

**FURNESS COLLEGE CORPORATION**  
Principal and Chief Executive: Nicola Cove

**MINUTES OF FURNESS COLLEGE**  
**FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Meeting Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> March 2025

**Venue:** TEAMS

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**Present:**

John Sidney (Chair)	External
Nicola Cove	Principal & CEO
Sue Newsham	External
Gary Lovatt	External (until 5.40pm)

**In Attendance:**

Sue Russell	Vice Principal, Resources
Justin Smith	Director of Finance
Megan Hughes	Head of HR
Rob Lawson	National Leader of Governance – meeting observer

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**ITEM 1 - APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

FR/25/1      There were no apologies for absence

**ITEM 2 - DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

FR/25/2      The Chair reminded Governors of the requirement to declare their interests in any agenda items. For any such declaration Governors would not be eligible to speak or to vote on the matters under discussion.

**ITEM 3 - EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVITY**

FR/25/3      The Chair reminded Governors of the College's commitment to equality and diversity and the need to consider these matters along with health and safety in all Committee business.

**ITEM 4 - MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

FR/25/4      **Resolved**      the minutes of the meeting held on **Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024** be **approved** as a correct record.

**ITEM 5 - MATTERS ARISING/ACTIONS**

FR/25/5      The Chair reviewed the actions from the previous meeting with the following findings – all actions are complete. The PIAP started looking at potential

impacts of staffing on learners as requested. The Chair wrote to the facilities manager and thanked him for his hard work on the Sixth Form refurbishment.

## ITEM 6 – HR REPORT

- FR/25/6 The Head of HR presented the paper and asked that the report be taken as read. She drew Members attention to key points and confirmed she would be happy to take any questions.
- FR/25/7 The turnover of staff is an issue that the College has been addressing over a long period of time, and she was pleased to confirm that we are now starting to see this reducing slowly. However, there is a need to be realistic at the current time, and the College anticipates that the turnover may rise as we go through this period of uncertainty. There are still a high proportion of staff in first few years of employment which comes with challenges, but looking at the leaver figures, there was not the usual patterns in term one. Previously, the College sees a trend where some new starters leave quickly to take up employment with a large local employer. Sometimes, people apply for jobs at College and the large local employer at the same time, take up employment with the College after interview, but then leave for a post with a large local employer when a better offer is received and clearance gained. However, a smaller number left in this term. The Head of HR confirmed that the College always makes sure that prospective employees make the physical journey to College now as some took up posts but quickly decided that the journey to Barrow was too difficult.
- FR/25/8 Engineering has issues that have been identified, and the new onboarding member of the HR team is looking into this. We have had challenges with engineering staff, but there is a real national challenge around availability of engineering lecturers. Also, there is an issue emerging with agencies. The quality of service from agencies has fallen steadily in recent years. It is increasingly expensive, and the candidates are of a lower standard. This has always been a backup plan when recruitment is difficult, but it is becoming a serious issue.
- FR/25/9 Staffing levels and the service length of staff shows a similar pattern to last year. Almost a 50/50 split between more than 5 years and less than 5 years' service, although this varies from department to department. HR are continuing to work with area managers to look at ensuring they have tight procedures, particularly in supporting staff.
- FR/25/10 With regard to employee relations, and issues that came from the last staff survey. Relations are currently challenging as there are a lot of pressing issues. There is a tense atmosphere in the College as there is a good deal of uncertainty because there are no answers to questions that managers can provide yet. There are frequent meetings with union representatives, which is helpful, and there is a lot of briefings going out from SLT to ensure all staff have the most up to date information. Comms are happening regularly, but staff are still uncertain.
- FR/25/11 With regard to absence, work with area managers is taking place to see where there are issues need to be addressed, and the report summarises the work done. Where teaching was impacted by sickness, we covered roles with the exception of Engineering where suitable cover could not always be found. The

teams managed to cover maths and English sessions where there was sickness absence, so this minimised the impact on students.

- FR/25/12 Members asked about the figure 30% of staff leaving in first year and asked if this the highest it's been? The Head of HR confirmed that it is high, but also consistent with last year. She asked Members to note that whilst there has been an easing of the flow of staff to a large local employer in the first term, staff may yet decide to leave given current uncertainties.
- FR/25/13 The Chair of the Board asked about the problems in engineering and whether or not they are still an issue. If so, what can we do proactively that hasn't been done before? What other avenues can we explore? Also, what are we missing? What could we do better? The Head of HR confirmed that there is now a role in the HR team that focuses purely on recruiting and onboarding. The College recognised the need for this, and this member of staff is developing links with managers. Unfortunately, the first person appointed left after three months, but a new member has been recruited. He has been in touch with AoC to ensure that we were doing everything that we could to improve the position. In doing so, he discovered over 90 vacancies across the country for engineering giving an indication of the scale of the problem. He is currently doing work on Linked In as a lot of the agencies that we use only look at Linked In and then charge a fee for introductions. There are links with a large local employer looking at utilising the skills of people still in industry, but in terms of how timetabling works, it has been of limited use because the times that people can offer are not the times young people are in College. We do however have some people on very small contracts who deliver on specific modules. We are developing banks of people in industry who might want to 'dip a toe' into teaching and this works well. The demographic of the staff is 51+ but this is positive because many of them are very experienced. There are improvements to be made, and once the recruitment and onboarding member settles in, this will be a huge move forward.
- FR/25/14 Members asked about relationships with staff. The Head of HR confirmed that it is difficult to settle things when we cannot give full answers. This week has been the first week that we have felt the uncertainty with job applicants. Some applicants have withdrawn applications as they feel that things are too uncertain at the moment to make the commitment to move to College.
- FR/25/15 The Principal & CEO addressed the Chair of the Board's question about links with industry and advised that Sector Experts into Industry is a project with the National College for Nuclear and we are working with this and other large employers in the Nuclear industry looking at commencing some form of training delivery. This is not offering someone a second job on top of existing commitments, but offers an opportunity to someone who may have capacity, and who wants to make a change in working arrangements. It is still new, but the significant challenge is the structure that needs to be put around new staff to support them. All the proper checks and contracts must be in place. A pilot which ends on the 31<sup>st</sup> March is intended to provide some of the structures that will address this and it is hoped that good things will come from it.
- FR/25/16 Members asked about staffing levels by area and which are learner facing roles. If the information in the report makes clear which figures related to student focused roles, we could see this more clearly. The Principal & CEO confirmed that she would be happy to consider this, but the support areas are also critical. For example, if cleaning not done, we can't open teaching spaces.

Happy to think about how we present this. The level of detail is useful internally, but we can look at this. The Chair added that he was not telling the College to alter reports.

**FR/25/17 ACTION – the Head of HR to consider how the information is presented to enable a focus on student facing roles for future reports.**

**FR/25/18 RESOLVED – the report was NOTED.**

## **ITEM 7 – GENDER PAY GAP REPORT**

FR/25/19 The Head of HR presented the report, and confirmed that the trends are very similar to those reported previously. It is important to understand the gap in that there is an issue with the median when looking at head count. We employ our own cleaning and catering staff and there are a significant number who are almost all female. The way the information is presented to calculate the GPG means we are looking at 25 staff on fractional contracts that suit them, which equates to 10 FTE posts. Making the roles full time would improve the data, but it would not be the kind of contracts staff want and would mean many staff would be lost. The College always prioritises quality of candidates over data presentation. One issue is that people see the figures but don't always understand what it means. People need to understand the difference between GPG and Equal Pay. We show the report excluding catering and cleaning services where these are often outsourced to see a better comparison but those staff need to be included as they are our employees. Outsourcing purely to improve GPG reporting would be irresponsible.

FR/25/20 Members confirmed that they understood the position as the same points are raised each year. Changes would not be made to employment arrangements just to improve the GPG profile.

FR/25/21 The Chair of the Board asked if it would be possible to look at what the data would look like if we changed the 24 part time roles to 10 full time roles. The Head of HR confirmed that when doing this, the median hourly rate was a difference of £4 which is quite significant.

FR/25/22 The Chair of the Committee confirmed that the College has never found any evidence of a discriminatory policy. Many large employers outsource catering and cleaning which improves GPG data. The College needs to be responsible and have an equitable approach to all of our staff.

FR/25/23 The Principal & CEO confirmed that from the benchmarking data, we can see the colleges that have completed this, there is a widening gap. However, Furness College will be showing a closing of the gap. Admittedly, this is only small, but nonetheless, the work undertaken has had an impact and there is a shrinking in the gap.

FR/25/24 The Committee Chair noted that this would be the Head of HR's last meeting and thanked her for her contributions to the College. Since he first joined the College, he has seen the level of reporting improve massively. The Head of HR has done some significant work over the years, including the terms and conditions of the merger with the sixth form, and the number of successful negotiations she has undertaken for the College is significant. He confirmed that the Board is extremely thankful for all the work and confirmed that she has turned into an exemplary HR professional.

**FR/25/25      RESOLVED – the report was RECOMMENDED to Board for final approval.**

#### **ITEM 8 – BUDGET OUTLINE 2025 – 26**

**FR/25/26      Item held under a confidential minute.**

#### **ITEM 9 – FEES POLICY**

**FR/25/36      The Director of Finance presented the fees policy for recommendation to the Board and confirmed that no changes had been made other than to redate.**

**FR/25/37      RESOLVED – the Fees Police was RECOMMENDED to the Board for APPROVAL**

#### **ITEM 10 – CARBON REPORT**

**FR/25/38      The Director of Finance confirmed the report was presented on the same basis as the previous year as no alterations to underlying CO2 factors produced by government have been made. Overall, there has been no change. He confirmed that it was interesting to note that the CO2 factors have not been changed either. He confirmed that a lot of efficiency works have been made, and the College should see the impact of this work in actual savings in the coming year. Also, the refurbishment of the Sixth Form has been completed with the latest energy efficiency measures, so this should have an impact next year. The Principal and CEO confirmed that Appendix 1 will be published on the website.**

**FR/25/39      Members noted that it is hard to judge what is reasonable and what is not. They asked how confident the College is in the accuracy of the figures. The Director of Finance confirmed that figures are collated from bills and this is done on an ongoing basis, so we feel happy with the KW hours and therefore the calculated figures are accurate.**

**FR/25/40      The Chair of the Committee noted that our carbon footprint appears to be about physical buildings and asked if operations have a significant impact on the footprint. The Director of Finance confirmed that machinery and power is taken into account and a significant programme was completed on LED replacements and the full rollout of motion sensors, but exact figures for this are hard to pin down. He confirmed that a SALIX loan of £135K helped the College to achieve efficiencies and ensured that we have reduced the footprint.**

**FR/25/41      RESOLVED – the paper was NOTED.**

#### **ITEM 11 – STUDENT UNION ACCOUNTS**

**FR/25/42      The Director of Finance presented the report and confirmed that the Student Union ran four events all of which were well attended and created a small surplus. The Principal & CEO noted that it is a good opportunity for members of the SU and the treasurer can learn a lot of skills. Experience tells us that sometimes the SU can lose sight of expenditure, so we always report back to the Committee on an annual basis to confirm that they are not drawing in debt. It's a cost centre in the organisation, but important to see how they are supporting themselves. An additional £2k is added to the historical balance and this is allocated to them. This is important when things need purchasing or**

replacing. There is the potential for risk which is why it is reported to the Finance & Resources Committee. There is a new SU committee every year, so it is vital that they have resources to work with, and do so responsibly.

**FR/25/43      RESOLVED the paper was NOTED.**

#### **ITEM 12 – SIXTH FORM PRIZE FUND**

FR/25/44      The Principal & CEO presented the report and confirmed that the Barrow Sixth Form Prize Fund is a separate registered charity from legacy trusts of the former grammar schools. They are used to support learners to come to college and on the journey from College. 60 prizes were awarded from the schemes across all the campus as the scheme allows. The fund balances remain strong and all regulatory requirements were met.

FR/25/45      The Chair of the Board noted that it was a well administered fund and confirmed he had a lot of confidence in the report.

**FR/25/46      RESOLVED – the report was NOTED.**

#### **ITEM 13 – COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

FR/25/47      The Clerk presented the Terms of Reference and confirmed that no changes had been recommended.

**FR/25/48      RESOLVED – the Terms of Reference for the Committee were APPROVED.**

#### **ITEM 14 – ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

FR/25/49      There was no other business to consider.

#### **ITEM 15 – CONFIDENTIALITY**

FR/25/50      It was agreed that item 8 – Budget Outline should be held under a confidential minute.

#### **ITEM 16 – BOARD EVALUATION**

FR/25/51      The Chair asked the standard questions. Members noted that they felt they had opportunity to participate and had enough time to consider the papers. Members noted that following the Ofsted report, they are constantly conscious about being clear that they are offering sufficient challenge. All agreed that the papers were very succinct.

FR/25/52      Members felt that in terms of ensuring positive outcomes for learners, the budget paper was critical. Also, the staff turnover is still relatively concerning although actions to improve are in place and having some impact. The solutions are not easily to hand, but the report highlights the issues for discussion.

FR/25/53      In terms of successes to report to the Board



- Understanding of the demographic showing high staff numbers who are 51+ gives the College access to people with significant industry experience
- The HR report demonstrates the commitment to supporting learners in all areas
- GPG mean has reduced year on year and the College is on track to meet regulatory requirements of publication by the 30<sup>th</sup> March. Also, the structure of the College as a vertically integrated organisation gives and interpretation of the statistics that outsourcing might remove. Far from a weakness, this is a strength for the community

FR/25/54 In terms of concerns to report to the Board

- The budget outline demonstrates the absolute de minimis position that the College may move into for 2025/26

**ACTIONS LIST FROM FURNESS COLLEGE  
FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE  
WEDNESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2025**

ACTION	Ref MINUTE	WHO	BY WHEN
The Head of HR to consider how the information is presented to enable a focus on student facing roles for future reports.	FR/25/17	Head of HR	Next report