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Borders College

Finance & Resources Committee

Meeting at 16:00, Thursday 2 October 2025

On Teams

<u>Actions</u>

Item	Action	Responsibility and Date	Action Status
42/25	Review Strategic Risk Register, paragraph 5.3 and add in any missing information	K Robb 14 October (prior to circulation of Board papers)	
44/25	Circulate training opportunities to Board Members	I Earp	

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Minutes

ITEM	MINUTE
Present **In Attendance**	Ugo Mbaezue (Chair) Vernice Key (Board Member) Garry Dickson (Board Member) Ingrid Earp (Regional Board Secretary) Kirsty Robb (Vice-Principal Finance & Corporate Services) Conor Bradley (Director for IT & Digital) Debbie Kerr (Director for People Services) Suzie Hartley (Minutes)
32/25	**Chair's Welcome** The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting which is the first one of the new academic year.
33/25	**Declaration of Conflict of Interest** No areas of conflict were raised.
34/25	**Register of Members' Interest** There were no updates to the register.
35/25	**Apologies for Absence** Apologies were received from Pete Smith, Heather Boyce, Phil MacDonald and Ray McCowan.
36/25	**Minutes of Previous Meeting held 17 June 2025 (Paper A)** The previous minutes were approved as an accurate representation of discussions.
37/25	**Matters Arising** There were no outstanding actions/matter arising from the last meeting.
SECTION A – ITEMS FOR DECISION	
38/25	**People Strategy 2025-2030 (D Kerr, Paper B)** Director of People Services, D Kerr, highlighted the key areas from the People Strategy 2025–2030, which aligns with the College's Vision 2030. The strategy is centred around attracting and retaining high-quality staff and ownership and input by staff themselves was recognised as being key to ensuring its success.

	Baseline data for 2025 has been established an although targets are set for 2026, further development is planned through to 2030. Questions from the Committee were welcomed. The Chair reminded that the Committee is required to approve the strategy and encouraged members to give their comments/ask questions. He considered it to be an honest and an engaging read and queried whether it would be subject to wider consultation with staff. The diversity disclosure rate of 37% was also questioned. It was confirmed that once the strategy is approved by the Board, next steps will include workshop sessions with the Wider Leadership Team. Regarding the diversity disclosure rate, it was noted that some staff have not completed the equalities monitoring form, and that the EDI Officer will meet with those individuals to identify any barriers to completing this. A member praised the format of the strategy and felt it sets a high standard. She queried however the ambitious target for performance appraisal submissions, suggesting it may be difficult to achieve in cases of long-term sickness. Director of People Services responded that the aim remains to reach 100% compliance; appraisals require only an hour and a half annually and this feels like a reasonable expectation. She added that sickness is generally well managed, and it is rare for staff to be absent for an entire year. The Committee unanimously approved the People Strategy 2025–2030.
39/25	**<u>Digital & Data Strategy 2025-2030 (C Bradley, Paper C)</u>** C Bradley, Director for IT and Digital presented a summary of the Digital & Data Strategy for 2025–2030. It aligns with the College's current strategic direction and broader institutional goals, to support and enable the delivery of key strategic outputs and act as a guiding reference, linking directly to the overarching College strategy. Included are mechanisms for ongoing measurement to ensure progress and alignment with objectives. The College will continue to refine its requirements annually, including new course development and capital planning. Supporting documentation will detail how data is used across the institution. A new tool from JISC—the Digital Elevation Tool—comprising 600 questions, will help benchmark the College's digital maturity. Staff confidence and usage of digital tools will also be assessed, including the effectiveness of the Halo Self-Service Portal and its impact on learning and project delivery. Committee members welcomed the paper. The Chair commented that it was well-written and easy to follow, and raised two points: firstly, that subsection five references cyber security only briefly, and suggested it might warrant its own heading given its importance; secondly, the absence of baseline figures makes it harder to assess progress. The Director of IT and Digital responded that cyber security remains a priority and this will continue through the introduction of new technology and processes. He acknowledged however that its prominence could be increased. In terms of measuring, feedback from the self-service portal will be included, which typically achieves close to 100% response rates, and outputs from the JISC tool. A report to SLT in January will include baseline data, with numeric values gathered in the interim and individual projects will also have measurable outcomes.

	Vice Principal for Finance & Corporate Services added that the limited detail on cyber security was intentional, given the public nature of the paper, and emphasised the need to strike a balance between transparency and security. The Committee approved the strategy.
40/25	**<u>Annual Report to Regional Board (I Earp / U Mbaezue, ToR 2.20, Paper D)</u>** The paper sets out how this committee follows the Terms of Reference and the good governance required for all three Board Committees to undertake. Members did not have any questions or comments and were content to approve the report.
SECTION B – ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
41/25	**<u>Business (Finance) Review and Update (K Robb, ToR 2.1 / 2.9, Paper E)</u>** K Robb, Vice Principal for Finance & Corporate Services presented the financial outturn for the previous year, noting that the College came in on budget despite the initial forecasted deficit. This was achieved through effective financial management and support from various departments. A few adjustments were made following the audit, including the reallocation of voluntary severance costs to the 2024–25 financial year. These were accommodated through underspends, avoiding any overspend overall. An unusual figure resembling a surplus was noted, attributed to an accounting adjustment related to the sale of the Hawick campus. Appendices provided further detail on non-core income, which accounted for approximately 14.5% of total income. Risk levels have been adjusted accordingly. Capital expenditure remains on track, including the acquisition of two new minibuses expected to generate long-term revenue savings. Additional capital funding from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) will support campus redesign plans, with further details to be presented to the Audit & Risk Committee next week. The Chair referred to a recent BBC article highlighting financial sustainability concerns across the college sector, with 22 out of 24 institutions operating in deficit. In contrast, the College's position was viewed as relatively stable. It was noted that at one stage, the deficit had reached nearly half a million pounds, but careful management—particularly by the Finance Director and team—helped mitigate this. The wider sector remains under pressure, and there is uncertainty around how the UK Government's budget will translate into Scottish funding. Colleges Scotland have been advocating for increased support, and the sector is united in calling for both revenue and capital investment. In response to a query about how the College compares to others, it was explained that deficits are typically measured as a percentage of total income and vary by institution size. The College is positioned mid-range, with some colleges already experiencing cash flow issues. The Scottish Government has introduced a workaround allowing colleges to 'borrow'

	from future budgets, but this introduces further risk and difficult decisions ahead. The College continue to actively seek additional funding opportunities (not including investments or borrowing) and a consortium involving Board members has been proposed with the aim of utilising their expertise and networks. An initial meeting is scheduled in the coming weeks. External funding continues to be regularly pursued using tools such as Grant Finder and through connections with the Chamber of Commerce. A member highlighted that, as a small college, there is no dedicated post for grant-seeking, unlike larger institutions. Members were informed that the College's Programme Manager, Suzan Bell and the Business Managers regularly review funding opportunities. A member noted that some grants require collaboration with other organisations and if this is an option. The Vice Principal for Finance & Corporate Services explained that the College must be selective, as some grants cost more to deliver than the funding received. Nonetheless, the College secured £2.6 million in grants last year, although competition for funding is increasing. The Chair queried whether missed commercial income targets were due to the departure of Jane Grant (Executive Director for Business and Innovation) and the subsequent removal of this post. It was confirmed that while some contacts were lost, her responsibilities were redistributed. Initiatives such as Borderlands have been taken forward, and targets for the previous year were met. However, the risk register reflects the increasing difficulty in securing funding, with shrinking pots and rising expectations creating pressure. The new delivery model is still bedding in, and while teams are working collaboratively, this remains a transitional period. The Chair echoed previous concerns raised about the lack of a dedicated figurehead to pursue grant funding. Vice Principal for Finance & Corporate Services explained that Heads of Sector now play a more active role in identifying non-core income opportunities, which is proving more efficient than relying on a single individual. It was confirmed that this paper does not go to the Board. Committee were content to note the update.
42/25	**<u>Strategic Risk Register (K Robb, ToR 2.16, Paper F)</u>** Vice Principal for Finance & Corporate Services presented the updated Strategic Risk Register, confirming that the Senior Leadership Team had reviewed the document and were satisfied with its contents. The review included a reflection on actions fully completed in the previous year, which have further mitigated several risks. One area of concern remains the risk associated with not meeting commercial income targets. While this risk is still within the College's defined appetite, it has increased and will continue to be a challenge going forward. The overall affordability risk remains unchanged, though it may be possible to reduce this in future if SFC increases grant allocations.

	Members were reminded that the risk appetite and the full register will be discussed in more detail at the upcoming Board Development Day. A member noted that paragraph 5.3 appeared to be missing some content and suggested it be reviewed and amended before the paper goes to the Board. **ACTION: VP F&CS** Members were content to note the paper.
43/25	**<u>Annual People Services report (D Kerr, ToR 2.7, 2.17, Paper G)</u>** Director of People Services presented the Annual People Services Report, summarising the key workforce statistics gathered over the previous year. Looking ahead, the strategic focus will shift towards monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs), with data condensed into quarterly targets. The report includes annual figures on gender split, sickness absence, staff turnover, vacancy rates, and workforce demographics. An update was provided on GTCS registration, which has been extended for another five years, reducing administrative workload for lecturing staff. Employer engagement has increased and continues to be measured as a key KPI. The College received positive feedback from the Great Places to Work (GPTW) survey and there were four areas where the College was formally recognised. The outcome of the College's submission to the Best Workplaces list is awaited. Communications with trade unions remain constructive. Relations with Unison are progressing well, and the College continues to maintain a strong, open dialogue with EIS, which has been welcomed by both parties. Updates were provided on staffing structures, voluntary severance, and the closure of the Hawick campus. Regarding pay and terms and conditions, the previous year's agreement has been implemented, and negotiations for the 2026–27 period will begin later this year once the pay claim is received. Support staff negotiations are ongoing, with an offer on the table contingent on receiving funding equivalent to the lecturing staff pay award. The Scottish Government has requested further information, and while a response was expected, the process has been delayed following the departure of Minister Mr Dey and the appointment of Mr McPherson, who has requested a more detailed review. The College continues to work with government officials to progress a new three-year agreement, aiming for a period of industrial relations at national level. A signed agreement with Unison has been reached, with joint meetings now held alongside EIS and College management. This has been viewed as a positive development and has been signed off by the Board Chair. The revised National Recognition Agreement (NRA) remains under negotiation and will be brought to the Board for approval once finalised. It will replace the current NRPA. A few outstanding issues remain, but it is hoped that following further discussions, a final document will be ready

	for signing. A Fair Work Statement has been agreed and signed by EIS and FELA, based on findings from the employer engagement survey. It was highlighted that significant changes to employment law are expected following completion of the Employment Bill. These may include restrictions on 'fire and rehire' practices, the introduction of day-one employment rights, and changes to probationary periods. Staff wellbeing continues to be a priority. Initiatives introduced include a wellbeing hour, including an offer of wild swimming sessions, amongst other activities. Eric Jones, Active Campus Coordinator, who leads on activities, will join the Staff Voice Group. This is a self-managed group which excludes managers. The group will focus on wellbeing, social engagement, equalities, and sustainability, with an emphasis on grassroots involvement—particularly important as the College navigates future financial challenges. A compressed working week is about to be launched for professional services staff, offering greater flexibility for those who previously had limited access to such arrangements. This will be implemented in line with business needs. The Committee Chair praised the report, noting the positive progress and the potential of the compressed working week to attract and retain staff. Director of People Services confirmed that absence levels remain low, averaging around 4%, which is below sector norms, and that long-term absences are being managed with appropriate support, particularly in cases involving significant personal trauma. A member raised that the compressed working week is perceived by some as being just for women. It was clarified that the scheme is open to all staff and can be structured over a week or fortnightly, ensuring equal access. The Committee Chair commended the College's recognition in the GPTW awards. It was also reported that College has been selected as a front-runner in employing and recruiting individuals with disabilities and will be formally recognised at an upcoming AGM in October.
44/25	**Committee Self-Evaluation (I Earp, Paper H)** The Board Secretary thanked Members for their responses to the Committee self-evaluation and that the intention going forward is to space these out more evenly. Overall, the feedback received was very positive but that this may present a challenge in terms of identifying specific areas for improvement. It was suggested therefore that focus is on areas requiring further knowledge. CDN has introduced new training resources, including podcasts and short videos, aimed at improving accessibility. They are also exploring the introduction of face-to-face scheduled training, which would offer opportunities for networking and sharing experiences. Funding for training remains limited, and members were encouraged to report back if any training proves to be of limited value. One new offering, titled Developing Educational Character, was highlighted as particularly interesting. They have also launched a new product called

	Understanding Finance, which may be useful to members. Director for People Services and the Principal have a forthcoming meeting with Marie, CEO of CDN, and invited members to raise any perceived gaps in training provision so these can be discussed. The Board Secretary will circulate the latest training information and highlighted that some options may no longer be relevant. **ACTION: Board Secretary** A member mentioned an interest in learning more about the SIP role but had been unable to find relevant resources and was advised that CDN has introduced a series of governance "shorts", including one on SIM, which may be of interest. The Committee Chair thanked all who responded to the evaluation and encouraged members to suggest any improvements to the Committee informally throughout the academic year, via the Board Secretary. Members were also invited to contact the VP for Finance & Corporate Services directly with any questions regarding financial management.
SECTION C – ITEMS FOR INFORMATION	
45/25	**<u>Cyber Security Update (C Bradley, ToR 2.19, Paper I)</u>** Director for IT and Digital provided an update on the College's cyber security position. There have been no major cyber incidents to report and progress continues on reducing the College's attack surface, with one area of file storage now fully completed. A second area is scheduled for decommissioning in October, while a third has been delayed until Quarter 4 of next year due to its link with Eduroam at Heriot-Watt University. Once this connection is separated, the College will proceed with winding down the service after September. The network refresh has now been completed, with all systems patched and updated and new tools have been implemented to enhance security across the College's digital infrastructure. The College has again successfully achieved Cyber Essentials Plus certification for 2025–26. This is a significant accomplishment, as only around 22–30% of organisations of comparable size have attained this level of certification.
46/25	**<u>Papers for Publication (Standing Item)</u>** The Board Secretary will identify which papers from this meeting are suitable for publication.
47/25	**<u>Any Other Business (Standing Item)</u>** No further matters were raised.
48/24	**Date of Next Meeting** The date of the next meeting is Thursday 27 November 2025 at 4pm on Teams.

Signed…..……………………………. **Signed…..……………………………….**

Chair **Board Secretary**