

**St Helens College**

**GOVERNING BOARD**

**Minutes from the meeting held at the Town Centre Campus, St Helens  
Thursday 16 October 2025 at 3.00pm**

<b>Present:</b>	Phil Han	External Governor
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Jim Pinsent	External Governor
	Natalie Ibbs	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Alistair Greer	External Governor
	Clare Milsom	External Governor
	Doug Laver	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Jen McGill	Staff Governor
	Tracey Turner	Staff Governor

<b>In attendance:</b>	Stephanie Donaldson	Deputy Chief Executive
	Mohammed Ramzan	Deputy Principal
	Julie Heap	Designated Safeguarding Lead
	Carys Bibby	Governance Director (minutes)

**2526/1** Governing Board members were taken on a tour of English and Maths by Head of School, [REDACTED]

Governors noted the improvement initiatives for Maths students being implemented this academic year. For adult students, initial information, advice and guidance had been strengthened through pre-enrolment assessment, the agreement of “non-negotiables” around attendance and other behaviours, and additional “check in” points to ensure students are on the right programme. More progress monitoring points have also been introduced throughout the year, with the first to take place next week and intervention actions to be put in place where necessary.

An all-student resources area has been introduced so that learners across all sites have consistent access to materials. In response to a query around whether this might overwhelm students, it was confirmed that accessing these materials is optional.

[REDACTED] provided an overview of the Maths Mastery initiative and how this is being used to shape the maths curriculum, allowing students to develop strategies for approaching different topics based on commonalities. The scheme of work now includes ‘mastery weeks’ where staff and students will focus on different elements depending on

identified strengths and weaknesses. This programme has been embraced by staff and positive feedback has been received from students, who are encouraged to frequently reflect on their learning.

Members were also taken on a tour of the St Helens Town Centre kitchen, following completion of the refurbishment project and commented that the improvement was impressive. Students and staff were very appreciative of the updates. The board thanked colleagues for the success of the project, particularly the Estates Team and the Procurement Manager as the project had cost over £200k less than suggested by initial scoping.

**2526/2     Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received for Liz Duncan, Ann Marr and Zulakha Desai.

**2526/3     Declarations of interest**

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

**2526/4     Minutes of previous meetings held on 3 July 2025**

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

**2526/5     Matters arising and action tracker**

**RESOLVED:**     The board noted the action tracker updates.

**2526/6     Principal's Report (incorporating Performance and Compliance)**

The report set out a summary of early progress in 2025/26 alongside other matters of strategic importance impacting the College.

Governors discussed the improvement measures introduced in Maths, as seen on the curriculum area walk through, and it was noted that the College had also created a Head of Maths role, due to be filled in November 2025, in recognition of the additional capacity needed to drive further improvements in this area. The school of English and maths has grown considerably due to higher numbers of ESOL students over the last 2 years. English and maths attendance at the time of the meeting was higher than the same point in previous years. The board acknowledged the work of the People Team over the summer to ensure that all classes were staffed for September.

The board noted the additional income secured since the budget was set. In response to a query on the reasons the College had had more success with bidding for funding, it was suggested that this may be linked to the growing reputation of the College, particularly in Knowsley, and a track record of delivering adult and NEET provision. The College is informed of bids through various channels and in some instances through relationships, such as those with local authorities.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

An Ofsted inspection could occur between the implementation of the new framework in November and the Christmas break. A brief overview of differences in the new framework was provided. Inclusion is now a strong focus with an overall grade given for this aspect. The College has extensive provision linked to inclusivity. It was confirmed that the Quality Improvement Plan and Self-Assessment Report are being drafted and will be available in draft form should the inspection take place early in the next half term. Governors will be prepared for the inspection through briefing papers and, for those governors meeting the inspectors, a run-through of possible questions.

Governors noted the update on the strategy development and that an extraordinary governing board meeting will be called to approve the new strategy before Christmas.

The report also provided an overview of recent policy updates and expected announcements. The Prime Minister's speech had been positive around further education, but how exactly this will inform policies and funding is still uncertain. Governors agreed that there were opportunities for the College linked to the expectation that two thirds of adults up to the age of 25 should access level 4 and 5 vocational and technical education, in line with employer needs. High needs provision may also be a growth area as councils try to deliver this in-area to save on transport and accommodation costs. Strategically the College should be prepared to quickly take advantage of opportunities arising such as capital bids.

The board commended the three-year trends shown in the dashboard and the positive direction of most measures over this time frame.

**RESOLVED:      The board noted the principal's summary report for October 2025.**

**The board noted final outcomes against high-level KPIs and targets for 2024/25.**

**The board noted the current compliance report.**

**Tracey Turner joined the meeting.**

**2526/7      2024/25 results summary**

The presentation provided achievement data to date for 2024/25.

Overall, achievement since 2022/23 had improved significantly by almost 10%, with the College being 0.1% away from the 2024/25 target of 84.6% including non-regulated qualifications. The College is now within 1% of the general further education college average. Retention had also improved by around 8%, despite an increasing number of students with barriers to learning studying at level 1 and level 2. These outcomes reflect the impact of inclusive curriculum design, targeted support strategies, and strengthened teaching, learning and assessment practice. Achievement for young people has also shown a rapid improvement of over 10% and is now within 0.7% of the national average. The board queried if this improvement is linked mainly to retention. Whilst retention is much improved, this had not negatively impacted pass rates. The board considered these improvements in terms of learner numbers, with around 200 additional learners now achieving than in 2022/23, and the transformational impact this will have

on their lives and the local community. The board requested that total numbers are given alongside percentages for context in reports.

Local attainment key stage 4 remained below the national average and governors discussed the additional effort required for the College to achieve close to national achievement benchmarks from these lower starting points. It was noted that the College had not moved away from programmes with external examination in order to increase the number of students passing their qualification, and that this improvement was driven by improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

Level 2 achievement had not increased at the same rate as other levels due to a higher-than-expected number of fails than expected in English and maths in 2024/25.

Disengagement with these subjects remains a challenge and governors challenged whether students who are unlikely to pass a qualification should be enrolled on it. For full time study programmes students English and maths is a condition of funding, if they do not already have a grade 4 at GCSE. New processes have been introduced this academic year to ensure that students are enrolled onto an English and maths qualification that is suitable for them. Governors noted the risk of functional skills qualifications being pass or fail and discussed the benefits of progressive improvement on a GCSE programme. Level 3 achievement had declined in 2024/25, as more students were enrolled on 2-year programmes, for which retention rates have a greater impact. Challenges with staffing in Business and Professional had also impacted retention. Pass rates in Electrical installation declined due to upward shifts in grade boundaries, resulting in fewer students meeting the revised thresholds. This aligns with sector-wide changes in assessment criteria and is being addressed through targeted curriculum planning, diagnostic assessment, and enhanced learner support.

The board scrutinised achievement by a range of protected characteristics and vulnerable groups. Whilst high needs learners achieve better than other students, a small decline in high needs achievement was linked to English and maths qualification selection and the board was informed that for these students, more individualisation was needed to balance ambition and challenge, with options for 'stepping stones' to GCSEs being considered.

By campus, the biggest improvements had been seen at the Stockbridge Lane, which links to the College's strategy to grow the Knowsley site both in terms of reputation and size.

Construction and Engineering are both high volume schools and local skills priority areas, and the College had seen the most significant improvement in these areas. The School of Preparation for Life and Work achievement had been impacted by the higher number of Foundation Learning students who are most at risk of non-achievement as they have the most barriers to learning that need to be addressed.

Achievement for adults had also increased by around 8% and was now close to national average, a positive trajectory that reflects the impact of targeted teaching and learning and curriculum design. Higher Education data had also improved by a similar measure. For adults, areas for improvement were highlighted as Access to Higher Education and GCSE English and maths. The board commented that improvements in Higher Education data indicated that the College now has the capacity to drive the required improvement on Access courses.

The College has improved apprenticeship achievement rates and maintained a position above the national average, despite growth in apprenticeship numbers. Business and

Management was indicated as an area for improvement, alongside Construction, although it was noted that achievement in this area has lower national averages.

The data supported that the curriculum strategy and quality improvement plan is driving improvement and provided governors with assurance of strategic alignment and Ofsted readiness. Governors discussed that whilst targets should remain ambitious for students, maintaining this position will be a challenge. The data evidences a change in the learning culture, which can still be embedded further to drive more improvement. The board requested more graphical representation and overall numbers as well as percentages, to clearly demonstrate the impact of the improvement on students and the community. Governors thanked staff for their commitment and congratulated them for these results.

**RESOLVED:**     **The board noted the results for 2024/25.**

**Julie Heap joined the meeting.**

#### **2526/8     Annual safeguarding report and training**

Governors received training around the updates to Keeping Children Safe in Education. This included a reminder of governor responsibilities and how they can be assured that adequate arrangements are in place, such as DBS checks for anyone who can access the buildings. Governors are expected to read the relevant sections of Keeping Children Safe in Education annually. Mandatory bespoke training on Prevent was introduced in 2024/25 for staff and governors. Students are trained on Prevent through tutorials and no students were referred to the Prevent programme in 2024/25.

The board queried how the Safeguarding Team manage the monitoring of online safety. The 'senso' platform flags when a student searches for any concerning material. When activity is notified, this is compared to curriculum plans to ascertain if this is a search for class. If this is not the case the Head of School is notified, and staff will speak to the student.

The report provided an overview of safeguarding activity in 2024/25 and plans for 2025/26. This included the introduction of a new process for all staff across the College to be aware of which students are under safeguarding and the severity of the issue being dealt with. Currently the College has 60 students at the highest level of safeguarding concern; level 4, out of 240 students working with the safeguarding team. The board noted that the safeguarding team are working with around 10% of 16–18-year-olds at the College and that the severity of issues has increased again this year. In response to a query on the support provided to the team, it was confirmed that they have external 'supervision' sessions organised.

The board sought assurance around the process once students have been referred to external bodies. Students are still supported internally by the safeguarding team to ensure they are able to continue accessing their studies.

The board queried the capacity of the safeguarding team and if this is sufficient. The team currently have a case load of around 60 students, but cases are becoming more complex. It was expected that this cohort would be more demanding following reports from schools. Capacity is kept under review and increased where needed. A triage system is in place to ensure that behavioural issues are dealt with in curriculum areas. The College continues to develop preventative support, through a new personal development programme and new links with Merseycare, to try to reduce the number of cases referred to the team.

The Governing Board thanked the safeguarding team for the very positive impact of their work.

**RESOLVED:** The board noted the annual report and that the College has met the requirements of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2024.

**Julie Heap left the meeting.**

**2526/9**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[REDACTED]

Age Group	Percentage of Respondents Vaccinated
18-24	85%
25-34	90%
35-44	95%
45-54	92%
55+	88%

Response	Percentage
Yes, the U.S. should take action to address climate change	95%
No, the U.S. should not take action to address climate change	5%

[REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]  
 [REDACTED]

## 2526/10 Finance, Resources and Commercial report

The report presented the outcomes of the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee meeting on 1 October 2025. The board noted that enrolment was on track and no risks were raised.

An update was provided around the College's financial health score. Following the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee meeting, the Department for Education had reviewed the College Financial Forecasting Return submitted in July and advised that, due to a change in guidance, restricted cash cannot be included in the calculation of the current ratio element. The board had previously been advised that a 'good' financial health score of 190 was predicted due to unspent capital grants. With these grants removed from the calculation, the College's outturn for 2024/25 is a financial health score of 170, 'requires improvement'. This matches the financial health score in the 2024/25 budget. There are no changes to the accounts or the College's cash reserves.

The board noted that the College has not benefitted from a better financial health score. This is a Department for Education measure and is only made public by the College choosing to include it as a key performance indicator in the annual accounts. This change will impact the forecast financial health score in the medium-term financial plan, which will be resubmitted to the committee for scrutiny before recommendation to the Governing Board. The budget agreed for 2025/26 was for 'good' financial health, based on unspent capital. Due to improved financial performance at the beginning of the academic year, the College may still achieve 'good' financial health without the inclusion of ringfenced grants.

The board queried whether provision had been made to repay the Engineering T Level grant if required. No decision has been on whether this will be recouped; however, the College has submitted a case to keep the money and spend it before 31 December as there will be an absolute requirement to deliver the T Level in 2026/27. The accounts make provision for this money being refunded.

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

**The board noted the management accounts for the year ended July 2025.**

**The board approved the Modern Slavery Statement.**

**The board noted the Annual Health and Safety Report.**

## **2526/11 Audit Committee report**

The report provided an overview of the work of the Audit Committee at its meeting on 18 September 2025, including a deep dive into the preparation for the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act ahead of April 2027, and a focus on single points of failure in the staffing establishment.

The board discussed the outcome of the Health and Safety internal audit. Despite the limited assurance outcome, the report and the Health and Safety Manager have provided reassurance around improvement of systems and processes across the College. The board has also received assurance from the Health and Safety Link Governor around the appropriateness of systems and processes. The findings of the internal audit were robustly scrutinised by the committee. Both the committee and executive team accepted that some of the findings were unequivocal, such as a temporarily blocked fire escape, albeit in an areas where other escape routes were available, but contested the audit methodology for scoring risks based on immediacy of action required and the impact of this on the overall findings. It has been confirmed that this 'limited assurance' outcome would not impact the overall annual opinion and TIAA have confirmed that they will assess their audit methodology.

The board queried if the College has insurance against cyber-attacks. There are elements of protection in the College's insurance; however, this is not comprehensive. There is strong compliance with staff mandatory training and cyber essentials plus accreditation offers assurance that arrangements are robust. The internal penetration testing outcomes were positive.

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

**The board approved the corporate risk register.**

## **2526/12 Governor appointments**

The report presented a number of proposals for governor appointments. The Chair of the Search and Governance Committee provided an overview of Wayne Longshaw's credentials and interview.

Student elections had selected Emilia Lulek (T Level Animal Management) and Thomas Carey (Creative Media) as the two student governors for this year. Both had expressed strong opinions around inclusion and that students are receiving the support they need. Governors were invited to nominate themselves as a 'buddy' for the new student governors as part of their induction.

**RESOLVED: The board approved the following appointments to committees:**

- **Andrew Lang to the Search and Governance and Performance and Remuneration Committees**
- **Doug Laver and Clare Milsom to the Audit Committee**
- **Ann Marr to the Curriculum and Quality Committee**
- **Alistair Greer to the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee**

**The board approved the appointment of Zulakha Desai as Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee.**

**The board approved the appointment of Emilia Lulek and Thomas Carey as student governors, as elected by their fellow students.**

**The board approved the appointment of Wayne Longshaw as an external governor.**

## **2526/13 Link governor update**

The Safeguarding Link Governor reiterated the messaging in the annual update and the work undertaken by the safeguarding and wellbeing team.

On Environmental Sustainability, the College's sustainable development goal self-assessment was in line with other institutions' responses, with challenges around budget and capacity. The work streams on environmental sustainability are continuing to progress but need more staff involvement. The Strategic Director of Estates will have a responsibility for environmental sustainability.

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



**2526/14 Any other business.**

There were no items of other business.

**Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held on 11 December 2025.