

**Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 11 March 2025 at 4.30pm**

**Present physically at WSC:** A Duffety, **Chair** N Savvas, CEO

**Present virtually:** C Higgins J Drake  
E D'Souza M Chatt, **Vice Chair**

**In Attendance:** A Brewster, Group Head of Finance  
A McGarel, CFO  
D Barton, Assistant Principal Adult  
L Carroll, Group Head of Project Accounting, Risk and Transformation  
L Moody, Principal Strategic Growth and Partnerships  
L Parish, Assistant Principal Apprenticeships  
P Stittle, Executive Director Business Development  
S Gales, Governance Professional  
S Minns, Group Head of Admissions and Enrolment

**Apologies:**

**Absent:**

**1. Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence**

A Duffety, C Higgins, E D'Souza and M Chatt declared their roles as Trustees, and N Savvas as CEO of the Eastern Education Group Trust. No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

No apologies were received.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2025**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2025 were **agreed** as an accurate record.

**3. Matters Arising from meeting on 5 February 2025**

Four of the six matters arising were complete, one is ongoing, and one is due to be presented to the Audit and Risk Management Committee in the summer term.

**4. Finance Report**

Governors received and noted the detailed financial report provided, and the Group Head of Finance summarised the report:

- The year-to-date position is a position better than budget by circa £220k,
- The forecast year end position is a surplus position worse than budget by circa £10k.

The Group Head of Finance informed that the DfE have informed that growth case funding will be paid at two-thirds the anticipated amount, so we will need to update our forecasting.

Governors requested an additional paper outlining the risks and opportunities, plans for how the challenge budget will be achieved and commentary on unbudgeted expenditure.

Governors commended the variance analysis table.

Governors discussed the impact of the partial funding of the growth case and queried the strategies the College will employ to rebalance the year-end position. The CFO informed that senior leaders are working to achieve savings and where possible are delaying recruitment to reduce costs.

Governors reflected that, following the recent growth of the Trust and the demand generated by the scale of improvements needed at the SEND schools, our Group teams and senior leaders are more focussed on Trust work than previously anticipated. The CFO

**Action**

CFO

explained that the Trust plan to cover these costs by drawing on their reserves, as a one-off investment, however informed that it will impact WSC's budget due to unbudgeted intra-Group related party transaction spend.

Governors queried how we will account for this unbudgeted intra-Group related party transaction in our management accounts. The CFO explained how the finance team are tracking and monitoring the unbudgeted expenditure, and how it will be recharged.

The CEO and Corporation Chair suggested we convene a task and finish group in the second half of summer term, with members from the Audit and Risk Management and Resources Committees to review how we account for intra-Group related party transactions staffing costs and other Group central costs, and how these are attributed to each organisation.

Governors discussed the balance sheet and queried if additional analysis can be provided of debtors and creditors, to help identify trends and/or concerns. The CFO agreed to add this in future reports.

CFO

Governors discussed the need to move to reporting by exception and risk area.

Governors discussed line 1.24 relating to exceptional costs and queried the reason for the discrepancy between the RAG ratings on pages 2 and 5. A Brewster informed this is in error and explained that the finance team feel confident in the costing and should be rated green 'high level of confidence'.

Governors discussed opportunities/risk in the context of the forecast-year end position, and queried whether there is confidence that we can achieve the forecast year-end position. A Brewster explained that the team are confident, and summarised the inter-relations of the opportunities/risks and confirmed the table will be updated for the next Finance Committee meeting. The CFO explained the anticipated profiling across the next term to achieve the year-end position, and their rationale for their confidence.

## 5. **Key Performance Indicator Report**

Governors received and considered the KPI report provided, of which 9 green, 6 amber and 0 red RAG rated KPIs.

Governors queried the college's financial health grade for 2023/24. The CFO confirmed it was Outstanding.

Governors queried if the college is now using the new methodology for the financial health grade. The CFO explained that it is not in use yet across the sector.

## 6. **Student numbers for current year (Enrolments) and for next year (Applications)**

### i. **Sixth Form Provision**

### ii. **University Studies Provision**

Governors received and considered the report provided. S Minns provided a verbal update on the live enrolment data compared to the ESFA funded student allocation and on HE numbers compared to budgetary assumptions.

Governors commended the additional course application information provided.

Governors queried what is the ESFA funding allocation for 2025/26. The CFO informed that it will be based on 3,744 students, due to lagged funding.

Governors discussed the impact of lagged funding especially in the context of significant successive growth, and queried how confident we are that we can support the anticipated growth next year. The CFO explained how this is being planned for and managed. Governors discussed whether the 2025/26 budget income should be based on the ESFA allocation and the expenditure should be based on the anticipated student numbers, to fully plan for meeting the anticipated growth. The CFO to consider.

CFO

Governors queried where we monitor student retention. The CFO explained that we monitor student numbers as a KPI and as part of the retention factor used to calculate the forecast budget. The CEO explained that the Educational Excellence Committee also look at retention as a KPI linked to student experience.

Governors discussed that how we develop our estate to meet student demand needs to reflect current and future need and queried if the medium-term demographic data shows a sustained level of demand or a decline. The CEO explained the demographic data and summarised how we are looking at our course offer, timetabling and infrastructure more broadly to accommodate the growth short-term and position ourselves to best meet the needs of our community to ensure we remain financially sustainable.

Governors queried the impact of the internal progression policy in terms of applications this year compared to last year. L Moody explained the increase in applications both from current Group students and recent Group alumni.

### iii. **Apprenticeship Pipeline**

Governors received and considered the report provided and L Parish provided a verbal update on the live data compared to the budgetary target.

Governors reflected that, at the last meeting, we discussed the possible impact of the government's changes to the apprenticeship levy and queried if the impact is now understood. L Parish explained that budget hasn't yet been published so we don't know the impact yet. L Moody explained that for the next meeting (as this is after the government publishes the budget) we will explain the likely impact.

Governors commended the strength of the report.

### iv. **Adult Pipeline**

Governors received and considered the report provided and D Barton provided a verbal update on the live data compared to the budgetary target.

Governors commended the success and queried how our growth in Cambridgeshire is impacting other ESOL providers. D Barton explained that there is unmet ESOL demand in Cambridgeshire, so we are filling a skills gap. Governors queried whether we have staffing to deliver the additional ESOL courses. D Barton confirmed that we have recruited additional staff and L Moody explained that we may need to appoint additional staff to support further growth.

Governors congratulated the adult team for extending their offer to reach a broader community.

### v. **Full Cost Pipeline**

Governors received and considered the report provided and P Stittle provided a verbal update on the live data compared to the budgetary target.

Governors queried what 'SMT' in the report stands for. P Stittle explained it means science management technician.

Governors thanked Phil Stittle for his reports and wished him success in his new role.

## 7. **Risk Register Extract**

Governors received and considered the Risk Register extract which included 1 red, 7 amber and 2 yellow risks.

L Carroll summarised three operational risks which impact finances. Governors queried if the Committee needs to do anything with the operational risks. L Carroll explained these are for information.

Governors discussed WSC005 (relating to growth case funding) and **recommend to the Audit and Risk Management Committee** close this risk as we now know the funding rate.

A&RMC

Governors discussed the WSC payroll project, and L Carroll explained how the project has further changed since the report was written.

8. **Reserves Policy**

Governors received and considered the Reserves Policy provided, and the CFO summarised the rationale for the policy.

Governors reflected that our reserves range is not aligned to the Trust's policy, and queried whether we should look to align them. The CFO explained that the College and Trust operate to different DfE financial handbooks which recommend different reserve ranges. The CEO explained that we are seeing more alignment between the school and college sector, and so we may look to align the reserves policies going forward.

The Group Head of Finance explained the key differences in reporting of reserves across the College and Trust and reflected this may need to be considered in future if we look to align the reserves policy.

Governors **approved** the policy and **agreed to recommend** it to the Corporation.

9. **2025/26 Funding Allocation**

The CFO informed that announcement of the funding allocation has been delayed by the DfE so this item will be deferred to the next meeting.

10. **Any Other Business**

None.

The meeting closed at 5.58pm