MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF LEICESTER COLLEGE CORPORATION:

SEARCH AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 15 JANUARY 2026

Present:	Danielle Gillett (Chair)	
	Shabir Ismail	
	Chan Kataria	
	Steve Munro	
	Jackie Rossa	
	Sophie Strevens-Robinson	
In Attendance:	Louise Hazel	Director of Governance and Policy
	Matt Widdowson	Governance and Policy Officer (Minutes)

1. <u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u>

1.1. Steve Munro was welcomed to his first meeting of the Search and Governance Committee.

1.2. All governors declared an interest in item 4, the External Board Review.

1.3. Jackie Rossa declared an interest in item 5 with regards to governors serving an additional term of office.

1.4. Steve Munro declared an interest in item 5 with regards to the vacancy for Chair of the Audit Committee.

1.5. Danielle Gillett declared an interest in item 6, the Chair's Performance Review Questions for 2025/26.

2. <u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u>

2.1. There were no apologies.

3. <u>MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2025</u>

3.1. <u>MATTERS ARISING</u>

3.1.1. It was noted that the agenda stated that the previous meeting had taken place on 26 November 2025, when it had, in fact, taken place on 11 September 2025.

3.1.2. All matters arising would be picked up under item 5.

3.2. The minutes of the meeting of 11 September 2025 were <u>agreed</u> as an accurate record and <u>approved</u>.

4. <u>EXTERNAL BOARD REVIEW</u>

4.1. The Director of Governance and Policy presented the results of the external review of governance.

4.1.1. This had been a thorough review conducted by Rob Lawson. The review demonstrated a good understanding of how the Corporation and committees worked. The report would now go before Corporation for a full discussion.

4.1.2. The report had highlighted a lot of good practice, and it was pleasing to see that the reviewer considered the Leicester College Corporation to be a high performing board. A particular highlight was the reviewer's opinion that there was effective governance which enabled good quality support and challenge. The Board's approach to student voice had been considered as exemplary, and the approaches to risk and EDI were considered to be examples of good practice.

4.1.3. There were twelve recommendations including, among others:

- Aligning the Standing Orders with the Instrument and Articles of Government.
- Reaffirming the commitment to the Nolan Principles.
- Addressing the potential for some governors to stray into operational matters by raising the awareness of the distinction between strategic and operational matters.
- Governors being able to visit the College more often.
- Mapping governors and ELT's professional networks to identify gaps which would assist with stakeholder engagement.

4.2. **Governors made the following comments.**

4.2.1. **Overall, governance was considered to be effective with meetings being well chaired and well supported. However, it was surprising that the issue of the operational/strategic divide had been raised. It would be useful to be provided with some examples of when the distinction had been blurred.** There would be an opportunity to ask the reviewer about this at the meeting of the Corporation.

4.2.2. **There was also a surprising comment about challenge from the Board being too robust. It would be useful for the reviewer to provide some context and evidence of this.** This could be raised with the reviewer at the next meeting of the Corporation.

4.2.3. **Around the time when the former Principal was on sick leave, a governor had been asked to provide additional support to the College. This could be considered to be unusual activity and may have influenced the reviewer's opinion.** The comment about the blurring of the strategic/operational divide was probably not referring to this instance.

4.2.4. **It might be difficult to discuss the operational/strategic divide issue with the reviewer during a meeting of the Corporation as this issue may have come to light during a particular committee meeting where**

discussions had gone into considerable operational detail. This issue may have been identified from observing a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. It was acknowledged that governors were always working to best assist the College but in that particular instance the discussion may have become too operational. There had also been issues with governors visiting the College without arranging meetings through the Secretariat.

4.2.5. **Some of the criticism was reasonable. There were instances when the tone of meetings had been surprising and may not feel very friendly. There was an instance when a member of staff was criticised for the quality of the English in a paper which was unduly harsh.** There was always some anxiety around presenting difficult papers, but officers always appreciated the challenge. There could be a lot of back and forth in some committees, but discussions always came to positive conclusions. Staff were of the opinion that the governors had the best intentions, and this was not felt to be a major issue.

4.2.6. **These issues were not raised by the previous review.** The had not been raised previously.

4.2.7. **The reviewer observed a particularly challenging meeting of the CSQI Committee as there had been a fundamental disagreement between governors and management. It had been essential that these issues were raised. Governors were also aware of what had taken place at Weston College and were now much keener to demonstrate a willingness to challenge.** The report recognised that there was good challenge. It also highlighted that the fact that there was diversity of thought on the Board, which was a strength, but which meant that there could be multiple instances of challenge.

4.2.8. **A workshop was recommended, but it was not clear what was being suggested.** Noted.

4.2.9. **It was important not to criticise governors' well-intentioned efforts.** Agreed. There were protocols that everyone could be reminded of.

4.2.10. **Learning walks needed to be better organised. Governors' time needed to be harnessed in the best way possible.** Agreed.

4.2.11. **There was a case for a reminder of the 'dos and don'ts.'** Agreed.

4.2.12. **Governors came from different backgrounds which influenced their knowledge and expectations of how meetings were conducted. There were also governors who were new to the role.** The induction process would be reviewed.

4.2.13. **The comment that 'challenge is too robust' was too broad brush and may only relate to a particular instance. wrong. Robust challenge was sometimes necessary. Ofsted might appreciate this report as it demonstrated that there had been robust challenge and attention to detail. It was important to find out whether the reviewer felt that while the challenge was fair, it was the language used that was problematic.**

4.2.14. **Most Colleges had a more structured programme of learning walks. Perhaps a calendar would be useful. Other colleges also had more link governors. Furthermore, there was an issue around understanding the purpose of learning walks and being clear about it.** There was the need to review the purpose and structure of governor visits. However, it should be noted that staff enjoyed the opportunity to showcase their areas to governors.

4.2.15. **The reviewer was asked to identify both positives and negatives and had completed the task he was set. It should be remembered that this was a positive report.** Agreed.

4.2.16. **The points around committees 'acting in silos' was interesting. If the Corporation did not seek assurance from the committees in the correct way, then this needed to be acted on.** The review acknowledged that governors were able to attend any committee meetings. With regards to receiving reports from every committee, this had been tried in the past but governors had felt this took up too much time during Corporation meetings. A review of this may be useful.

4.2.17. **The reviewer had suggested that committee Chairs meet informally off-site, however this could cause transparency issues.** This suggestion had been challenged for that very reason.

4.2.18. **Having side conversations between committee Chairs was not the way forward. It was important to have the input from the Director of Governance and Policy to keep governance on track.** There were opportunities for governors to meet informally at events and the annual strategic away day.

4.2.19. **Governors had to have confidence in all committees.** Noted.

4.2.20. **Was this considered to be a good quality report?** There had only been one previous report, and this was much better as it went into more depth and provided references to good practice and made a series of recommendations for the board to consider

4.2.21. **Would there be a further opportunity to ask the reviewer questions?** The intention was for the reviewer to take questions at the next meeting of the Corporation before leaving to allow that governors the opportunity to discuss the report. It should be noted that governors did not have to accept the recommendations.

4.3. **Governors <u>noted</u> the External Board Review and recommendations.**

5. <u>SUCCESSION PLANNING</u>

5.1. The Director of Governance and Policy provided governors with an update on succession planning. The following points were highlighted.

5.1.1. Following the resignations of Alex Stacey-Midgley and Zubair Limbada there were four vacancies including one for the Chair of the Audit Committee.

5.1.2. Steve Munro had agreed to take on the role of Chair of the Audit Committee at the end of the academic year. In the interim, Tom Wilson had agreed to temporarily fill the post. If Tom Wilson was unable to fill the post, then Neil McDougall could be asked. There would be a conversation with Vipal Karavadra over him taking on the Vice Chair role.

5.1.3. Lesley Giles, Neil McDougall, and Jackie Rossa had all agreed to serve a further three-year term. Robert Radford had stated that he would only want to commit to one-year at a time. It was recommended that all four governors were reappointed when their terms expired.

5.1.4. Sue Hopewell did not want to take on the full governor role and was happy to continue as a co-opted member of the CSQI Committee.

5.1.5. Danielle Gillett's term of office would end in June 2026.

5.1.6. In terms of diversity, the Board was predominantly male and there had been a slight shift in ethnicity. The age profile continued to be around the same.

5.1.7. An application had been received from Jude Mellor who was Head Teacher at the Ashby School. An interview had taken place, and the panel had thought that she would bring a unique perspective to the Board; she was familiar with the city.

5.2. **Governors made the following comments.**

5.2.1. **Two-thirds of the Board were white. Was there a target for increasing ethnic diversity?** While half of the city's population were non-white, the county was majority white. This meant that the Board's diversity had to be considered in a wider sense. However, it was recognised that a move towards 50% could be made

5.2.2. **There needed to be consideration of whether the Board reflected the College's students and staff.** This was always a consideration.

5.2.3. **There were several demographic and skills factors that had to be considered. Governor recruitment was not easy and there were still skills gaps. The Associate programme may help to address this. Additionally, there had been previous instances of governors being recruited and then not staying in post for very long. The role could sometimes be overwhelming, especially if someone had other priorities. All this made it difficult to have set targets.** Noted.

5.2.4. **Jude Mellor had come across as very informed and could be a good connector with schools. She was the Head Teacher of a school with over 500 A level students and was an educationalist with a SEND specialism. It would be great to have her on the Board.** Agreed.

5.3. **Governors <u>approved</u> the reappointment of Neil McDougall, Jackie Rossa and Lesley Giles for a further three-year term of office following the expiration of their current terms.**

5.4. **Governors <u>approved</u> the reappointment of Robert Radford for a further one-year term of office following the expiration of his current term.**

5.5. **Governors <u>approved</u> the reappointment of Sue Hopewell as a co-opted member of the CSQI Committee for a further year.**

5.6. **Governors <u>approved</u> the appointment of Jude Mellor as an independent governor for a three-year term of office.**

5.7. **Governors <u>agreed</u> with the approach to filling Chair and Vice Chair vacancies on the Audit Committee.**

5.8. **Governors <u>noted</u> the current membership and Skills Matrix.**

6. CHAIR OF CORPORATION PERFORMANCE REVIEW SURVEY QUESTIONS

6.1. The Director of Governance and Policy presented the draft questions for the Chair of Corporation's performance review. The following points were highlighted.

6.1.1. Although the current Chair would be stepping down in June 2026, this was a good discipline to keep going.
6.1.2. These questions were the same as previous years and linked to the Chair's competency framework.

6.2. **Governors made the following comments.**

6.2.1. **Had these questions been updated recently?** There were updated last year.
6.2.2. **Would this this review be for the current Chair?** Yes, but it would be worth completing to provide insight for the incoming Chair.
6.2.3. **This would be a useful exercise following the External Board Review.**

6.3. **Governors <u>approved</u> the Chair of Corporation's Performance Review Survey Questions.**

7. <u>SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR GOVERNORS</u>

7.1. The Director of Governance and Policy presented the draft self-reflection questions for governors. The following points were highlighted.

7.1.1. The introduction of the self-reflection questions had followed discussions around providing the Chair with a useful starting point for 1:1 meetings.
7.1.2. There had been further discussions around carrying out 1:1 meetings in blocks, perhaps towards the end of the summer term.

7.2. **Governors made the following comments.**

7.2.1. **Would there be a proforma to complete?** Yes.
7.2.2. **Other Boards asked board members to set their own objectives.** This was a 1:1 discussion rather than an appraisal. However, there would still be the opportunity to do this.
7.2.3. **This ensured that there was some structure in place.** Agreed.
7.2.4. **After the June Away Day would be the best time to have 1:1 discussions.**
7.2.5. **Maybe the question around there being just "one thing" a governor wanted to achieve in the coming year it should ask if there is 'anything' they wanted to achieve.** Noted.

7.3. **Governors <u>approved</u> the Self-reflection Questions for Governors.**

8. <u>GOVERNORS' AWAY DAY 2026</u>

8.1. The Principal provided an update on the Governors' Away Day 2026. The following points were highlighted.

8.1.1. At previous away days there had always been a speaker who had provided a national view. This year the suggestion was to invite Scott Knowles from the Chamber to provide a local perspective including covering issues such as devolution and employers' current thinking.

8.1.2. The away day would provide a good opportunity for the new Deputy Principals to present the newly developed strategies.
8.1.3. Student voice needed to be incorporated into the away day as this was always useful.
8.1.4. There needed to be a discussion on Foundation Learning as the plan was to pilot a new approach in 2026/27 and there could be an impact on quality and attendance. An external speaker from another college could be invited.
8.1.5. The second day would be an opportunity to discuss the estates review and human resources.

8.2. **Governors made the following comments.**

8.2.1. **Foundation Learning is a model that works really well. If it is done right, the outcomes can be phenomenal.** Noted.
8.2.2. **There are mixed views of Foundation Learning. Getting it right could be difficult, but it would certainly be a good idea to explore it.** Noted.
8.2.3. **Foundation Learning aligned with the NEET and SEND agendas. It also aligned with inclusion as getting the fundamental skills in place could be a game changer.** It would be brave to do, and it was important that governors were on-board.
8.2.4. **It was important that away days provided governors with time to talk.** Agreed.
8.2.5. **A discussion about local government reorganisation and how this would work for the College would be helpful.** Scott Knowles would be the best person to discuss this.
8.2.6. **It would be important for the agenda to not be too packed.** The away day could start earlier if necessary.

8.3. **Governors approved the plans for the Governors' Away Day.**

9. FEEDBACK FROM THE NATIONAL CHAIRS' COUNCIL

9.1. The Chair provided feedback from the National Chairs' Council. The following points were highlighted.

9.1.1. A presentation had been given by David Hughes. He had highlighted that the policy landscape was now becoming clearer as things started to settle. FE had been included in policy conversations for the first time in a long time, and it was time to put 'our money where our mouth is' and to contribute. Governors needed to understand which of the government's priorities were right for their college as it was not possible to contribute to everything.
9.1.2. The priorities for colleges were:
- Enhancing inclusion and achievement of young people
- Reducing NEET numbers
- Reducing skills shortage vacancies in industrial strategy sectors, plus construction and health
- Engaging colleges as anchor institutions.

9.1.3. The government was now in its second year and so might begin to focus on the areas that would deliver results in time for the next general election.

9.1.4. There were anticipated to be around 900,000 new job vacancies. Jobs at level 4 plus would be satisfied by graduates which meant that colleges would fulfil the need at levels 2 and3.
9.1.5. Information was provided on new funding opportunities. There were no new funded opportunities for adult education despite the need.
9.1.6. It was still a challenging environment and there was no room in the DfE budget for anything new.
9.1.7. It was welcome that what the AoC were saying about the national picture aligned with the College's experiences.
9.1.8. The AoC were launching a new initiative called Adult Education Pays, although it was not clear who would be paying.
9.1.9. The meeting had also included a session given by Anne Frost who was now the Chair of Governors at Sandwell College. Sandwell had just had an Ofsted inspection which had involved fifteen inspectors over three days. The inspection had been tough and the college's SLT had found it no less pressured than under the previous inspection regime. From the governors' perspective, there had been little difference to what had been experienced in the past.

9.2. **Governors made the following comments.**

9.2.1. **There might be challenges when V-levels came in if a few A-levels had to be added back in. The key was to work collaboratively with other institutions.** Noted.
9.2.2. **The Principal had attended some sessions with Derby College to look at career pathways in the NHS.** Noted.
9.2.3. **Leicestershire County Council was also keen on collaboration and had been keen for the College to join their Skills Board.** Noted.
9.2.4. **When were Sandwell College inspected?** December 2025.

9.3. **Governors <u>noted</u> the feedback from the National Chairs' Council.**

10. GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT ACTION PLAN

10.1. The Director of Governance and Policy presented the Governance Improvement Action Plan. The following points were highlighted.

10.1.1. Most actions were on track.
10.1.2. Feedback on the new governor dashboard would be gratefully received.
10.1.3. The new Ofsted Framework session would be postponed pending the new Deputy Principal taking up his post.

10.2. **Governors made the following comments.**

10.2.1. **Were actions in amber because they were work in progress?** Yes. At the end of the year, they might be changed to green.
10.2.2. **The External Board Review report provided template with recommended actions. Would these be included in the new Improvement Plan?** The actions could be added to the Governance Improvement Plan or there could be a specific action plan.

10.3. **Governors noted the Governance Improvement Action Plan.**

11. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- 13 May 2026