

Minutes of the hybrid meeting held on 5 November 2025 at 3.00pm

Present Physically: K Points, EEGT Trustee

Present Virtually: A Duffety, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor - **Chair**
C Higgins, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor (part)
C Ridgeon, EEGT Trustee
D Wildridge, EEGT Trustee
E D'Souza, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor
M Chatt, EEGT Trustee and WSC Governor
R Attwell, EEGT Trustee

In attendance: A Brewster, Group Director - Finance
A McGarel, CFO
D Barton, Group Assistant Principal- Adult (part)
J McDonnell, Trainee Clerk and EA to the Governance Professional
L Carroll, Group Director – Risk
L Parish, Group Assistant Principal- Apprenticeship and HE (part)
N Savvas, CEO
S Gales, Governance Professional
S Minns, Group Head of Admissions and Enrolment (part)

Apologies: J Drake, WSC Governor - **Vice Chair**
L Moody, Group Principal, University and Professional Development

Absent:

1. Declaration of Interests and Apologies for absence

Members recognised the standing declarations. No other conflicts of interest in relation to the items of the agenda were declared.

Apologies were received from J Drake.

2. Minutes of the meeting on 5 November 2025

Members reviewed and **agreed** the minutes of the meeting on 5 November 2025 as an accurate record.

3. Matters arising from the meeting on 5 November 2025

Eight of the eighteen matters arising from the previous meeting were complete with ten ongoing.

MA7 – Members discussed this action relating to providing benchmarks for the KPIs and requested that the CFO update the response to clarify that disaggregated internal benchmark targets will be used.

MA9 – Members discussed the action relating to amending the section within the EEG Financial Regulations about approval of land/leases and queried if the proposed delegated authority value is for the total value or the annual amount. The CFO confirmed that it is for the total value. Members **approved** the proposed change.

MA13 – Members discussed the action relating to how EEGT's annual accounts explain Exning's Finances and requested that the CFO further consider the wording within the 'Trustees Report' to better explain the context for the financial outturn.

i. 2024/25 Financial Health Grade (WSC)

Members received and **noted** the DfE Financial Health Grade report.

Action

CFO

CFO

Members commended the strong outturn and queried whether the 2025/26 Financial Health Grade is expected to be as strong or if not, which KPI is most at risk. The CFO explained that he feels the KPI relating to a surplus position is most sensitive given the challenging financial climate. The Corporation Chair (as a FE National Leader for Governance working) informed that the FE Commissioner team are aware of the significant challenge for colleges and are reviewing the benchmark relating to surplus to ensure it is reasonable and realistic.

C Higgins joined the meeting at 3.15pm

4. Enrolments and applications

- i. **Primary Provision**
- ii. **Specialist SEND Provision**
- iii. **Sixth Form Provision**
- iv. **Higher Education Provision**
- v. **Adult Provision**

Members received and considered the papers on enrolments and applications.

S Minns summarised the primary, SEND, sixth form and HE report and key changes compared to the position reported at the last meeting.

Members commended the improved student enrolment at WSC sixth form and queried what actions led to the conversions. S Minns summarised the methods used to encourage applicants to enrol.

Members queried whether duplicate applications between WSC sixth form and ASFC are challenging to manage and if this impact the reliability of forecasting. S Minns explained that our enrolment system helps identify and track duplicate applications to aid our communications with applicants. Members requested analysis of duplicate applications at the next meeting and asked the Governance Professional to add it as a standing item at the February meeting on the agenda planner.

S Minns
Gov. Prof.

Members queried whether it is possible for us to analyse the reasons why students do not apply to EEG's sixth forms. S Minns reflected that this is difficult data to gather, though informed that some of our feeder schools provide feedback however noted that this data provides an incomplete picture.

The CEO reflected that the more critical element is understanding how we can support students to not become NEET after leaving school ('at risk' secondary school students who may have a history of absence and/or are hard-to-engage and have no plans for further education/employment/training). The CEO informed that we are working with Local Authorities on projects to prevent NEETs. Members commended the projects and asked for progress updates when available.

CEO

D Barton joined the meeting at 3.30pm

D Barton summarised the adult enrolment and applications report.

Members commended the progress in securing additional grants, though queried if these funds are at risk of clawback linked to devolution. D Barton informed that our AEB income is at risk of clawback and explained the additional complexities of tailoring delivery across multiple Local Authorities, and how our Adult and Data teams work together to closely monitor the funding. D Barton added that devolution adds further complexity and time sensitivity.

Members queried whether the additional grants and contracts had been incorporated into the budget. D Barton explained that it has and that she and the CFO have agreed the proportion of the additional funding which will contribute to the surplus and expenditure linked to resourcing the additional delivery.

Members commended the improved enrolment and application reports.

D Barton, S Minns and L Parish left the meeting at 3.40pm

5. Finance Report

- i. **EEGT**
- ii. **WSC**

Members received and considered a report which explained that the production of this report has been further delayed as a result of the implementation of the new financial reporting system.

A Brewster explained the reasons for the delay (a technical fault between our external financial software systems) and informed that since this report was published, the fault affecting EEGT's data has been fixed, however work is still ongoing to resolve the fault affecting for WSC's data.

Members reflected that the Academy Trust Handbook requires the production and review of EEGT's monthly financial accounts and queried when these will be provided. A Brewster confirmed that now the technical issue has been resolved the accounts will be produced and uploaded to GovernorHub for the Committee to review, though advised that the Finance team are working to review the phasing of year-to-date actual data further to enhance its usefulness when considering performance.

A Brewster

6. KPI Report

- i. **EEGT**

Members received and considered the report provided which showed the data for the Primary and SEND Schools, and the Sixth Forms, as at the end of September 2025; with 14 green, 0 amber and 2 red KPIs.

- ii. **WSC**

Members received and considered the report provided which showed the data as at the end of September 2025; with 12 green, 3 amber and 0 red KPIs.

A Brewster summarised the key points of the reports and acknowledged and apologised for the mistake on EEGT's report relating to the pupil to teacher ratio for the SEND schools.

Members discussed how SEND schools are funded and noted that the pupil to teacher ratio is highly variable as it reflects the SEN needs of students. A Brewster added that the SEND schools are funded for their PAN rather than the number of students on roll.

Members reflected that the income and expenditure KPIs for WSC were to be removed, though noted they are shown in this report. A Brewster apologised and confirmed these will be removed.

CFO

Members queried how the direction arrows used in the KPI reports have been identified given the difficulty producing the monthly accounts. A Brewster agreed that they are not meaningful on these reports rather were included as placeholders.

7. Annual Report and Financial Statement 2024/25

- i. **EEGT**

Members received and considered the updated annual accounts compared to the version presented to the EEGT Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting on 18 November 2025.

i. WSC

Members received and considered the updated annual accounts compared to the version presented to the Corporation at the Audit and Risk Management Committee meeting on 17 November 2025.

The CFO reflected that the annual accounts show a very strong outturn, which aligned to forecasting. The CFO noted that EEGT's annual accounts include some highly technical aspects this year such as the valuation of pensions and to account for the transfers of the primary and SEND schools.

The CFO summarised the key changes to the annual accounts compared to the versions reviewed by the two Audit and Risk Management Committees (WSC's on 17 November 2025 and EEGT's on 18 November 2025).

The CFO noted that the SECR (Streamlined Energy and Carbon Reports) still need to be added and some further requested changes are still being processed by the External Auditors.

The CFO outlined the timeline of when the final versions of the annual accounts, associated letters of representation and External Auditor's findings reports will be submitted to the Corporation and Trust Board.

The Governance Professional explained the 'ask' of this Committee in relation to reviewing and recommending the annual accounts to the Corporation and Trust Board and the quorum needed (pursuant to the Committee's terms of reference) required to recommend the accounts.

Members commended the Finance team and External Auditors for their support of the annual audits and their clean audit findings.

Members reflected that the format for both annual accounts are quite inaccessible for non-financial specialists to understand, especially for the headline surplus/deficit position. The CFO agreed though reflected that the formats are prescribed by the DfE and noted that within the 'Trustee Report' (for EEGT) and the 'Report of the Governing Body (for WSC) we have tried to simplify and contextualise the financial performance and outturn.

Members reflected that there are some minor typos and formatting issues in both annual accounts and **agreed** to send information about these to the CFO, for the External Auditors to amend.

Members queried if the letters of the annual accounts have been reviewed by the Audit and Risk Management Committees and whether they can be signed electronically. The CFO confirmed that the letters were provided to and approved by the Audit and Risk Management Committees and advised that these can be signed electronically.

Members discussed the Income/Expenditure sheet within the EEGT annual accounts and reflected that the 'net movement in funds before other recognised gains/(losses)' is hard to understand especially when compared to the 2023/24 figure. The CFO explained that in the final version of the accounts this will be reconciled, and additional wording will be provided to explain the figure.

Members identified an inconsistency of the named address for the External Auditors in EEGT's annual accounts, between the 'reference and administrative details report' section and the 'independent auditors' report'. A Brewster to liaise with the External Auditors to amend.

Members reflected that the EEGT's annual accounts includes our financial KPI dashboard and queried whether this should be added in WSC's annual accounts, or whether it should be removed. If kept, members requested that the risk direction

All
Larking Gowen
& RSM

Larking Gowen

CFO
Larking Gowen
RSM

arrows be removed. The CFO to consider and liaise with the External Auditors accordingly to amend.

Members noted that the list of 'Members' in EEGT's annual accounts is incomplete and the Governance Professional confirmed that the External Auditors are aware and are amending it.

Larking Gowen

Members discussed how the reserves are presented in EEGT's annual accounts (linked to the discussion of MA13 above) and reflected that the SEND schools require significant capital investment to improve their estate and are liabilities. Members requested that the CFO review the supporting narrative in the annual accounts to contextualise the surplus outturn to explain the reserves required to maintain and improve the infrastructure of our schools and colleges as identified in the Property Strategy, and to note that reserve levels are not static and will fall in 2025/26 as reinvestment works commence.

CFO

Members discussed the 'Trustee Report' in EEGT's annual accounts and requested that the wording relating to the Internal Audit service be enhanced to reflect the strategic intent, rigour and transparency of the Trust's risk and control framework. The CFO agreed and reflected that the Internal Audit's involvement in reviewing the Trust's risk register and in the development of its 3-year audit map is very strong practice.

CFO

Members discussed the reporting of investments within the annual accounts and reflected that it would be prudent for this Committee to review its banking and investments, interest rates and returns at a future meeting. The CFO agreed and noted that Larking Gowen are providing some information about what is permissible given the different regulatory frameworks that apply to MATs vs Colleges.

CFO

The CFO also informed he contacted the DfE to seek permission for a pilot to pool and invest EEG's reserves to generate a higher interest return rate, with the interest generated being apportioned back to EEGT and WSC. The CFO informed that the DfE's response was that they needed to seek advice from HM Treasury as this links to Managing Public Money guidance, and that he is awaiting a formal response. The CFO noted that while we await a response, EEGT and WSC's reserves are separately invested and utilise investments which are flexible enough for the funds to be withdrawn and used for the planned capital investment and improvement works.

Decision taken by EEGT Trustees

Members **approved** EEGT's annual accounts and **agreed to recommend them to the Trust Board**, subject to the amendments discussed above.

Decision taken by WSC Governors

Members **approved** WSC's annual accounts and **agreed to recommend them to the Corporation**, subject to the amendments discussed above.

8. Risk Register Extract

Members reviewed the Risk Register extract which included **1 red, 3 amber** and **6 yellow** risks, with one risk removed (WSC0XX relating to not achieving the 2024/25 'challenge budget') and one proposed new risk (EEX0XX relating to risk of not achieving the 2025/26 budget surplus).

Members discussed the rationale and context for the two 'operational risks' relating to implementing a new payroll system and the new finance system.

Members reflected that central systems integration has been a core component of onboarding the primary and SEND schools and in creating a common culture and queried the anticipated response of schools or colleges joining EEG in the future to the new payroll and finance system. The CFO explained that it is common practice

for joining parties to adopt the systems and processes of the established Group though noted, as with all change management, there may be some resistance.

Members reflected that HE student numbers have improved compared to previous year and queried what needs to happen for the red risk (relating to HE enrolment) to be downgraded to amber. The CEO reflected that it was still very early in the academic year and into implementing the HE Growth Strategy, and so we need further assurance that enrolment is sustained or if there are withdrawals which indicate more work was needed. C Higgins (as a member of the Adult, Apprenticeship and HE Educational Excellence Committee) fed back on that Committee's discussion which supported the view that we need to further trend analysis before downgrading the risk. Members supported the cautious approach and discussed the factors which could influence when the risk could be considered as sufficiently mitigated to be downgraded.

Members reviewed the risks and **felt assured** by the mitigations proposed

9. **Any Other Business**

- **Update on cold spots contracts (St Neots, Soham, and Ely Centres)**

The CFO provided a verbal update on the funding WSC has been awarded through CPCA to develop three additional centres in Ely, Soham and St Neots to support skills development in cold spots (discussed by the Boards on 9 May 2025) and advised that, as it we have not been able to find suitable premises to buy, WSC would like to be granted the 'option' to utilise the funding for leased premises.

Members voiced their support of the rationale for the approach and reflected that given our strong track record with CPCA it is reasonable to make this 'option' request.

The CEO confirmed that we intend to bring more detail about our plans for delivering these new centres before we seek formal approval to commit to any lease, and to update governance formally via the Chairs Advisory Board.

L Moody

- **Update on Heads of Terms for Thetford centre**

The CFO provided a verbal update on the opportunity (discussed by the Boards on 2 June 2025) to relocate our Thetford centre as part of the town's regeneration plans and advised that Breckland District Council are seeking a commitment from WSC to match fund the architectural design costs up to £200k and to sign a Heads of Terms document. The CFO explained that, in accordance with our Financial Regulations, the CEO has delegated authority to authorise unbudgeted expenditure up to £250k; however, for transparency wanted to notify the Committee of the discretionary expenditure.

Members thanked the Executive for their transparency and voiced their support of the rationale for proceeding with the opportunity, though were cautious to review more detail about the opportunity (e.g. Stage 2 due diligence) before granting formal approval to commit to the opportunity. Members asked the Executive to update governance formally via the Chairs Advisory Board.

L Moody

Members (in compliance with the Financial Regulations) supported the two proposals, though noted these proposals should be considered by the Chair's Advisory Board with monitoring reports coming to this Committee for oversight. The Corporation Chair and CEO to arrange a Chairs Advisory Boards for these proposals.

Chairs Advisory Board

The meeting closed at 6.03pm