

## **Northern Regional College**

### **Governing Body**

**Minutes of the Governing Body meeting held on 26 November 2025 in Causeway campus commencing at 5.00pm.**

**Present:** Mr C McKenna (Chair), Mr P Burke, Mr B Devlin, Dr P Graham(online), Mr M Higgins, Mr G McAllister (online), Mrs C McGovern (online), Ms D McIlwaine (online), Mr R McKernan (online), Mr I Murphy (online), Mr B Patterson, Mr S Shevlin (online), Mr D Small (online), Mrs J Taggart

**In Attendance:** Mrs C Brown, Mr C Fairless (132.8), Mr S Laverty, Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

**Also present:** Mr S Dempster, DE (132.3)

#### **132.1 Welcome/Apologies**

The Chair welcomed Mr Dempster to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Ms Hemphill and Mr Macauley.

#### **132.2 Declaration of Interests**

PG reminded members of his interest with ETI.

#### **132.3 Presentation by DE on 16-18 Legislation**

##### **Document shared in advance: Presentation**

SD summarised the work covered by the DE 14-19 Strategy Team and outlined the activities being carried out to meet the deadline for completing the Assembly process by the end of 2026. He highlighted several key issues, including:

- Different departments focusing on roles, compliance, and support.
- Feedback to date emphasises that success relies on public support.
- Still to decide how success and KPIs will be evaluated.
- The commencement of certain provisions will be phased in according to readiness.

MH confirmed participation in the process by providing feedback through consultation. He emphasised the importance of close collaboration with local schools and area partnerships to ensure the quality of students in colleges. He mentioned that a budget workshop with DfE would take place in the coming week and, where space allowed, he would be happy to include classes, although further provision beyond existing capacity would entail extra costs.

CMK noted the Minister's strong support for this project and her recognition of the need for provisions and for reducing duplication.

BP expressed concern around compliance and enforcement, particularly suggestion of financial penalties and the impact on deprived families and court workloads.

SD agreed with these comments. He explained the reasons for the regulatory approach and highlighted that the Minister would decide if this was needed, noting that it might never happen.

PG referenced the recent revision of safeguarding policy and inquired about liaison with the safeguarding group.

SD noted the importance of safeguarding and stated that the pupil support team liaises on various issues with feedback included in broader departmental conversations.

CMK thanked SD for his presentation. He noted significant work for the school, university, and FE sectors to reduce duplication and encourage collaboration, particularly emphasising career development and growth.

SD left the meeting at 5.35pm.

#### **132.4 Minutes of Last Meeting**

**Document shared in advance: Draft minutes 3.11.25**

On PG's proposal, seconded by JT, the minutes were approved with a minor amendment.

**ACTION:** The minutes would be amended.

#### **132.5 Matters Arising**

None.

#### **132.6 Chair's Communication**

**Documents shared in advance: CEF Draft Constitution; Draft Composite ICS Report**

136.2.1 Chair's Update: The Chair reported participation in the GB Chairs' meeting on 24.11.25 and mentioned upcoming meetings with CEF on 1.12.25, the Department stocktake meeting on 2.12.25, and the accountability meeting on 11.12.25.

132.6.2 Benchmarking Exercise: Members noted this would commence early 2026 and be led by L Watson.

##### **132.6.3 Change to Committee memberships:**

- JT and CMG have transferred to A&R Committee. CMG has been appointed Committee Vice-Chair.
- BP has joined Resources Committee.
- All A&R members have now been added to FAIC membership.

##### **132.6.4 CEF: Members noted the final draft Constitution.**

DS queried whether any similar documents existed outside employment matters, which would enable collaboration and participation across the FE sector.

MH explained that this had been the previous role of Colleges NI, which had been replaced by CEF whose focus was on pay policies and employment issues. He noted the current separate meetings of Chairs and CEs and mentioned plans to review all documents, with the aim of Chairs meeting to address strategic matters, potentially including CEs.

CMK acknowledged the importance of this opportunity and believed that the CEF convenor could serve as a catalyst for collaboration.

132.6.5 Draft Composite report of the FE Governing Body Effectiveness Review: Members noted this report which had been developed with the engagement of sector Chairs.

132.6.6 Letter from Chair of Department ARAC: CMK advised receipt of this letter which would be shared with members after the meeting.

## **132.7 Principal's Report**

### **Document shared in advance: Report**

The report was taken as read, with various issues mentioned in other agenda updates.

CMK noted a meeting with the Minister during the week starting 24.11.25, who, while expressing concerns about accounts, was aware of the strong performance of the College's underlying business. He believed it was important that the members were informed of the success recognised at Department level.

MH mentioned that PG had also raised this point at the Education Committee, and it would also be included in his monthly message.

MH mentioned the recent Skillbuild Competition and positive outcomes for the College

## **132.8 College Plan & Corporate Plan**

### **Document shared in advance: CDP Progress Report 24/25; CDP Presentation; Corporate Plan 26/29**

132.8.1 CDP Progress Report and Presentation: CB referred to the CDP presentation that had been previously shared with the Education Committee. She highlighted green RAG ratings for all KPIs and noted no concerns about achieving targets. She particularly emphasised that Traineeship performance had not come at the expense of apprenticeship numbers.

Members welcomed a very good report.

MH reminded GB that decisions made a few years ago had facilitated the growth in core provision and delivery of successful outcomes.

CMG asked for and received an outline on the flow of communication from GB to ground level.

JT wondered whether the new campuses had influenced achievement. MH advised that this had contributed to the rise in enrolments; however, the decision to cut unsustainable programmes to support the development of new programmes had been essential.

CB also acknowledged the support from the Marketing team in raising awareness of the College's offerings.

CMK also mentioned the influence of the new campus buildings in increasing the value of the towns.

The CDP Progress Report was noted.

CF joined the meeting at 5.50pm.

132.8.2 Corporate Plan Update: CF discussed the report and noted that the plan objectives were designed to match the Minister's priorities. He pointed out factors in the operating environment that influence these objectives and expected more information to be provided by the Department at a workshop during the week starting 1.12.25, with benchmarking to begin in 2026.

CF advised that a framework of key deliverables would be prepared for the strategy day in February 2026 and invited members' feedback on the outlined objectives. MH commented on notable improvements in outcomes compared to the original 2022-2025 plan. He noted that the focus for 2026-2029 would be on increasing enrolments without any additional funding confirmed. He referred to extensive prior discussions on the balance between accredited and

non-accredited provision, which could significantly increase numbers. Opportunities from proposals to raise the statutory leaving age for students would also be considered. The 2026-29 plan would align with the Department's three-year strategy and budget. Members noted that a paper would be prepared to be taken forward in February 2026. The Minister's requirement for collaboration and unity across the FE sector to promote her priorities was acknowledged.

During debate, members noted:

- Benchmarking will begin in early 2026, allowing data to be used for comparing the six colleges.
- There is an opportunity to influence strategic thinking at the meeting with the Department next week.
- The budget workshop in December is expected to provide an outline on funding for commitments.
- The initial scoping report on net zero has been completed and the baseline sent to DEFRA. Key actions will be presented to the Resources Committee.
- Opportunities stemming from the launch of the LEP action plan next week.

**ACTION:** Members to feed back any comments on sections 13 and 14 of the report to CF as soon as possible.

**ACTION:** Thoughts on the strategy day to be fed back to KW by 15 December.

CF left the meeting at 6.10pm.

### **132.9 Education Committee**

#### **Document shared in advance: Draft minutes 30.9.25**

132.9.1 Draft minutes 30.9.25: PG summarised discussion at the meeting, including: welcoming PB as a new member; enrolment numbers, which have since changed; appointment of the Committee Vice-Chair; review of the TOR; safeguarding; policy updates; and saying goodbye to SS.

#### **132.9.2 Feedback on ETI SEN**

PG outlined ETI's evaluation comment on:

- Feedback communication to parents of students;
- Tailoring pathways to individual student needs.

He emphasised the importance of students' key documentation transferring from school to college, with discussions needed on this matter involving the Department. Additionally, he highlighted the challenge of finding work placements for students.

MH was pleased with the feedback from ETI and acknowledged some structural issues needing attention. Comments concerning feedback on individual pathways for students and managing parents' expectations would be considered.

CB mentioned that all colleges had received similar challenges.

CMG congratulated the team and suggested that internal reviews of SEN be carried out going forward.

The draft minutes of 30.9.25 were endorsed.

### **132.10 Resources Committee**

#### **Documents shared in advance: Draft minutes 15.10.25; Finance Update and annex; Fees & Charges Policy**

132.10.1 Draft minutes 15.10.25: IM summarised discussion at the meeting including: student numbers; staff survey; excellent work by the Project Manager and team on the new builds, which has been recognised by the Department; HR report; budget, with expectations of additional funding becoming available mid-year; and changes to Committee membership MH highlighted ongoing pressure on salaries despite savings achieved from staff reductions due to VES. He acknowledged the Department's previous assistance with additional funding but noted the uncertainty around confirmed funding. He also mentioned the difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitable staff, particularly lecturers in trade subjects.

132.10.2 Finance update: SL briefed members on the update and clarified the 2025/26 budget allocation, outstanding pressures, and increased traineeship funding. He also advised on confirmation received earlier in the day, that the application to Great British Energy Funding had been successful. Members noted that plans for delivering the final phase of the Ballymena car park were on track, with the budget being monitored closely.

SL updated members on the disposal and use of Farm Lodge, Lamont, and Trostan Avenue, the D1 process for which will be started as soon as possible to minimise vandalism of the derelict building. He also mentioned that the Department indicated they would be favourable toward a bid to retain funds from the disposal of Ballymoney campus, which is expected to be realised in the next financial year.

132.10.3 Fees & Charges Policy: Members considered the policy and noted proposals to increase relevant fee categories by the inflation rate of 2.7%. Members noted that the proposal was a marginal increase, which would be fair and reasonable.

**ACTION:** The policy was agreed.

6.36pm GMA left the meeting.

### **132.11 Financial Accounts Improvement Committee**

#### **Documents shared in advance: Draft minutes 08.10.25; Members' Update**

132.11.1 Draft minutes 8.10.25: MH highlighted the inclusion of ARAC members in the Committee membership and the range of new oversight meetings. He advised that recommendations from meetings and reviews, along with feedback on progress, would be incorporated into a central document for monitoring purposes.

132.11.2 Update of 20.11.25 meeting: MH reported on discussions with auditors regarding the possibility of a change in opinion on the July '24 accounts. As a result, this risk was now showing as black on the Corporate Risk Register. MH expected to attend the upcoming PAC alongside the Department. He intended to meet with the NIAO Director in the coming week to understand the current status of the accounts and consider the best way to proceed.

132.11.3 GB Members Update: MH took members through the update and advised on the recommendation to close down the July '24 accounts and move forward with July'25 accounts. He had met with the accounts team to outline how this would progress and explained the rationale, timeline and demands.

Members noted that following discussion between CMK and the Department, the Chair of the Department ARAC had sent a letter, which would be shared after the meeting. BD queried the reason for no formal information being provided on the audit opinion.

### **132.12 Audit & Risk Committee**

#### **Documents shared in advance: Draft minutes 17.09.25, 01.10.25 and 12.11.25**

DS outlined the content of the 12.11.25 minutes, which still had to be formally approved by Committee. He especially highlighted discussion on the risk register when it was noted that risk 7 reputational impact, had been moved to black and there were significant concerns around the risk from accounts.

The draft minutes of 17.09.25 and 01.10.25 were endorsed.

The draft minutes of 12.11.25 were endorsed subject to minor amendment.

### **132.13 Corporate Risk Register**

#### **Document shared in advance: Risk Register**

Members considered the Risk Register and noted that risk 7 had moved to black status.

### **132.14 Any Other Business**

Members were reminded of dates for upcoming College events:

- Annual Christmas Lunch in the Restaurant, Causeway Campus on 2.12.25
- Graduation: 4.12.25 in the Tullyglass House Hotel.
- Staff Awards 30.1.26 in Magherafelt campus.

### **132.15 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on 28.01.26 in Ballymena campus.

The meeting ended at 6.58pm

Mr C McKenna, Chair



Date 28.01.2026

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

