered were an accurate reflection of his presentation.

The Board reviewed the actions tracker and noted progress. No additional matters were raised beyond items already on the agenda.

26.3 Spotlight on: The College for Business

Deferred.

26.4 People, Policy, Partnerships

Staff

The Principal updated the Board on recent constructive meetings with local union representatives and the regional UCU lead. The College had offered a 4% pay award this year, which in addition to increasing the upper points of salary scales for skills-shortage roles would see some staff receiving increases of around 8%. The Principal stated that, across a sample of colleges discussed with AOC and peers, starting and top-of-scale salaries at TCOLC were among the highest, and likely "the best in the country" according to an independent source. Given the need to manage resources carefully, subsequent discussions with UCU had focussed on workload rather than pay. [Redacted] Governors stressed the need for consistent performance and effective deployment of resources as well as noting the increasing accountability via Ofsted for staff wellbeing.

The Deputy Principal would bring an update to the next Board of the recommendations which had come out of the recent exercise to examine the new Ofsted framework which governors had been involved in.

Partnerships and external positioning

Following engagement with the Police and Crime Commissioner, Merseyside Police liaison had been "excellent"; a named officer was in place and a joint-funded post was being explored. Work with the City Council safer-streets team is strong.

Employer and sponsor relationships continue to expand, including sponsorships for Liverpool Waters. The new partnerships team was now operational, and was expected to accelerate activity.

The Board endorsed an intention to bid for the Clean Energy TEC. Learning from the Construction TEC bid included the need for broader political alignment and partners across all North West sub-regions rather than just local colleges, and ensuring sector-specific elements and volumes of provision are clear in data, although it was noted the criteria which had been an obstacle for the College's bid had now been removed. The VPCDI advised that engineering achievements at the College were in the top ten of colleges nationally and the College was the largest provider of certain heat-pump/refrigeration apprenticeships which strengthened the bid. The Board were informed of some colleges in the North West which had indicated they would be supporting the College's bid.

Adult funding and devolution remained an issue for the College. Adult rates remained at 2008 levels and while it was accepted that the LCR's funding had remained static, the impact on the College was significant with 16-18 effectively subsidising adult provision which was unhelpful given the increasing needs of the 16-18 cohort. [Redacted]

26.5 Curriculum, Quality and Student Performance

The Principal provided an overview, stating that attendance was the greatest priority. Intensive actions have yielded only marginal gains to date, with attendance at English and maths exerting the greatest drag. The college had 5,500+ English/maths resit entries this year (c. +800 additional 16-18 students last year; +450 this year), which increases support demand. The new inspection framework rightly set out expectations about distance travelled but there would be limited scope to demonstrate the challenges specific to the College.

Value-added and high grades must improve; achievement rates are broadly good but the distribution is not yet where it needed to be. Academic Studies (A-levels) was a persistent challenge.

Quality Improvement Plan

The detailed position was set out by the VPCDI. Retention was higher than last year overall although adults were slightly behind prior predictions. Attendance was lower than the same point last year, largely due to English and maths. Daily deep dives focused on: (i) quality of Teaching Leaning and Assessment; (ii) effectiveness and deployment of in-class support; (iii) consistent performance management.

In terms of value-added, 62% of students were currently at or above target versus a 70% expectation; predicted ALPS from mock exams would be presented at the next meeting after marking had been completed.

Retention for A levels this year was stronger in year one than it had been the previous year (18 withdrawals compared to 54 at the same point last year) and 97% retention but legacy issues meant retention in year two was currently at 71%, [redacted]. Ensuring all remaining students passed was a priority action.

Staffing difficulties had affected the Foundation English and maths experience. Mitigations included the teaching-manager model outlined earlier and a deployable full-time specialist in each subject for targeted small-group work and exam-grade uplift.

Governors queried whether attendance deterioration was cohort-driven versus provision-driven. The Principal and Deputy Principal stated that national attendance fragility, particularly in Liverpool schools – and this was endorsed by a governor with relevant professional expertise - and the heavy mix of former school non-attenders was a factor but stressed that the College was accountable for a consistently high-quality experience and stable staffing to secure attendance and outcomes. While attendance at English and maths was a significant pull, attendance across the College needed to be higher. Governors took assurance from this firm commitment and refusal to lower expectations. The student governor was emphatic that teaching needed to be engaging for students to consistently attend and this was echoed by another governor citing the importance of students "locking in" early in the session, regardless of length. The Principal highlighted that it would be useful to obtain student feedback in response to the measures being put in place.

Knowing students' needs as soon as possible had been a long-standing aim, with new strategies being added each year. Ways of increasing pre-admissions intelligence via contact with schools and parent were being tested, with the aim of identifying poor attendance or school refusal far earlier and having tailored support in place in September rather than mid-way through term one.

The importance of an individualised approach was emphasised with rapid case by case work being seen as essential. The challenges of such a resource-intensive approach were clear when applied to the volume of students concerned. Inclusion boards had commenced, streaming would be refined further and both stretch and catch up were targeted at specific students.

Across the risk themes, two (exam provision and digital) were progressing positively although all four risk themes would remind rated "high" due to the scale and provision mix.

Aamir Butt (Director of Student Support and Wellbeing) joined the meeting.

<u>Safeguarding</u>

The DoSS&W advised that while overall referrals were down by c4%, the complexity had increased and 69% of referrals related to abuse categories. Full details were provided in the report. Knife-related issues had increased percentage wise but remained very small in absolute numbers.

External referrals had increased from 498 to 616; high thresholds for acceptance of a referral meant the College was regularly having to use escalation processes and even when a referral was accepted the College was having to support students while arrangements were put into place. This meant that that staff roles were changing in response to the levels of support required.

The Friday "triage" sessions had continued, with the safeguarding team and progress leaders participating. Ms Barry had observed a session in her capacity as safeguarding link governor and had been able to take substantial assurance from the skill and professionalism demonstrated by all staff.

The DoSS&W echoed the point made earlier regarding the named police contact and the data sharing agreement which had improved the College's ability to keep students safe. This was part of a wider strategy of utilising external expertise, for example, external speakers had educated students on how the chances of them being a victim of knife crime increased by 70-80% if they carried a knife. The Principal added that the police had been absolutely clear that any student carrying a knife must be excluded from college and while it wasn't a significant problem at the College, governors were assured that an informed, robust approach was taken.

Governors were acutely aware that staff were dealing with difficult issues and needed support themselves. The DoSS&W advised that staff were given monthly supervisory sessions, akin to counselling, and could request further support too along with ad hoc support following serious incidents. In terms of workforce resilience the DoSS&W outlined that some realigning of roles was necessary so that the most skilled and experienced staff were able to work on the most serious cases.

Safeguarding had been subject to a review to ensure it aligned with the expectations of the Ofsted framework and while the final report was being prepares, the DoSS&W was confident that the area met or exceeded expectations.

Aamir Butt (Director of Student Support and Wellbeing) left the meeting.

26.6 Corporate Performance

The Principal summarised that the College continued to project Outstanding financial health for 2025/26 even without taking into account in-year growth funding although investment in staffing and the estate was required. Liverpool Waters required further investment and the rest of the estate was due a refresh.

As mentioned earlier, static adult funding rates continued to cause concern and the Board would need to consider the strategic implications if nothing changed.

Risk Register

The DCEx highlighted there had been minor updates since the December Board meeting including adding workload agreement references, removing some actions (exams/apprenticeships), and updating to reflect Ofsted framework changes. The risk register was noted.

Management Accounts – Period 5

The full re-forecast had been postponed pending confirmation of in-year growth (expected, but not yet notified). Known adjustments had been included such as additional NI grant (above budget), recognition of prior-year Adult Skills over-delivery, and correction of a partner's over-estimated HE partner income (matching expenditure removed).

Although it had not been accepted by teaching staff yet, the 4% pay award had been accrued for year to date to avoid understating staff cost ratios.

College HE income was projected to be £400k below budget. Numerous new roles discussed earlier in the meeting had not been included; they would be mitigated in-year by underspends and recruitment lead-times but will raise the 2026/27 base.

If in-year 16-18 growth was paid at 50%, indicative additional income would be c£1.6m.

The College would be subject to a funding assurance audit in March (sample w/c 9 March; completion by 31 March). There was always the possibility of a clawback of funding although the strong systems within the College minimised the risk.

The Board acknowledged that the investment required to support strategic aims and that this needed to be balanced against financial sustainability. The DCEx confirmed that a full re-forecast will come to the Board as soon as funding was confirmed (or if there was a prolonged delay then she would use reasonable assumptions).

26.7 Update from Committee Chairs/Link Governors

There were no new updates from the committees. In addition to Ms Barry's early update as safeguarding link governor, Ms Taylor provided an update with regards to her roles as Health and Safety and Estates/Sustainability links. Ms Taylor had received assurance that the Sustainability Action Plan was being refreshed (baselines, relevance, curriculum embedding). Health & Safety audits continued with an emphasis on re-embedding roles/responsibilities and consistent risk-assessment practiceM. The Chair raised two issues which he had observed for forwarding on to the Estates team.

26.8 Any Other Business

Governors requested that they receive structure diagrams regularly. **Action: CL**

26.9 Confidentiality of Items

The Chair confirmed confidentiality for designated items per GP9 9.4.1: items which were commercially sensitive/subject to consultation or referred to third parties/individuals would remain confidential.

26.10 Date and Time of Next Meeting

Wednesday, 18 March 2026, 1.30pm

The student governor and all staff with the exception of the Principal and Clerk left the meeting. Quorum confirmed.

26.11 Confidential Item

Redacted

Meeting closed: c. 3.57pm.