

HARLOW COLLEGE FURTHER EDUCATION CORPORATION

CORPORATION MEETING

Minutes of the meeting held at Harlow College – Thursday 23 October 2025 – 9am

Membership:	*Paul Taylor (Chair)	Vic Goddard	*Lily Lin
	*Caleb Asareaddo	*Neala Goddard-Bird	*Karen Spencer
	Caroline Betts	*John Godley	*Ian Tompkins
	Matt Braund	*Stephen Isherwood	*Ed Whittle
	*Rod Bristow	Ayub Khan	*Heather Wilson
	*Julia Fillary	*Ray Levy	

* denotes present

In attendance: Paul Whitehead, Deputy Principal
Becky Jones, Deputy Principal
Kirstie Craig, Vice-Principal
Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance
Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance

Annual Safeguarding Training

The meeting commenced with the annual Governor safeguarding training, presented by Sara Norton, Safeguarding Manager.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Caroline Betts, Matt Braund, Vic Goddard and Ayub Khan, for personal reasons.

Paul Taylor welcomed everyone to the meeting and the two newly elected Student Governors introduced themselves.

2 Declaration of Interests

There were no additional declarations of interest.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2025 were approved by the Corporation as a true and accurate record of the meeting, subject to two job titles being updated, and were signed by the Chair.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes

4.1 FE Commissioner's Summer Newsletter (agenda item 8.1.3 refers)

Ruth Lucas confirmed that the FE Commissioner's Summer Newsletter had been circulated to all Governors.

5 Principal's Report

The Corporation received and considered the Principal's Report, presented by Karen Spencer, Principal.

The report was taken as read.

Karen Spencer reported that in the Prime Minister's speech at the Labour Party Conference, there was a specific focus on further education and skills and the government's mission to grow the economy, improve living standards and strengthen local communities. This has been well-received by the FE sector.

Governors were informed that as part of the Cabinet reshuffle and government reorganisation, oversight for apprenticeships and skills policy will move from the Department for Education (DfE) to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The change is designed to create a single, joined-up system connecting skills, training and employment. The DWP will now lead on adult skills, apprenticeships and workforce participation, aligning these with wider labour market interventions and benefit reforms. The DfE will retain responsibility for 16–19 education, college funding, teaching quality, accountability and qualifications, alongside oversight of Ofsted and the regulatory framework for providers. Skills England has formally transferred to the DWP and will assume the functions previously undertaken by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). Skills England will provide national coordination, set priorities for technical education and apprenticeships, and advise government on long-term workforce planning and productivity. Jacqui Smith remains the Minister for Skills however she now reports to two Secretaries of State.

The new Ofsted framework has been introduced and a new inspection cycle will begin on 10 November 2025. Further details on this can be found in agenda item 6 – Quality, Curriculum and Self-Assessment Update.

There is increasing pressure on high needs funding nationally. The College has a strong relationship with Essex County Council and is not experiencing some of the nationally reported issues. A review of SEND funding is taking place and there is risk with where the funding will sit in light of local government reform.

The government has published its Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper, which contains a whole section on further education and building on existing good practice within the sector. The introduction of V-Levels has been announced which will be delivered alongside A-Levels and T-Levels. V-Levels are due to be introduced in 2027-2028. There are two-year pathways at Level 2 being introduced, one for further study which will allow for access to A-Levels or T-Levels and a two year occupational pathway. A summary of the White Paper will be circulated to all Governors.

The sector is waiting on the final outcomes on the Curriculum Assessment Review with regards to GCSE English and maths resits. Consideration could be given as to whether GCSE maths should be a double award like English due to the volume of content. A new preparing for GCSE qualification for those with a GCSE grade of 2 or below is to be introduced.

A Governor asked for more information on GCSE English and maths resits. Karen Spencer reported that students need to resit these subjects if they achieved a grade 3, however those with a lower grade can undertake Functional Skills, however this is not something we routinely do. Becky Jones reported that a number of colleges bulk enter their students for the November GCSE resits however this is not the approach taken by Harlow College. In terms of meeting the condition of funding, if a student attends an exam, they are classed as being retained and the condition of funding being met.

Governors were informed that there is a review of the 16 – 19 funding formula, ensuring there is a focus on high value qualifications and priority growth sectors. There is a youth guarantee for NEETs and stronger employer links, with a focus on employer co-investment funding in partnership with the DfE and colleges. New awarding powers at Levels 4 and 5 have been granted for colleges to drive the higher technical qualifications (HTQs).

A Governor reported that V-Levels are potentially good however the government needs to map out a vision for them. A Governor asked if the White Paper will have an impact on the attitude towards Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications. Karen Spencer reported that the College is registered with the Office for Students for its higher education provision however taking on a quasi registration could be better and give more flexibility and the power to be an awarding body. If the right conditions are put in place, there is merit in what is being proposed.

Becky Jones highlighted that there is no reference to Access to Higher Education and in previous years there had been a good appetite locally for this type of qualification however people cannot afford to study this currently and there is a need to put in help and support for these learners. Paul Whitehead reported that a shift in the conditions for higher education is unlikely due to the financial pressures currently being faced by universities.

A Governor asked if the move of Skills England to the DWP will have an impact on the College. Karen Spencer reported that this move is not likely to have much of an impact on the ground.

The Corporation noted the Principal's Report.

6 Quality, Curriculum and Self-Assessment Update

The Corporation received and considered the Quality, Curriculum and Self-Assessment Update, presented by Becky Jones, Deputy Principal.

Becky Jones reported that improvements have been seen across all provision types in 2024 – 2025 with the exception of higher education however there were only twenty higher education students. A key focus during the year was working on consistency across teams and this is reflected in the improvements made.

There has been a slight drop in the attendance rate however the College changed the system for recording attendance (not including home study marks) therefore in real terms, students are attending better and this has translated into higher achievement and retention rates.

Governors were informed that there has been a significant growth in English and maths students resitting again in 2025 - 2026. For 2024 – 2025, the College's grade 9 – 4 rate

for English was 22.1%, against the national rate of 21% for general further education colleges and 22% for all colleges which places the College 111 nationally out of 208 colleges. There is work to be undertaken with progress from Level 2 however Level 1 is better. For maths, the College's grade 9 – 4 rate was 24%, against the national rate of 16% for general further education colleges and 16.4% for all colleges which places the College 55 nationally out of 208 colleges.

Achievement for students from an ethnic minority background or a vulnerable group is in line with the College's rates for those not from these backgrounds, with the exception of achievement for black males. This is predominately due to the majority of these students studying ESOL and / or English and maths. This will be explored by the Inclusion Taskforce (formerly retention task force).

Governors' attention was brought to the self-assessment event planned for 3 December 2025 and Becky Jones asked for any feedback.

Becky Jones highlighted the new Ofsted inspection framework which now contains 16 judgements which include a new judgement on inclusion and meeting skills' needs is now one of the key judgements. There is a five-point grading scale for all judgements except safeguarding which is either "met" or "not met". The middle grade on the five-point scale is "expected standard" and it is thought this will be the new "good" even though it is in the middle of the scale. It will be an "absolute fit" model for the grades rather than a "best fit" model. John Godley reported that Ofsted said more context will be taken into consideration however this is yet to be seen in the pilots.

A Governor reported that the College's deep dives being less around lesson observations and more on completing actions from the previous year is a good move.

The Corporation noted the Quality, Curriculum and Self-Assessment Update.

7 Search and Governance Committee Reports

7.1 Search and Governance Committee Meeting Summary Report

The Corporation received and noted the summary report of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 07 October 2025.

7.1.1 Minutes of the Search and Governance Committee – 07 October 2025

The Corporation received and noted the minutes of the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 07 October 2025.

7.1.2 Membership of Harlow Education Further Education Corporation

The Corporation received and considered the Search and Governance Committee's recommendations for membership of Harlow College Further Education Corporation.

The Search and Governance Committee recommended the appointment of Councillor Dan Swords as a Governor of Harlow College Further Education Corporation for a period of four years (or less if he ceases to

be a Harlow Council Councillor), commencing on 1 November 2025, and for him to sit on the Resources Committee.

The Corporation unanimously approved the Search and Governance Committee's recommendations. Councillor Dan Swords was appointed as a Governor of Harlow College Further Education for a period of four years (or less if he ceases to be a Harlow Council Councillor), commencing on 1 November 2025.

7.1.3 AoC Further Education Code of Good Governance

The Corporation received and considered the report on the AoC Further Education Code of Good Governance, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

The Head of Governance reported that the Corporation needs to report that it is compliant with a governance code in the financial statements and that the Corporation adopted the AoC's Further Education Code of Good Governance in October 2023.

The Head of Governance highlighted the mapping exercise against the six principles in the Code, demonstrating how the Corporation has complied with the Code and areas for development.

Governors were informed that the College's response to the Code had been discussed in detail at the Search and Governance Committee meeting held on 07 October 2025 and that the Search and Governance Committee's recommendation is for the Corporation to approve the response.

The Corporation noted the report on the AoC Further Education Code of Good Governance and approved the College's reporting of compliance with the AoC Further Education Code of Good Governance in the annual accounts.

8 Audit Committee Reports

8.1 Audit Committee Meeting Summary Report

The Corporation received and noted the summary report of the Audit Committee meeting held on 09 October 2025.

8.1.1 Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting – 09 October 2025

The Corporation received and noted the minutes and the confidential minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 09 October 2025.

8.1.2 Regularity Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire

The Corporation received and considered the Regulatory Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Deanne Morgan informed Governors that this is a DfE template which the College has to complete and submit to the external auditors.

The Corporation was informed that the Regulatory Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire had been discussed in detail by the Audit Committee at its meeting held on 09 October 2025. The Audit Committee recommends that the document is signed by the Chair and Accounting Officer.

The Corporation approved the Regulatory Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire and agreed for it to be signed by the Chair and the Accounting Officer.

8.1.3 Appointment of External Auditors

The Corporation noted the decision of the Audit Committee of tendering for an external audit service for three years (2025/26, 2026/27, 2027/28) subject to an annual review with an option to extend.

8.1.4 Appointment of Internal Auditors

The Corporation noted the decision of the Audit Committee of tendering for an internal audit service and an in-depth funding assurance audit for three years (2026/27, 2027/28, 2028/29) subject to an annual review with an option to extend.

9 Finance and Resources Reports

9.1 Predicted Financial Outturn 1 August 2024 – 31 July 2025

The Corporation received and considered the predicted financial outturn for the period 1 August 2024 – 31 July 2025, presented by Deanne Morgan, Executive Director – Finance.

Deanne Morgan reported that a lot of the data and figures have been covered at previous Resources Committee and Corporation meetings and the draft year-end accounts are broadly in line with the targets set. The accounts are subject to external audit and there could be some movement with the pension lines.

Financial health is good and the bank covenants are met. Cash days are good. Although there are slightly lower than the original forecast due to the repayment of the loan, they are still above the 40 day benchmark.

Governors were informed that the apprenticeship debtor is being finalised and that the apprenticeship income for 2025 – 2026 is being looked at to see how much of it relates to 2024 – 2025. A Governor asked if this would be material and Deanne Morgan confirmed it would not be.

The DfE funding audit has been completed and this should not have an impact on the year-end figures.

A Governor highlighted it is good to see the agency costs reducing and asked why the staff costs are slightly above budget. Paul Whitehead reported that staff costs have increased in-year due to the significant in-year growth in student numbers and SEND students. It is difficult to plan the staff cost growth due to the lagged funding model however the costs have been factored through into the 2025 – 2026 financial plan. Karen Spencer reported that the College only receives 12% of the funding for additional students however the staff cost is 70% of the full amount which will not be received until the next academic year. It is a balancing act between the costs and not turning students away. A Governor reported that the original staffing budget is different to the actuals every month and management responded that due to the additional students there is a need for extra staff which would not have been known at the time of the budget being set.

A Governor asked if the biggest issue is staffing for high needs students and if the trend of increasing number of high needs students is likely to continue. Paul Whitehead reported that the College had to initially recruit staff quickly via agencies last year and then converted them to permanent members of staff. High needs numbers for 2025 – 2026 are less than in 2024 – 2025. It is difficult to predict however numbers appear to be back closer to those in 2023-2024.

The Corporation noted the predicted outturn for the period 1 August 2024 – 31 July 2025.

9.2 Recruitment of Learners - Enrolment Report 2025 – 2026

The Corporation received and considered the report on recruitment of learners – enrolment report 2025 – 2026, presented by Paul Whitehead, Deputy Principal.

Paul Whitehead reported that the College is on track to meet the 16 – 18 learner responsive funding allocation however no in-year growth funding is expected. There has been an increase in student numbers at STAC, facilitated by the leasing of additional classroom space, and a slight decline in student numbers at Harlow.

The Youth Guarantee aspect of the White Paper could pose challenges for colleges, such as capacity issues, classroom space and staffing and there is currently no indication that there will be any additional capital funding available in the upcoming years.

Governors' attention was brought to the increase in T-Level student numbers, along with the increase in apprenticeship numbers, both at Harlow and at STAC.

A Governor asked what the reasons were for the growth in apprenticeship numbers. Kirstie Craig reported that the College had been focusing on improving the quality of its apprenticeship provision and restricted the number of enrolments. Now the quality issues have been addressed, there are less restrictions on apprenticeship numbers therefore there has been a growth in provision, particularly in electrical, aeronautical engineering and manufacturing engineering.

The Adult Skills Fund (ASF) targets have been broken down and at present, management are confident the targets will be met and confirmed that the full allocation was met last academic year.

A Governor asked why the ASF was RAG rated red if management are confident that targets will be met. Paul Whitehead reported that the College needs to earn the funding in order to receive it rather than it being allocation based. It has therefore been RAG rated red based on the current position however this will change in-year.

A Governor asked if postcodes are still an issue for the ASF. Karen Spencer reported that this is the case and that a mayoral authority in Essex might help address this issue.

Higher Education numbers are low however Engineering and Psychology and Counselling Higher National Qualifications are being delivered.

There are 30 fewer high needs funded students this academic year compared to last year, however the current numbers are in line with 2023 – 2024 figures.

The Corporation noted the report recruitment of learners – enrolment report 2025 – 2026.

9.3 Property Update

The Corporation received and considered the property update, presented by Paul Whitehead, Deputy Principal.

The report was taken as read.

Paul Whitehead reported that work completed in 2024 – 2025, in line with the College's plan to reduce to net zero carbon by 2050, has resulted in a 12% reduction in emissions and carbon footprint. This has been largely due to cladding works, boiler replacements and improvements to the condition of the campus. Furthermore, a full refit of all lighting to LED lighting is underway. The College is currently ahead of its 2040 target.

A rolling programme of campus refurbishment work is ongoing which is planned to minimise the impact on teaching.

The College has secured £70k funding from Harlow Council to bring the Construction Hub back into use as the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has confirmed its move to Harlow. The College is also working with Passmores Co-operative Learning Community to use the Hub for 14 – 16 year old learners.

Governors' attention was brought to the proposed land exchange with Harlow Council and the areas of land concerned. Governors were informed that it is mutually beneficial for both parties to exchange land and a like-for-like swap is proposed. There would be a covenant on the land given to the College that it would be for educational use. The College is taking legal advice on the proposed Heads of Terms for the land exchange.

A Governor asked if the cost of the land exchange would be at zero cost. It was confirmed that the land would be exchanged and no cash payment would be involved. Karen Spencer reported that the land acquired by the College would have a significant return on investment for training and Paul Whitehead confirmed that both the College and Council are governed by HM Treasury's Managing Public Money. There will be a need to ensure that the land exchange will be equal for both parties.

The Corporation approved to proceed with this land exchange on the basis that it will be a "like for like" swap with no monies exchanged between the two parties and that the Heads of Terms would be signed by two Governors and executed and sealed as a deed.

Paul Whitehead provided the Corporation with an update on STAC Phase 2a and Phase 2b.

Phase 2a is a hangar building with an estimated cost of £14m, excluding the land which Manchester Airport Group have agreed to gift to the College. Essex County Council have confirmed a £5m contribution and employer / private investment is now being sought for the remaining funding. Early conversations around funding are also taking place with the DfE.

A Governor asked which employers might be approached for investment. Paul Whitehead confirmed that a considered approach will be taken through a target list in partnership with Essex County Council and Manchester Airport Group.

Manchester Airport Group and Harlow College are producing a plan in relation to obtaining planning permission and then lease agreements for the additional land will be explored in detail. It is not certain yet whether the lease will be an extension of the current lease or a new lease. There would be conditions in the lease that the land would be used for educational purposes and if the project did not go ahead, the land would revert back to the landlord. The process would be the same as the process for STAC Phase 1. A Governor asked if there were any liabilities at present. Paul Whitehead confirmed that all funding will come with certain conditions around the building, however if the build did not go ahead, the funding would be relinquished.

A Governor asked if there was engagement with the local Council around Section 106 funding and it was confirmed that discussions are taking place.

Essex County Council, Manchester Airport Group and Harlow College are meeting regularly and advice is being taken on the most appropriate approach to deal with funding from investors. Joint advice from solicitors with Essex County Council is being sought and the College has been advised that a number of colleges have set up subsidiaries for project design and build in order to zero rate the VAT upfront on buildings for educational use.

A Governor asked about the subsidiary company, which could be potentially contentious for HMRC, and if the College was getting robust written advice. Karen Spencer confirmed that formal legal advice will be sought and Paul Whitehead confirmed that initial meetings had been held and will continue to be held. Deanne Morgan highlighted that the College has zero rated construction

costs previously, it is standard in the sector and ensures that the College is not wasting money. The difference with this project is the private investment and there is a need to be mindful of any potential issues with corporation tax and VAT. Ed Whittle offered to look over any VAT advice received as this is his background.

The Corporation was asked to give permission for the exploration of establishing a design and build subsidiary, based on professional advice. It was confirmed that permission is not currently being sought to set up such a company rather it is to explore options and make a formal proposal at a later meeting.

The Corporation approved proceeding with the arrangements for land lease arrangements with MAG in line with DfE requirements and the exploration of a design and build subsidiary, based on professional advice.

The Corporation noted the property update and approved the following:

- The College to proceed with this land exchange on the basis that it will be a “like for like” swap with no monies exchanged between the two parties and that the Heads of Terms would be signed by two Governors and executed and sealed as a deed;
- The College to proceed with the arrangements for land lease arrangements with MAG in line with DfE requirements;
- The College to explore a design and build subsidiary, based on professional advice.

10 Student Governor Update

The Corporation received and considered the Student Governor Update, presented by Neala Goddard-Bird and Caleb Asareaddo, Student Governors.

Governors were informed that student voice is strong at both Harlow and STAC, with over 72 Student Ambassadors taking part in regular meetings and activities.

Neala Goddard-Bird reported on the Federation of Essex Colleges’ learner voice conference which focused on sustainability. Neala Goddard-Bird reported that Harlow College offers enrichment opportunities to students on sustainability and sustainability will be a key focus for the new appointed Green Ambassadors.

Student Ambassadors are reporting that more sporting enrichment opportunities are being requested and that these are opened up to second year students. Karen Spencer reported that Harlow is a focus area for Active Essex and Ian Tompkins offered to link the College with the appropriate person at Active Essex.

Neala Goddard-Bird reported that management are good at addressing any issues raised by Ambassadors and students and examples of “You Said, We Did” are included in the report.

A Governor reported on the work being undertaken as part of the Five Dinners programme which is open to anyone living, studying or working in Harlow and this could be explored further with students.

Caleb Asareaddo reported on the issue of food prices. Karen Spencer reported that this is an ongoing challenge as all the College's catering facilities are running at a loss. Paul Whitehead confirmed that a group has been established to review all catering and that as the cost of food increases, the College wants to ensure that there is an affordable meal option for students. The College receives £3 per meal for every student who is eligible for free school meals however the price range of a meal is between £4.50 and £6.50. Karen Spencer reported that it is cheaper for the College to buy in bulk, however this generates a lot of waste. Neala Goddard-Bird asked for more vegan and gluten free options to be available and Paul Whitehead confirmed that this would be followed up as part of the review. Karen Spencer reported that students opt to go over to the town centre rather eating on site and that previously healthier options had been provided but there was very little uptake.

Caleb Asareaddo reported that STAC students are concerned about the reliability and cost of public transport. Karen Spencer reported that there is an airport travel subsidy for STAC students and that details will be re-shared with students. There are unfortunately national issues with reliability and cost of public transport. Paul Whitehead reported that a Stansted transport group is being established and there will be student representation on the group. Public transport will need to be considered as part of STAC Phase 2 and is also a key element of Manchester Airport Group's planning application to increase passenger number at Stansted Airport.

Caleb Asareaddo highlighted the upcoming trip which students are eager to be part of. It was reported that a large number of applications have been received and that selection criteria has been set.

The Corporation noted the Student Governor update.

11 Policies for Approval

The Corporation received and considered the Complaints Policy Statement and Procedure, the Disability Statement 2025 – 2026 and the Safeguarding and Prevent Policy, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

Governors were informed that there are no substantive changes to the policies, only minor amendments to terminology, government departments and College procedures, as outlined in the covering report.

The Corporation approved the Complaints Policy Statement and Procedure, the Disability Statement 2025 – 2026 and the Safeguarding and Prevent Policy.

12 Governor Code of Conduct

The Corporation received and considered the Governor Code of Conduct, presented by Ruth Lucas, Head of Governance.

Ruth Lucas reported that the College's governance solicitors, Eversheds, produce the Code of Conduct and outlined the changes to this version, which were mainly to update

references to government departments, update hyperlinks, update references to new codes and policies and update the aims and values in the College's new Strategic Plan.

The Corporation approved the Code of Conduct and Ruth Lucas circulated the declaration for Governors to sign.

13 Any Other Business

There were no items of any other business.

14 Dates of Future Meetings

Autumn Term 2025	Wednesday 03 December 2025	9.am
	(self-assessment reviews)	
	Thursday 18 December 2025	9am
Spring Term 2026	Thursday 26 March 2026	9am
Summer Term 2026	Thursday 19 May 2026	9am
	Thursday 09 July 2026	9am

Action Plan:

Action No.	Agenda Item	Action	By Whom	By When
001	05 – Principal's Report	Ruth Lucas to circulate a summary of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper to all Governors.	Ruth Lucas	30 November 2025
002	10 – Student Governor Update	Ian Tompkins to provide the Active Essex contact to Ruth Lucas.	Ian Tompkins	30 November 2025