The City of Liverpool College

Meeting of the Board held on 9th December 2025), 1.30pm

Present: Chisom Akwukwaegbu (student), Saonli Basu (staff), Elaine Bowker (Principal), Tony Cobain (Chair), Paul Coyle, Danny Harvey (Acting Chair), Matty Hughson (staff), Suaad Hussain, Viv Lacey, Ruth Slater, Peter Tavernor, Sian Taylor (Vice Chair), Athaliah Timile (student).

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: Chris Phillips, Director of IT.

25.48 Welcome, Apologies, Declarations of Interest

As Tony Cobain was attending remotely due to a chest infection, the Board agreed that Danny Harvey should chair the meeting. The Acting Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Louise Barry, Cheryl Denny, and Nicola O'Donoghue. Viv Lacey would join after the reappointment item (subject to her reappointment being confirmed).

25.49 Minutes, Actions, and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record subject to the date being corrected. The Board noted the status of actions. The safeguarding action would be completed after a sector-wide review of inspection approaches to safeguarding. The DCEx confirmed the DfE provider dashboard were included in appendices to the Finance paper. [Redacted]. No further matters were raised.

25.50 Reappointments/Completion of Terms

The Board approved the re-appointment of Moin Patala for a second full term as per the recommendation in the paper provided. As Viv Lacey had been a Board member since 2013, the Board weighed up her contribution and engagement plus current Board composition against the longevity of her service and agreed to re-appoint Viv Lacey, with the Clerk to explore extending the term from one year to two given current vacancies and churn, with most members being in their first term.

The Board recorded its formal and heartfelt thanks to Peter Tavernor on this retirement from the Board after a long period of distinguished service. The Chair and Board placed on record appreciation for Peter's contribution to learners, leadership and governance, and his continued commitment.

In his parting remarks, Peter reflected on the transformation led by the Principal from a legacy of an under-performing college to one recognised nationally for added value and learner gain; urged the College to evidence learning gain linked to economic inclusion; and cautioned the Board against complacency but emphasised that they should be proud of the college they were leading.

Dr Tavernor would remain on Group Finance Committee as a co-opted member but was standing down from Performance and Quality Committee which would be chaired by Cheryl Denny going forwards; members were invited to consider joining given its importance.

25.51 Spotlight on: Cyber Security

Chris Phillips, Director of IT, joined the meeting at this point.

[Redacted]

25.52 Performance Dashboard

The DCEx reported that finance KPIs were broadly in line with last meeting: the College remained on track against budget, with sickness down in teaching staff and overall turnover slightly lower year-on-year. The VPCDI highlighted utilisation was temporarily lower in term one (new teachers in training, remission allocations, and sickness not counted in utilisation). Average class size was 17.7, with targeted splits or co-teaching where groups exceed thresholds. Attendance was a concern this year - particularly in English and maths - where it was 3–4 percentage points below last year's position; targeted actions were being implemented and these would be discussed later in the meeting.

25.53 People, Policy, Partnerships

The Principal started by saying the College's finances were strong and there was potentially a further £1.6m income to be received in-year. While the College's resilience increased each year, the cash days position remained a risk which needed to be managed. The Principal was concerned that the strong financial headlines didn't fully capture the reality and gave a misleading picture of what was affordable in terms of pay and had faced challenge from the unions in this regard.

The Principal briefed on continued growth in 16–18 enrolments, the associated support pressures (learning support, counselling, behaviour, 5,500 students taking foundation English and maths), and the broader partnership agenda.

[Redacted]

In terms of partnerships, the College continued to engage with businesses and stakeholders. Monthly dinners were held with guest speakers - most recently the council leader - and attendance from key employers in the region. The Principal reported on a recent visit to Dublin with the British Irish Trade Alliance (BITA) which had generated sponsorship for projects.

The new Construction Academy at Liverpool Waters continued to be a strength for the College, providing a realistic environment for students to work in. Construction of houses on site was planned which would be expensive but would significantly enhance the student experience, giving opportunities for both retrofitting and construction.

The Board were delighted to note that Dr Lynn Borthwich (Head of School for Engineering and Logistics) had received the Maggi Toft Award for Women in Technology.

In terms of national policy, there was much to digest with qualification reform continuing; the College would need to monitor developments carefully as current indications were suggesting a mismatch between cohort needs and the planned reforms. The recent budget had highlighted SEND spending but it remained to be seen how this would be realised in FE. £820m had been announced for the Youth Guarantee and £725m for the Growth and Skills Levy; further updates would be brough to the Board in due course.

The Board thanked the Principal for her detailed update.

The Board agreed to reorder the agenda and take the corporate performance items next.

25.54 Corporate Performance

Group Audit Committee Annual Report

The report detailed the Committee's work over the past year and had been previously been considered by the Group Audit Committee. Subject to an amendment to the committee attendance, the report was approved for submission to the DfE, to accompany the financial statements.

Annual Financial Statements & Audit Findings, Letters of Representation, Regularity Questionnaire

The DCEx summarised a clean external audit (RSM) with minor control recommendations (funding audit sampling trivial adjustments; procurement policy tightening for agency staff). The pension position had moved from liability to a restricted asset (presented at £0). The regularity questionnaire confirmed compliance. The subsidiary (SharEd) required a letter of support from the College to be signed as its income derived from College recharges. Members of the Group Audit Committee and Group Finance Committee had received the financial statements and audit findings directly from the auditors. On the basis that the information was entirely consistent with the Board's understanding of the previous year, the Board approved all documents and authorised signatures.

SharEd AGM (observer appointment):

The Board appointed Danny Harvey as observer to the AGM. The AGM was convened in-session to ensure quorum: prior minutes were approved; annual accounts to 31 July 2025 were accepted; no dividends recommended; directors confirmed; RSM and Validera were acknowledged as the financial statements auditors and internal auditors respectively.

Finance Update (including P3 accounts) & DfE Governor Dashboard

The DCEx advised that, after incorporating the 4% pay award, staff costs were c.70.3% of income; overall forecast remained on budget with a formal re-forecast scheduled for the new year and new posts since budget approval to be included. As highlighted by the Principal, there was significant growth for 16-18. Adult recruitment had also been strong. HE recruitment continued to decline year on year. Loans and free courses for jobs were in line with budget. 16–18 in-year growth funding from DfE was expected at c50% of the formula uplift (College estimate c.£1.6m), with c.£3.2m plus inflation anticipated in 2026/27 based on confirmed growth and rate uplifts. Cash days remained tight but were improving with consistent growth.

The Board noted that the current forecast would generate an outstanding financial health score and that the assumptions used were prudent with the cash position (and capital phasing) were being monitored accordingly.

DfE governor dashboard

The Board noted rising income and a stable EBITDA as well as the relatively high staff-cost ratio which was consistent with strategic investment in front-line delivery. The dashboard provided independent confirmation of the information previously received by the Board. The Chair of the Group Finance Committee advised that in the meeting the previous week he had asked for – and received - clarification on both the cash position and EBITDA as it looked as if both would decline sharply, but he had received assurance regarding the assumptions used and the phasing of income/expenditure; the DCEx agreed that it reflected a prudent position.

25.55 Curriculum, Quality and Student Performance

Self-Assessment Report (SAR)

The Board reviewed the 2024/25 SAR. As it was retrospective, it was framed against the legacy Ofsted criteria but mapped to the new 2025 framework. Overall quality remained "approaching outstanding"; Personal Development was outstanding. Three schools had been assessed as outstanding, with five good, one requires improvement and one inadequate. Adult provision (ESOL and Access) had strengthened further; Engineering moved from Good to Outstanding. Academic Studies remained inadequate on two-year exam measures, albeit with strong first-year improvements that will feed through this year. Contribution to Skills was self-assessed as exceptional under the new framework; Safeguarding "meets the standard" under the new framework which required colleges to show how they proactively kept students safe.
The Board discussed Ofsted's new framework (five-point scale: urgent improvement/needs attention/expected/strong/exceptional), the 'all students, all the time, everywhere' emphasis, and agreed that it was sensible to map against the new framework.

The Board noted the evidence base within the SAR and that the information was consistent with that received over the previous year and duly approved submission by 31 January 2026.

Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs)

The Board approved the thematic QIP approach (shifting from school-based to risk-themed reporting), with immediate actions focused on attendance and English/maths.

Attendance KPIs were agreed on a milestone basis [redacted], recognising a cohort with lower starting attendance – or no attendance at all for the College's sizeable number of previously home schooled students - and the need to evidence individual learner progress. There was a lengthy discussion around balancing aspiration with realism and the difficulties establishing students' starting points because their previous school attendance wasn't readily available; while the mutual advantages of a data sharing protocol between the College and schools were clear and some progress had been made, it was not a situation which would be resolved in the immediate future. There was consensus that improving attendance continued to be a key priority for the College and setting targets based on reality did not detract from that.

Immediate interventions included: consistent College-wide attendance practices (ownership of the whole study programme; curriculum staff in first 10 minutes of English/maths; escorting students to return; targeted catch-up using under-utilised staff from January); external literacy curriculum support; and proposals to re-shape Level 1/Foundation pathways with wraparound ALS/youth-work support to ensure readiness for mainstream provision.

Retention remained broadly on track so far but there was some variation by school with this being particularly evident in some two-year cohorts. Growth in two-year programmes in Business, Professional Studies, Engineering, Green Technologies, and Logistics was noted and the impact would continue to be analysed.

Overall attendance stood at [redacted] one percentage point below the same point last year, driven largely by English and maths dips. Academic Studies showed strong improvement and was among the highest-attending for English & maths; Engineering and adult English & maths also reported positive attendance trends.

Governors asked for clarity on schools with lowest English & maths attendance and how this had been specifically responded to. Three schools within the Faculty of Culture and Visitor Economy were flagged as lowest-attending. Management had already re-tasked SLT leads so that Heads of School reported directly to two additional SLT sponsors for day-to-day operational support and heightened spotlight on attendance, classroom quality, and student progress.

Core approaches adopted across the College included reinforcing curriculum ownership of the entire programme including maths and English and curriculum staff attending the first 10 minutes of maths and English sessions with their groups to demonstrate integration. Successful initiatives from the school of Engineering and Logistics had been deployed in Academic Studies with evidence of impact on attendance. Missed content was reviewed and under utilised staff were tasked with individual or small group catch up.

Governors welcomed the discussion around Level 1 readiness and the strategies being used, notably the designing of a foundation model both for immediate support and next year's curriculum. The model emphasised wrap-around support (readiness, professional behaviours, communication, socialisation) alongside curriculum changes and proposals were due to be received by the Executive before term-end.

The Board were informed of risk-based interventions in schools with a sharp focus from SLT.

The Board approved the KPIs within the QIP and the thematic approach.

<u>Single Equality Scheme</u>

The SES was presented with an explanation provided of how it was a public sector duty to publish. The latest iteration had incorporated legal definitions throughout and only minor changes from the prior version. The Board considered the SES as comprehensive and well-constructed, demonstrating transparency and a commitment to equality. Governors sought and received clarification that publication timelines and statutory expectations were met and approved the report for publication.

25.56 Estates Strategy

The draft strategy outlined improved condition and suitability across sites, space norms aligned to mid-benchmark given higher learner numbers, and opportunities for evening/weekend utilisation. The Board noted Liverpool Waters Construction Academy's success and the requirement for modest capital to remove generator dependency and meet sponsor expectations. The appropriateness of a 20-year plan was challenged; the DCEx confirmed that and the climate action plan timelines would be refined before publication. There was some wider discussion around how the strategic plan depended on the estates strategy being implemented, and how the College gauged community and student needs. The strategy would go to SLT for review and subject to there being no significant changes agreed at SLT, the Board approved the strategy on the basis that it was appropriately structured.

25.57 Risk

The Board received an update on changes made to the risk register since the previous meeting.

- Risk ratings: Finance risk had been reduced, while IT risk had increased.
- [Redacted]

New actions had been added to address these risks going forward.

The Ofsted risk had also been updated in line with earlier discussions, and English and maths risk had been revised to reflect exam-related issues. The VPCDI had introduced new controls to strengthen oversight.

Governors sought assurance on whether the broadened staffing risk captured both recruitment and workload pressures and received confirmation that both were included and actively monitored. Further detail was provided on the recruitment strategy with a major recruitment campaign planned for the coming month, to be held at a local cinema. The campaign aimed to attract dual professionals—individuals with industry expertise who could also teach, particularly in areas such as foundation maths. The event would include HR staff and current dual professionals sharing their experiences through video content. The approach was described as a multi-faceted campaign designed to address the increasingly difficult recruitment environment. Governors queried whether the campaign would be sufficiently broad to attract candidates from diverse sectors. Management responded that the event was designed to appeal to professionals from arts and other industries, leveraging the College's success with dual professionals to strengthen the talent pipeline. Governors were invited to attend the event.

25.58 Committee Updates

Most items from the recent round of Committee meetings had been covered by the agenda, but draft minutes would shortly be added to Governor Hub.

The Performance and Quality Committee would be chaired by Cheryl Denny following Peter Tavernor's departure; governors were again invited to express interest in joining to strengthen membership.

25.59 Confidentiality of Items

Items which were commercially sensitive/subject to consultation or referred to third parties/individuals would remain confidential.

25.60 Date and Time of Next Meeting

3rd February 2026, 1.30pm

The Acting Chair thanked everyone for attending and drew the meeting to a close.