

St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

**Minutes from the meeting held at the Stockbridge Lane Campus, Knowsley
Thursday 22 May 2025 at 3.15pm**

Present:	Phil Han	External Governor
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Jim Pinsent	External Governor
	Natalie Ibbs	External Governor
	Zulakha Desai	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Jen McGill	Staff Governor
	Tracey Turner	Staff Governor
In attendance:	Stephanie Donaldson	Deputy Chief Executive
	Mohammed Ramzan	Vice Principal – Quality and Student Experience
	Janet Hulme	Director of People and Organisational Development
	Carys Bibby	Governance Director (minutes)

Governing Board members were taken on a tour of Level 3 Technical Diploma in Childcare and Education by Rachel Maloney, Deputy Head of School - Early Years Health and Care.

366 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received for Zulakha Desai, Liz Duncan, John Heritage, Travis Brown and Fego Orughele.

367 Declarations of interest

It was noted that Stephanie Donaldson is an independent member of Torus' Audit Committee.

368 Minutes of previous meetings held on 3 April 2025

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record. Governors acknowledged the excellent quality of draft minutes.

369 Matters arising and action tracker

RESOLVED: The board noted the action tracker updates.

Steve Chesworth joined the meeting.

370 Health and Safety Training

The Health and Safety Manager provided training on health and safety governance. The training covered the regulatory framework and compliance, risk management and the role of the health and safety committee and governors including the health and safety link governor.

Governors queried how often the College can expect an inspection from external bodies. It was explained that the Health and Safety Executive base their inspections on risk and the number of incidents at an institution and will provide a good amount of notice of such an inspection. Mersey Fire and Rescue Service last inspected college premises two years ago and usually inspect every three to five years. As the last inspection was good, it is not expected that they will reinspect for another two to three years.

Internal inspections resulting in actions plans for managers allow for continuous improvement and the internal auditors, TIAA, also consider health and safety as part of their work plan. An internal audit of health and safety by TIAA has just concluded with results to be provided to the Audit Committee.

In response to a query on who undertakes the internal inspections, it was confirmed that the Health and Safety manager conducts all inspections. Other staff and managers are asked to engage with Health and Safety Manager during these inspections to identify risks and possible control measures. The word inspection is avoided in internal communications due to the formal connotations and in order to frame this activity as collaborative and foster responsibility amongst staff. In order to provide additional assurance around inspection outcomes, the Health and Safety manager is considering using an external company to verify and cross check findings.

The board queried how regularly risk assessments are updated for changes, referring to the pace of change they had seen during their walk through of the Green Energy Skills Centre. All risk assessments are carried out annually as a minimum, with changes as required. The Health and Safety Manager is made aware when changes may be required through oversight of capital projects involving new equipment, communication with Heads of School and the Head of Estates and through attendance at school team meetings. Where any accidents take place, follow up investigations will ascertain if practices are not in line with risk assessments and updates will be made where necessary. Governors were pleased to hear that the Health and Safety Manager is working so closely with teams and other members of staff.

It was confirmed that the College Health and Safety Policy does not cover Waterside Training who have their own policy in place. The College does have some health and safety responsibilities towards Waterside as their landlord.

Governors were informed that the tabletop exercise, arranged through the College insurers to test the emergency plan, had been successful. A small number of recommendations made had been incorporated in the updated Emergency Management Plan, approved by the Governing Board in April.

The board queried how the College is preparing for “Martyn’s Law”. The College will have two years to implement changes in response to this law and further guidance is expected. Ahead of this the College is evaluating communication systems and considering further changes that may be required. Governors queried if the College

practice invacuation. This is not currently undertaken as it could be distressing for students, however the College does practice evacuation and has processes in place for invacuation.

Near misses are reported through the same portal as accidents and incidents. Incidents include issues such as vandalism, which are not necessarily health and safety related, but streamlining the system should help to encourage reporting

The Health and Safety Link Governor commented that the Health and Safety Committee have seen evidence of pragmatic practice. Governors thanked the Health and Safety Manager for his contribution.

Steve Chesworth left the meeting.

371 Performance and compliance

The report provided governors with a summary of progress against key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the agreed approach to assurance reporting, together with the board compliance report.

It was noted that as the College had still not been notified of its Ofsted inspection, it is now unlikely that this would happen this academic year. Leaders and managers were however still prepared should this happen. Governors discussed that as GCSE exams were concluding and most vocational areas were doing assessment activity it would be difficult for inspectors to judge the quality of teaching and learning at this point in the year.

The government, since the publication of papers for this meeting, had announced an additional £160m of funding next in 2025/26 for 16–18-year-olds. Initial expectations, based on the allocation of other government grants, are that the College might expect in the region of £600k of this. There had been no announcement around employer national insurance contributions. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The board considered the KPI dashboard. Data for retention last year is from an earlier point so whereas this looks like a decline, retention has improved. In 2025/26 historic retention data will be available for each month making trend analysis easier. Governors requested for the year-to-date student satisfaction measure to be removed as this duplicates the measure from the last survey. Student satisfaction has decreased since induction as teachers start to have challenging conversations with students around attendance and targets.

The report also provided an update of progress in delivering the ‘Anchor Institution’ strategic goal, set out in the College’s strategic plan. The employer engagement strategy had led to improved relationships with stakeholders and more representation from the College’s senior leaders on boards and committees locally. Local authorities and other partners are supportive of the College and interact more regularly. Middle managers work more regularly with employers to gain their input into curriculum design and enhancement. The Vice Principal – Curriculum was successful in repositioning Knowsley

in the borough which was evidence through a more vibrant campus and more adult students. The board queried if this work was still ongoing following the removal of the Vice Principal role. Internally the Director of Student Services and the Curriculum Director – Adults/HE are now based full time at the Stockbridge Lane campus which has been well received by staff. Externally other college managers are leading on work streams and some initiatives such as transitions arrangements between high schools and the college are being led by the schools. Growth in apprenticeships and adults indicate that the College is now a provider of choice.

The Governing Board praised leaders and managers for the work undertaken in this area.

RESOLVED: The board noted the progress against high-level KPIs and targets for 2024/25.

The board noted the compliance report.

The board noted current progress against the Anchor Institution strategic goal.

372 Financial management and estates update

The report presented a summary of the St Helens College Group management accounts for the period ended 31 March 2025 and an update on the college estate, for information. The College is now forecasting a surplus for the year and a 'good' financial health score due to grants and timings of capital projects. The increased pay award equalled around 3% overall and had not materially impacted the forecast.

The board noted that capital expenditure for 2025/26 had not yet been agreed.

[REDACTED]

RESOLVED: The board noted the report.

373 Draft accountability statement

The board received a presentation which gave an overview of the process for developing the accountability statement 2025/26. The priorities listed in the statement are those linked to high value or essential skills, as per national and local skills needs. This year, these included defence, life sciences and creative industries. The board considered the links between the government's industrial strategy and local employment, skills and growth plans.

The number of young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) continues to grow however the lagged funding methodology constrains how much growth the College can afford in this area.

The board considered whether priorities for 2025/26 will change. It was agreed that whilst growth in Knowsley does not meet the category of being linked to high value or

essential skills, it should be included in the statement as a public commitment. Other new provision at the College such as the Saints Academy will not be included here, although this is expected to be a growth area. The board questioned whether artificial intelligence is something that the College might prioritise in 2025/26. This offer has not yet been developed due to staffing capacity, but the College is considering training for employers around understanding and using AI. The board agreed that the statement should include no more than eight priorities, so that the College can focus on exceeding these targets.

Governors were presented with progress against the 2024/25 priorities and questioned why it appeared that green jobs had been the weakest area for the college as governors had seen an impressive offer at the Green Energy Skills Centre. The Green Energy Skills Centre is fully utilised by young people and apprenticeships, however the 2024/25 statement committed to upskilling of the current workforce and included actions around very specific qualifications to be launched, some of which haven't been achieved due to funding availability or staffing capacity

RESOLVED: **The board noted the presentation on the key drivers, priorities and indicative targets for the accountability statement 2025/26.**

374 Sustainability strategy update

The report presented an update on delivery of the College's Sustainability Strategy and Environmental Sustainability Action Plan. Progress has been made across the College and stronger relationships have been developed with community partners and stakeholder who can help the College with these actions. The local authority in St Helens plans to be carbon neutral by 2040 and will be able to share good practice and expertise. The largest strand of work currently being undertaken in the embedding of sustainability goals with all curriculum areas. The College is about to self-assess and it is expected that this will show the College is still an 'emerging' institution although in some areas practices are 'established.'

RESOLVED: **The board noted the report.**

375 Appointment of external auditors

The board was asked to consider the appointment of the College's external auditors for the financial year 2024/25. The Chair of the Audit Committee gave an overview of a thorough and impressive procurement process, where all evaluators were trained on procurement act requirements and additional steps were taken to ensure no bias.

The Chair of the Audit Committee reported that the committee have been happy with the incumbent auditors RSM however through a fair process, Beever and Struthers have been selected as the recommended new supplier. The transition will be managed between RSM and Beever and Struthers,

Beever and Struthers will service the College from their Manchester office and the team have had an introductory meeting with the Chair of the Audit Committee, Governance Director and key members of the Finance Team.

RESOLVED: The board approved the recommendation of the Audit Committee to appoint Beever and Struthers as external auditors from 3 June 2025.

376 **Governor appointments**

The Chair of Search and Governance gave an overview of the interview process for governor recruitment. The recruitment agency Anderson Quigley provided a great selection of candidates and the panel had undertaken nine interviews. Ann Marr had been recommended by another governor and was interviewed separately to the Anderson Quigley process but with the same level of rigour. The interview questions had tested ability to commit time, constructive challenge, values and handling disagreement. The appointments proposed provided some more junior governors who may develop over time, alongside more experienced governors.

The Chair of Search and Governance thanked Zulakha Desai for joining the panel and providing robust challenge in the final recommendation process.

RESOLVED: The board approved the appointment of Ann Marr, Claire Milsom, Doug Laver and Alistair Greer as members of the corporation

The board approved an update to the Terms of Reference for the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee to allow for one co-opted member.

The board approved the appointment of Alex Singer as a co-opted member of the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee.

Alison Cannon left the meeting.

377 **Higher Education policies**

The report presented a number of higher education (HE) policies for approval, following recommendation by the Curriculum and Quality Committee.

RESOLVED: The board approved the:

- **Management of Closure or Suspension of a Programme of Study**
- **Student Admissions Policy**
- **Student Protection Plan**
- **Student Transfer Policy**

378 **Corporate Risk Register**

The report presented the Corporate Risk Register for approval. The board requested that the summary include the previous residual risk score.

RESOLVED: The board approved the updated Corporate Risk Register.

Any other business

The Chair of the Audit Committee requested that governors and executive provide any feedback on the Chair's performance ahead of the Chair's appraisal on 3 July 2025.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held on 3 July 2025.