Heart of Yorkshire Education Group Corporation (Group)

Group Board of Governors (Corporation)

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 24 March 2026 at 4.00pm at Vico Homes, Castleford (Meeting)

Present:

- Izzy Boocock (until minute eight)
- Stuart Brenton
- Freddie Cleaver (until minute eight)
- Dmitry Fedotov
- Adam Greenwood
- Harry Gunson
- Julie Lawson (from minute one)
- Rachael Martindale (from minute one)
- Andrew McConnell (Chair)
- David Powell (Vice Chair)
- Adam Sawden
- Tracy Tallant
- Vijay Teeluck
- Ellie Thomas (until minute eight)
- Neil Warren
- Tim Welton
- Sam Wright

In attendance:

- Clare Allcock, Group Executive Director of Student Experience and Support
- Caroline Carter, Group Executive Director of Finance and Resources
- Sam Cremore, Head of Governance and Legal Services
- Lorraine Cross, Group Executive Director of External Relations and Development
- Lisa Macdonald, Group Executive Director of Curriculum and Quality Standards
- Karen Sykes, Group Executive Director of People

Apologies:

- Jayne King

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

The Vice Chair explained that he would be chairing the meeting in preparation for his anticipated appointment to Chair at the last meeting of the academic year. He welcomed those present, confirmed the meeting was quorate and declared it open.

2. Declarations of Interest

The Vice Chair reminded members to declare any conflicts of interest. It was noted that Rachael Martindale, who was expected to be appointed to the Board shortly, would have an interest in her proposed appointment to the Curriculum and Quality Committee as would Adam Sawden. Members were advised that, where conflicts applied, affected individuals would not take part in discussions or voting but could remain present. No further declarations were made.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

3.1. The minutes of the previous meeting were reviewed for accuracy. No amendments were requested.

3.2. IT WAS RESOLVED THAT the minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

The Head of Governance and Legal Services confirmed that all actions identified from the previous meeting had been completed and that there were no outstanding matters arising requiring discussion.

5. Appointment of New Governors

5.1. The Vice Chair introduced applications from Rachael Martindale and Julie Lawson for consideration. It was confirmed that both applications had been reviewed by the Search and Governance Committee, that interviews had been held, and that reports were included within the Board papers. The Vice

Chair invited any comments from members of the Search and Governance Committee.

5.2. It was noted that both candidates were considered strong, with relevant skills and experience, and that the Search and Governance Committee had recommended their appointment.

5.3. No objections were raised by members and IT WAS RESOLVED TO appoint Rachael Martindale and Julie Lawson to the Board each for a period of four years subject to a one-year probationary period.

5.4. The new governors were then invited into the meeting and welcomed by the Vice Chair. A round of introductions was undertaken for the benefit of the new governors.

6. Update from the Finance, People and Resources Committee (People Matters)

6.1. The Vice Chair noted that the Update from the Finance, People and Resources Committee was to be considered earlier than planned as the Group Executive Director of People had to leave the Meeting early.

6.2. The Clerk explained that a new reporting approach had been adopted, with committee updates reflected in written summaries rather than by way of presentations.

6.3. The Group Executive Director of People highlighted key people-related matters considered by the Committee, including performance against workforce indicators, challenges including recruitment and retention in certain areas, and the context for proposed new performance indicators designed to give governors more meaningful oversight. Assurance was received regarding staff satisfaction as indicated by the Pulse Survey.

6.4. Attention was drawn to the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme. It was confirmed that the Committee had undertaken detailed consideration, including regarding the comprehensiveness of the description of the relevant processes and key responsibility holders, and that the scheme was recommended as an appropriate and proportionate measure.

6.5. IT WAS RESOLVED TO approve the Voluntary Redundancy Scheme.

7. Chair's and Vice Chair's Business

7.1. The Vice Chair noted that he and the Chair would each provide updates.

7.2. The Chair provided an update on activity since the previous meeting, including attendance at sector events, Chairs' networks, national and regional Association of Colleges meetings, and engagement with other Chairs. The Chair reflected on benchmarking Board agenda lengths with a comparator college, which were favourable, and noted differences in strategic coverage, student updates and meeting structure.

7.3. The Vice Chair supplemented this update with reflections from leadership development activity, including attendance at an Ofsted related workshop. Key themes described included inclusion and belonging, focus on vulnerable learners, wellbeing and stakeholder engagement. It was noted that questions had been raised regarding the research underpinning inspection tools and that this remained an area of interest for future discussion.

8. Student Update

8.1. Student governors presented an update on student experience and student voice activity, including feedback gathered through student leadership forums, surveys and informal engagement. Positive feedback was reported across sites including positive student satisfaction and positive attendance in extra-curricular activities, alongside areas for improvement including communication facilitating consistency of awareness of surveys and events.

8.2. Governors reflected on positive engagement with student initiatives, including external programmes supporting mental wellbeing, masculinity, and empowerment, and examples of student led sustainability initiatives.

8.3. Questions and answers:

8.3.1. Q: How representative was the student survey feedback?

A: It was confirmed that the survey was optional and distributed via student communication channels but that precise response numbers and representativeness by site were not available at the Meeting.

8.3.2. Q: Why was attendance lower at the most recent student leaders' conference?

A: It was explained that the earlier conference had been a Group-wide event, whereas the more recent conference related to a single college, accounting for the difference in numbers.

8.3.3. Q: Were events and survey engagement and awareness consistent across campuses?

A: Student governors indicated that awareness varied and that some students and teams had been less aware of surveys and events.

8.3.4. Q: Could engagement data be tracked more effectively?

A: It was suggested that SharePoint interaction data could provide partial insight into engagement levels. It was agreed that an update would be given in due course.

8.4. Members thanked the student governors for their contributions and emphasised the importance of representative engagement.

9. Search and Governance Committee Update and Committee Appointments

9.1. The Vice Chair outlined recommended committee appointments for new governors, including Rachael Martindale and Adam Sawden to the Curriculum and Quality Committee. It was noted that appointments were reviewed annually and that induction arrangements were in progress.

9.2. IT WAS RESOLVED TO recommend Rachael Martindale and Adam Sawden to the Curriculum and Quality Committee.

9.3. The Vice Chair also advised that expressions of interest for the Vice Chair role for 2026/27 would be invited later in the academic year and clarified that standing as Vice Chair did not imply future intent to become Chair.

10. Governor Link Scheme Update

10.1. The Clerk and participating governors provided detailed reflections on the first cycle of Governor Link Scheme visits to Castleford, Wakefield and Selby Colleges. Governors described the visits, including engagement with students and staff, observation of facilities, and insights gained regarding learner experience, safeguarding, belonging and operational context. Assurance was given that students and staff reported effective safeguarding practices and a strong sense of belonging.

10.2. Discussion covered the value of authenticity and the means by which authentic feedback could be assured during each visit, alignment with inspection themes, and how learning from visits could inform Board assurance and future visit planning.

10.3. Governors were asked to send any suggestions for future themes.

10.4. Questions and answers:

10.4.1. Q: How would feedback from visits be used going forward?

A: It was confirmed that a final visit of the academic year would take place in the summer term, with a consolidated report to the Board, and that Search and Governance Committee would review and refine the approach based on governor feedback.

11. Principal's Report (Including Strategic and Sector Update)

11.1. The Principal presented a detailed report covering learner performance, recruitment trends, sector reform, estates development, sustainability activity and emerging risks.

11.2. It was reported that attendance and retention had improved compared to the same point the previous year, and that total applications and acceptances for the forthcoming academic year were significantly ahead of the same point in the prior cycle.

11.3. The Principal explained that while application numbers were strong, particular focus was being given to conversion from applications to firm acceptances, noting that many learners apply to multiple providers.

11.4. It was confirmed that a number of learners remained identified as "at risk" and would continue to be closely monitored through to the end of the academic year.

11.5. Sector-wide reforms were described in detail, including the introduction of new vocational pathways and the government announcement that 16-19 funding would rise by only 0.5%, which was described as disappointing given cost pressures.

11.6. Estates updates included confirmation that practical completion of the Castleford Post-16 Centre had been achieved on 20 March, with the opening event scheduled for 1 May, and that the new 3G pitch at Selby was complete and already in use.

11.7. The Principal also confirmed that the Group had been selected as one of three national AoC Digital Insight Hubs, describing this as a significant competitive achievement.

11.8. Emerging risks were highlighted, including staffing pressures in specialist curriculum areas, cyber security threats, and geopolitical instability contributing to inflationary pressure.

11.9. Questions and answers:

11.9.1. Q: What were the biggest challenges anticipated over the next 12 months?

A: The Principal identified recruitment, capacity management and preparation for the new Ofsted inspection framework as the most significant challenges.

11.9.2. Q: What was the current position on space utilisation and whether it constrained growth?

A: It was explained that a formal utilisation survey had not been undertaken in the previous year, but that alternative methods were being developed and that physical space had already been reconfigured to improve utilisation.

11.9.3. Q: What had driven the increase in applications?

A: The Principal confirmed that earlier engagement with schools had resulted in earlier applications, alongside an overall increase in school leaver numbers.

11.9.4. Q: Was the downturn in higher education provision a local issue?

A: It was confirmed that this was a sector-wide trend, and that the Group's strategy focused on stabilisation rather than growth in higher education.

12. Stakeholder Engagement Update

An update was provided on the recent annual stakeholder engagement event involving employers, civic partners, community organisations and education partners. Key discussion themes were summarised, and it was noted that feedback was informing operational and strategic planning.

13. Update from the Curriculum and Quality Committee

13.1. The Vice Chair and Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee referred to the Committee update paper which was taken as read.

13.2. Governors had no questions.

14. Teaching and Learning Strategy

14.1. The Teaching and Learning Strategy, recommended by the Curriculum and Quality Committee, was presented for consideration.

14.2. IT WAS RESOLVED TO approve the Teaching and Learning Strategy.

15. Update from the Finance, People and Resources Committee (Finance and Resources Updates)

15.1. The Board received an update on finance and resources matters considered by the Finance, People and Resources Committee. The Committee Chair reported that the Committee had been assured regarding the Group's current financial position which was sound, had requested better triangulation of information between committees, that there had been robust scrutiny of the Five-year Financial Strategy, which had been recommended for the Board's approval, and that clarity around the Group's strategy relating to agency staff had been sought due to contradictions identified between the Group's stated intent and its more pragmatic approach. This was ongoing.

15.2. No questions were raised by members.

16. Finance Update

16.1. The Group Executive Director of Finance and Resources presented the finance update and highlighted three key points. It was reported that the forecast surplus had increased slightly to £74,000, that the Group was projected to achieve a financial health rating of "Good", and that all key financial performance indicators continued to be met.

16.2. Questions and answers:

16.2.1. Q: Why had pay costs as a percentage of income increased?

A: It was confirmed that this reflected the backdating of the pay award to 1 December, adding two months of cost.

16.2.2. Q: Did the non-pay budget position pose a risk to teaching, learning and assessment?

A: It was explained that early-year expenditure was planned and

non-linear, that this was not unexpected, and that there were no immediate concerns; contingencies remained available to manage risk.

17. Finance Update and Five-Year Financial Strategy

17.1. The Group Executive Director of Finance and Resources presented a detailed finance update and five-year financial strategy which had been recommended by the Finance, People and Resources Committee. The presentation covered assumptions, income and expenditure trends, agency staffing, capital investment, restructuring provision and longer-term sustainability risks.

17.2. Questions and answers:

17.2.1. Q: How were agency staffing costs treated within the forecast?
A: It was explained that budgets assumed permanent staffing, with agency costs arising from in-year variation.

17.2.2. Q: Was the restructuring provision sufficient?
A: It was confirmed that the figure was a prudent holding provision reviewed annually.

17.2.3. Q: How had digital and IT capital spend been assessed?
A: It was explained that efficiencies were expected through rationalisation and lifecycle management of devices alongside cost pressures.

17.3. IT WAS RESOLVED TO approve the five-year financial strategy.

18. Audit Committee Update and Risk Register

18.1. An update was provided on Audit Committee activity, including improvement in internal audit delivery and discussion of cyber resilience.

18.2. The proposed change in cyber risk appetite was explained and the revised document was discussed.

18.3. Questions and answers:

18.3.1. Q: Why was a ‘minimal’ cyber risk appetite proposed?

18.3.2. A: It was explained that the operating environment made lower tolerance unrealistic, and that this approach better reflected managed acceptance with strong mitigations.

18.3.3. Q: Had the Group experienced cyber-attacks and were staff appropriately trained?

A: It was confirmed that the Group had experience cyber attacks but that its defence systems were operating effectively and staff training was in place and being monitored. The Board received assurance from the Executive Director of Finance and Resources that this matter was being carefully scrutinised by the Audit Committee and would be raised to Board where necessary.

18.4. It was noted that RSM would be delivering risk training at the next Governor Strategic Performance Workshop in April to help provide assurance to the Board regarding the Group's approach to risk management.

18.5. IT WAS RESOLVED TO approve the revised cyber risk appetite to the Board.

19. Board Assurance Framework

19.1. The Executive Director of Finance and Resources presented the proposed Board Assurance Framework, which had been developed to provide a structured and transparent means by which the Board could obtain assurance that key risks were being effectively managed. It was explained that the framework set out the strategic objectives, principal risks, key controls in place to manage those risks, and the sources of assurance relied upon by the Board, aligned to the three-lines-of-assurance model. The Framework had been considered in detail previously, including through Audit Committee discussion, and was intended to support clearer articulation of where assurance was obtained and where gaps might exist.

19.2. Members emphasised the importance of the Framework in demonstrating to external stakeholders, including regulators, how the Board discharged its oversight responsibilities, and welcomed the introduction of a formal document to consolidate this information. It was noted that the Framework would continue to be refined and updated as assurance processes developed.

19.3. Questions and answers:

19.3.1. Q: Would the Framework allow ongoing monitoring of areas such as the impact of agency staffing on quality?
A: It was suggested that, where particular risks persisted, relevant assurance reporting could continue to be scheduled through committees and reflected within the Framework to ensure ongoing oversight.

19.3.2. IT WAS RESOLVED TO approve the Board Assurance Framework.

19.3.3. The Framework was to be included in the updated Scheme of Delegation.

20. Policies

20.1. The Freedom of Information Policy was presented.

20.2. No substantive questions were raised.

20.3. IT WAS RESOLVED TO approve the Freedom of Information Policy.

20.4. It was noted that the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech had been delayed pending further reviews and would be provided for approval at the next Board meeting in May.

21. Briefing Papers

Briefing papers were noted. It was confirmed that written responses to governor questions would be circulated following the meeting.

22. Review of Effectiveness of the Meeting

22.1. Members reflected on the effectiveness of the meeting, noting the quality of papers, strength of challenge, student contributions, strategic focus and overall engagement. Time management was discussed, and appreciation was expressed to officers and presenters.

22.2. The Vice Chair closed the meeting.



Signed: …… **Date:** 19/05/2026

Actions

No.	Item	Details	Deadline	Responsibility
1	8.3.4	SharePoint interaction data could provide partial insight into engagement levels. It was agreed that an update would be given in due course.	ASAP	Head of Governance and Legal Services
2	10.3	Send suggestions for future Link Governor Scheme visits.	ASAP	Governors
3	19.3.3	Board Assurance Framework to be included in the updated Scheme of Delegation.	Immediately	Head of Governance and Legal Services
4	20.4	Further reviews of the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech are to take place. The Code will be provided for approval at the Board meeting in July.	Next Board meeting	Head of Governance and Legal Services