

## **BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting held on Monday 22 September 2025 at 5.30pm in the SLT Meetings room, The Tower Building, Hele Road, Exeter

**Present** Patrick Tigwell Chair  
John Laramy Principal/CEO  
Graham Atkins  
Stephen Wiltshire  
Cynthia Sedgman  
Carol McCormack  
Stephen Wiltshire

**Apologies** Pamela Degregorio  
Stewart Noakes

### **In Attendance**

John Dowell Executive Director of Finance  
Richard Church Chief Operating Officer  
*To item 6 only* Steve Strang Executive Director of Estates and Sustainability  
Joanna Boardman Head of Governance

1. **Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest**  
The Chair welcomed colleagues to the meeting. Apologies were received from Sally Wolkowski and Stewart Noakes was not in attendance. No declarations of interest had been received.
2. **Minutes**
  - 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2025, as circulated, were agreed.
  - 2.2 The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2025, as circulated, were agreed.
3. **Matters arising**
  - 3.1 Committee Self Evaluation.
4. **Risk Management**
  - 4.1 Risk Register

It was noted that the current Risk Register was as of the 9 June 2025 meeting as the new review cycle had not yet fully commenced. The discussion held showed that:

There have been no significant changes to Job Descriptions since the end of the previous academic year. The first round of discussions regarding substantive amendments is yet to be completed, though current JDs remain reflective of operational needs, particularly at higher grades. Further review will take place in the next cycle, including consideration of reducing residuals.

The ability to assess and respond to curriculum needs remains strong. The importance of increased social spaces for students was raised, with a particular focus now on circulation spaces factoring in continually growing learner numbers. Newly rented facilities to support the increased numbers were discussed although it was noted that capacity would be reached again in Spring 2026.

Transport continues to be challenging where delays or cancellations by the providers occur and recent discussions with providers highlighted shortages in available vehicles which would continue into the future. . Specific difficulties were noted on lines from Crediton and Barnstaple, although service changes at Crediton are expected in the next calendar year, which may ease pressure. Staff have responded flexibly to mitigate any impact on learning.

A potential future mitigation may be around an additional bus service from Tiverton to alleviate some of the pressure. Current attendance levels are 1% lower than the previous year, largely attributable to transport-related delays.

Concerns were raised regarding the policy of Great Western Railway (GWR) on reduced fares, particularly where split families are impacted due to different starting locations. The College noted the impact that this has, particularly on split families. Current arrangements cover single routes between stations, which may disadvantage some students. It was noted that the College continues to lobby on transportation issues, but has no direct ability to support on this.

### **Specific Risk Register Updates**

- **1.1 Headroom for Risk (2025/26):** Governors agreed to continue monitoring carefully.
- **1.2 R64:** Risk remains categorised as medium, though with a slight upward trend recognised.
- **R2.17:** Scheduled for review in March.
- **R32 (Insurance and Business Continuity):** The college carries reinstatement cover of £2m. IT is currently reviewing arrangements.

Business Continuity plans are actively practised, with a recent deep dive into cyber security. Notably, the college backs up both data and systems, unlike many institutions which only secure data.

Consideration is being given to engaging an ethical hacker to test resilience, particularly considering merger activity.

### **Summary**

Colleges and educational institutions remain high-value targets for cyber-attacks. A deep dive review of risks, impact, and recovery processes was undertaken last year, but it was requested that a further detailed review of current cyber security measures and recovery planning be presented at a future meeting

Governors noted the ongoing challenges around transport and cyber security as key risks. Continued monitoring, lobbying, and proactive measures (including resilience testing and flexible responses) will remain essential.

## **5. Strategic Matters**

### **5.1 Opportunities and Developments Register**

This item was dealt with as a confidential item and recorded in the confidential minutes.

## **6. Property Matters**

### **6.1 Estates Masterplan**

This item was dealt with as a confidential item and recorded in the confidential minutes.

### **6.2 Property update**

This item was dealt with as a confidential item and recorded in the confidential minutes.

### **6.3 Sustainability Update**

This item was dealt with as a confidential item and recorded in the confidential minutes.

## **7. Financial Matters**

### **7.1 Provisional Year End outturn position**

Governors received a provisional update on the year-end out-turn. The annual account schedules will shortly be submitted to audit.

A surplus is forecast, which is £0.4m higher than previously reported. The improvement reflects stronger-than-forecast income from 16–18, adult

apprenticeships, and HE. Expenditure was also £100k lower than anticipated.

Planned expenditure on IT infrastructure has been delivered, with costs appropriately split between capital and revenue in line with regulations.

The surplus is £753k better than the original budget plan. The accumulated surplus is reflected on the balance sheet and is available to support future strategic priorities.

A slightly improved pay offer has been made, supported by the stronger out-turn.

### **Summary**

Governors welcomed the positive financial position, noting that the improved result provides greater flexibility and strategic options for the year ahead.

### **The Committee noted the outcomes**

#### 7.2 Student Recruitment (verbal update)

Governors received an update on student numbers. Recruitment for 16–19-year-olds is up by 750 learners, representing the largest growth the College has experienced (c.10%). This equates to an additional £1.5–2m in-year budget uplift, with a further £4m of guaranteed funding for 2025/26. Governors welcomed this as excellent news.

It was stated that the growth is not concentrated in any single area but reflects demographic expansion in Exeter and the strength of the College's curriculum offer. Significant increases were noted in engineering (aerospace, automotive, and construction), as well as in Hair and Beauty, Humanities, Maths, and Sciences. Some of the growth may be attributable to the closure or reduction of sixth form provision elsewhere.

Apprenticeships show a positive trajectory, with recruitment up 9% on new starts, on track to meet budget with Adult learners on budget, with increased class sizes improving efficiency.

HE Targets were reduced at budget-setting stage; current recruitment is on track to meet or exceed those numbers.

Staffing capacity has been increased in response to demand with an additional investment in recruiting staff last year, combined with proactive recruitment in growth areas, has enabled the College to manage the uplift. Class sizes are marginally higher (+0.1 on average) but remain manageable.

While the distributed nature of the estate (22 sites) presents operational challenges, it has allowed growth to be spread rather than concentrated at a single location. Pressure points are being managed, particularly at the main tower building where circulation space is limited. Measures underway include:

- Widening steps and entrances to improve flow.
- Reopening the CLS route behind the tower to St David's to create an additional exit.
- Exploring purchase of new doors to increase entrance capacity.

## **Summary**

Governors noted:

- Record-breaking growth in 16–19 recruitment, with associated funding uplift.
- Positive performance in Apprenticeships, Adults, and HE provision.
- Effective management of staffing and estates pressures, with proactive measures in place to address circulation and capacity challenges.

### 7.3 Staff Pay Award (verbal update)

This item was dealt with as a confidential item and recorded in the confidential minutes.

### 7.4 Financial Regulations

7.4.1 Financial Regulations 2025

7.4.2 Financial Regulations Appendices 2025

7.4.3 Financial Procedures 2025

The full pack of documents were noted as being reviewed on an annual basis by the college and then presented to the full board for approval. The committee was asked to review and recommend to the Board.

Very few changes were reported as there had been no change in the Regulatory Framework and that a full 'root and branch' review would need to take place post-merger.

## 8. **Emerging Risks**

The Committee did not consider that any additional risks had arisen from the meeting.

## 10. **Future meetings**

### 10.1 Items to take to the Board

The Committee agreed the items to take to the Board as:

- Estates Master Plan
- Review of Financial Policies
- Staff Pay Award
- Masterplan and Property Update (for information)
- Opportunities and Developments Register (for information)
- Sustainability and Net Zero report (for information)

### 10.2 Items for the next meeting

- Recovery from a Cyber Attack

### 10.3 Dates of future meetings

24 November 2025

9 March 2026

15 June 2026

*Signed by the Chair*