

Hills Road Sixth Form College

Minutes of the Corporation Meeting: 5 February 2025 (Ordinary Business)

Members Present Kevin Taylor (Chair of the Corporation), Jane Sterling (Vice-Chair of the Corporation), Adrian Clark, Bruno Cotta (Parent Member), Paula Heaney, Anthony Omo, Katie Paton (Staff Nominee Member), Carrie Anne Philbin, Jonathan Russell (Agenda 6-15), Matthew Smalley (Staff Nominee Member), Charlotte Southgate (Student Nominee Member), Alison Taylor, Jo Trump (Principal), Evren Uygun, Richard Westcott (Agenda 7-15).

Governance Services Robert Smith (Governance Professional)

In Attendance Laragh Jeanroy (Independent Chair of the Audit Committee: Agendum 6), Ian Pryer (Deputy Principal), Saira Hanif (Chief Finance Officer), Rachel Hooper (Chief Operating Officer), Ali Kirkman (Vice-Principal: Staff & Student Learning), Tim Lomas (Vice-Principal: Student Progression & Support), Theo Gregory-Rabie (Student Observer).

1 Apologies for Absence & Quoracy

Apologies for absence had been received from the following member of the Corporation: Mark Dawe.

The meeting was quorate.

2 Declarations of Interest

Reference is made to Minute 2 of the Corporation meeting held on 11 September 2024, the circumstances of which continue to apply.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting: 10 December 2024

It was noted that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 had received approval by the Chair of the Corporation for circulation.

The minutes were approved as a correct record of the business transacted and *prima facie* evidence of the proceedings to which they relate.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting: 10 December 2024

Minute 4: the link to the Governor Link Scheme spreadsheet had been re-circulated.

Minute 8: the draft form of the College's formal response to the East-West Rail consultation had been made available to members prior to submission.

Minute 12: the Governance Professional had instructed the transfer of the IT Disaster Recovery Plan to the category of policies approved by the Principal (or as delegated), and the action had been confirmed by the responsible member of College staff.

There were no other matters arising except as reported elsewhere in these minutes, or for the initial attention of committees.

5 Chair's Action Report

None.

6 Audit Committee Report

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024 approved by the Independent Chair of the Committee for circulation to members were received, together with a report on its business.

The following documents were also received:

the Board Assurance Framework (BAF) and Operational Risk Register, following review by the Committee;

the College Risk Dashboard, following review by the Committee; and

the draft Risk Management Policy, following review and recommendation by the Committee.

The Independent Chair of the Committee reported that the specially commissioned internal audit review of Safer Recruitment had resulted in strong assurance being given in relation to College practices and procedures, and will be considered in detail at the meeting of the Audit Committee to be held on 26 February (for report at the 26 March Corporation meeting).

The Corporation's safeguarding lead governors, Jonathan Russell and Jane Sterling, also confirmed from their observations that the Single Central Record is being fully maintained on a timely basis.

The draft Risk Management Policy was approved by the Corporation.

7 Adult Education (AE)

A paper prepared by the Deputy Principal was received and discussed.

It was reported that the following difficulties had affected performance, including financial performance:

the long-term ill-health absence of one staff member from March 2024 onwards, and the significant absence of another staff member throughout 2023-24, though the team is now restored to full strength;

reduced income from counselling courses owing to fewer students, though numbers are recovering;

the ongoing challenge of online competition in certain segments of the market such as foreign languages (including online self-led courses);

higher than expected costs, owing to the 6.5% pay agreement; and

limited access to quality monthly financial information to track performance, though this is now being addressed by the introduction of the IRIS Financial reporting system.

It was also reported that

a new database, alongside a new website, had been introduced to facilitate access to online booking;

the portfolio of AE courses is being reviewed, with an intention to develop new courses where there is demonstrable demand and to close courses that are uneconomic; and

the scope for providing online courses is being explored.

In 2023-24, the activity had shown a loss after the allocation of overhead charges. Although a deficit had been anticipated owing to the lingering effects of the public health emergency, it was noted that its extent (£50,000 greater than budgeted) had been principally driven by the level of the pay settlement in excess of the College's relevant contingency provision.

The range of actions, including the level of the payroll contingency, taken in the 2024-25 year to address adverse financial performance was noted.

It was agreed that a further update be provided to the governing body in due course.

8 Principal's Update

A written update was received and considered.

An appendix to the report set out the Key Performance Indicators (Risk Dashboard) updated from the iteration viewed at the meeting of the Audit Committee.

Applications for 2025 enrolment are close to 2024 levels, and indicative of the rising demographic.

Industrial action in relation to the differential treatment of academies and sixth form colleges in terms of public funding of payroll settlements had been suspended.

Ofsted had announced an inspection visit to take place imminently – though not immediately, owing to the planned Y13 mock examinations and the originally proposed industrial action days. Inspectors are expected to arrive later this term or early next term.

9 Application to the Department for Education (Academy Order)

A summary report, prepared by the Principal, was received together with:

the submitted application;

the accompanying financial projection; and

a letter from the Chair of the Corporation to the DfE Regional Director (East of England) confirming that the College will have completed its loan repayment at the point at which it seeks to become an academy (1 September 2025).

It was reported that the Chair of the Corporation had received a letter (dated 3 February 2025) from the DfE Regional Director (East of England) stating *inter alia* that:

the College's application for academy status had been approved, and will be effective from 1 September 2025;

the competent authority will be Hills Education Trust Ltd (HET Ltd);

the assets of the Corporation will be transferred to the stewardship of HET Ltd as from the effective date;

the dissolution process (Corporation of Hills Road Sixth Form College) must comply with statutory requirements (including conducting a consultation exercise with prescribed interests);

a funding agreement and Articles of Association (for which a model document exists) will need to be agreed with the DfE, and a number of other prescribed documents must be submitted for DfE review.

It was further reported that:

a consultation website and process will be created that will subsist for six weeks – the Principal expressed confidence that the period (one week) allowed for reading responses and producing a report on the consultation will be adequate for the purpose;

staff had been informed of the application submission at a recorded briefing on 21 January 2025, with very few questions raised, making it difficult to gauge where areas of concern (if any) might lie; and

the College will offer drop-in opportunities during the consultation period for staff to raise queries informally.

Senior staff were congratulated on the efficient and effective handling of the application process leading to its positive outcome.

10 East-West Rail Project

A paper prepared by the Chief Operating Officer was received and discussed.

The paper set out details concerning the project timeline and potential impact, subject to negotiation, on College land (including the College car park, the Sports & Tennis Centre and the Luard Road playing fields), and noted matters relating to the various interests concerned in the latter.

Relevant parties, including the College, had submitted responses to the public consultation by the deadline of 24 January 2025, and an initial meeting had taken place with the engineer responsible for the Cambridge section of the works to discuss the College's concerns.

It was also noted that, because of the internal checking processes of the project, the designers and engineers must finalise their outline plans by not later than the end of April 2025.

Further discussions, including site visits, between staff of the project company and College representatives are due to take place, in relation to which the College is being professionally advised.

11 Strategic Plan Report

A paper setting out initial proposals on how progress against the current Strategic Plan be reported was received and discussed.

It was noted that progress should be evidenced without replicating information already contained within the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), but that the document should be reasonably straightforward to update and use as a summary measure, allowing a high-level view plus the facility for detailed scrutiny if specific issues are of interest.

Three levels of information are proposed: Aspects (defined by the Strategic Plan), Priorities (similarly) and Measures (data that show progress on each Aspect).

Aspects of the Strategic Plan are completed by achieving the Priorities, all of which are already given. The proposal is that Priorities are assessed by Measures, which are a collection of appropriate, individual data sources that combine to afford a reasonable judgement of progress.

With specific reference to Aspects, it is further proposed that:

individual Priority scores are the sum of their weighted Measures;

Priorities may themselves be weighted in terms of the contribution they make to achieving the relevant Aspect; and

each Priority is owned, usually by a CST member.

With specific reference to Measures, it is further proposed that they:

are taken collectively to demonstrate progress;

can be weighted so as to have variable impacts on achieving the relevant Priority;

should be agreed and remain consistent throughout the period, as far as possible, thereby accepting that linear measures may be green or red for over an extended period;

are owned by the manager most able to control its score; and

are updated according to their individual data requirements, ensuring that the document is always 'live' with the best data available.

It was noted that some Measures will only be assessable by the exercise of professional judgement (e.g. relationship building). Provided this is recorded, and these more qualitative aspects are not substantial across all Priorities, they can still function as sources of assurance.

It was further noted that behind each Measure there will be an Excel spreadsheet for the owner of the Priority to record details of why and how the Measure has been created, why the RAG ratings are set as they are, and whether qualitative judgements have contributed to the score and on what basis.

Many of the Priorities are replicated, similar to, or are supported by data used in the QIP. The matching analysis between the two reports is not yet complete, but the intention would be to use QIP data, where appropriate, in the Strategic Plan progress report.

It was proposed that the Report be presented for formal consideration by the governing body on a termly basis.

The Corporation approved the proposals in principle, and authorised CST and Directors to attempt to populate the Measures and consider their scoring and weighting.

12 Departmental Quality Visits: English Media & Film, Music

The reports were received and considered.

The generally positive tenor of both reports was noted, as were measures to further develop the quality and efficacy of the student experience in the departments concerned.

13 Management Accounts 2024-25 (to Period 4: 30 November 2024)

A report, prepared by the Chief Finance Officer, was received and considered.

It was noted that:

a revised financial forecast for the year had been prepared from Period 4 onwards, but that it does not entail a re-formulation of the annual estimates of income and expenditure, and is forecast to meet the previously approved Group outcome for the year;

capital expenditure is projected to meet the relevant approved budget;

the year-end cash position is forecast to show a £24,000 inflow;

the Financial Health Category (based on the original three measures at the head of the KPIs table) is forecast to be "Good" at the end of the year: and

the Free Reserves position in November was £1.347m (i.e. below the threshold of £1.5m).

It was further noted that:

meeting the pay rise of 3.5% for the period from September to March from the College's own funds will absorb most of the remaining pay contingency, leaving no provision for long term ill-health and maternity cover - the revised financial forecast assumes the pay grant to arrive in April 2025 (the 3.5% pay settlement backdated to September 2024 being likely paid from existing College funds in February 2025, with the uplift to 5.5% happening from April 2025);

the current pay proposals by the National Joint Committee had been included in the pay forecast;

adverse income variances had principally arisen because of the timing of EHCP grants; and

adverse expenditure variances had principally arisen because of staff costs (cover for sickness, paternity leave, jury service) and minor building expenses.

It was confirmed that the timing of the loan repayment to Barclays Bank is not yet reflected in the cash flow forecast. Repayment may be made as a lump sum or as a series of interim payments, dependent on cashflow projections.

14 Governance Professional's Announcements

None.

15 Indicative Dates of Governing Body Meetings 2025-26

The following indicative dates were noted. They will be submitted for formal approval by the Board of Trustees (Hills Education Trust Limited) in due course.

Wednesday 17 September 2025 (6.30pm)

Thursday 6 November 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 10 December 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 4 February 2026 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 25 March 2026 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 13 May 2026 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 24 June 2026 (6.30pm)

16 Dates and Times of Remaining Corporation Meetings 2024-25

The following approved dates and times were noted:

Wednesday 26 March 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 14 May 2025 (6.30pm)

Wednesday 25 June 2025 (6.30pm)

15 Any Other Competent Business

None.

