Varndean Sixth Form College

MINUTES OF THE CORPORATION MEETING

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10th DECEMBER 2025 AT 5.30 P.M. MEETING 25/02

IN QUAD 3 (East Quad), VARNDEAN COLLEGE

Present: Toby Douglass, Ayas Fallon-Khan, Paul Herridge, Donna-Marie Janson, Simon Lindfield, Carrie Llewellyn, Keith Perera, Alan Walker, Brendan Ward, Jolanta Young

In Attendance: James Gordon, Lisa Watkin-Stevens, Elaine French, Louise Pennington

1. **Welcomes and Apologies for Absence**

Apologies: Nick Armstrong, Jodie Braham, Sarah Dunsmore, Yasmin Khan, John Lamb, John Williams, Jason Wye and Lisa Wardle-Sharp (new Teaching Staff Governor from 1/1/2026)

Welcomes: None

In the Chair: In the absence of John Williams, the Deputy Chair, Simon Lindfield chaired the meeting.

The Meeting was quorate.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

None recorded at this time, other than those declarations notified at previous meetings and as recorded in the Register of Interests' files.

3. **Minutes of the Corporation held on 15th October 2025 Part I Main Business; Part II Confidential Minutes (none)**

The minutes of the meeting were approved by the Corporation and the Chair was authorised to sign these. **ACTION: Louise Pennington/Chair of Governors**

4. **Matters Arising and Action Points and Significant Risks**

The Corporation noted the progress with actions to date and those which were on the agenda, in progress or would be taken forward in due course.

SU Constitution – on agenda – refer Student Governors' Report. **ACTION: Student Governors**

It was noted that the actions' schedule would be updated to reflect any changes detailed above. **ACTION: Louise Pennington**.

4b) High Level Risks' schedule (Significant Risks): Governors were reminded that the schedule listing the significant risks, was included in the meeting papers, to act as a reminder for Governors to ensure awareness throughout the meeting when considering each agenda item.

5. **Chair's Report -** nothing to report as Chair of Governors was not present.

6. **Principal's Report**

The Principal presented her Report and highlighted the following points recorded below, per sub-item:

a) **Executive Summary including sector updates, feedback from meetings, pay updates.**

- Introduction of new post-16 qualification - V level, noting that the timeline for implementing this was ambitious being September 2027, in light of the timescale required to review the specification and provide sufficient time for teaching staff to plan and deliver this. It was also noted that it was replacing a recently introduced new qualifications – AAQs (Alternative Academic Qualifications), which replaced the BTEC, designed to replace the older vocational qualifications and offering practical skills alongside A Levels, which only started in 2025/2026 academic year. The new qualification will be able to be studied in combination with A Levels. V Levels will be adopted by the College noting that the DfE's intention will be to introduce this in a phased process from 2027 to 2031.
- In response to a question from Governors regarding assessment of the new qualification, it was confirmed that this would be similar to BTECs (based on the White Paper guidance), with both external and internal assessments.
- It's expected that the V Levels will enable a more streamlined process reducing the number of awarding bodies etc.
- The new qualifications aim to ensure that the specifications are more closely aligned to occupational standards, and details regarding this are awaited in terms of content.
- A Governor also suggested that in light of the new qualification, it was important to ensure that there was no discrimination on those Students who have recently completed the qualifications now being discontinued.
- Pay award – for noting that the pay offer in respect of the Support and Teaching Staff had been accepted by the Unions nationally and had been included in the College's budget as approved in the Summer term and awarded to Staff. However, discussions with Teaching Unions continued in respect of workload issues and protections. The back pay in respect of Support Staff was also mentioned noting that this would be revisited at the next Corporation meeting – refer Finance Committee meeting section below.

b) **Complaints and Compliments Report 2024/2025**

The contents of the Report were noted by the Corporation and the Increase in number of subject access requests from Parents (more commonly with Parents of SEND Students) and Alumni have been received, being a trend within the FE sector, which is time consuming for Staff to process.

7. **College Strategic Plan**

Papers:

Executive Summary
Strategic plan Update
Key Performance Indicators
Strategic Plan 22-25 – for reference
Proposed Layout of Strategic Plan 25-28

The Principal presented the various papers included within item 7 and highlighted the following:

- KPIs have been reviewed (aligning these with strategic pillars and calendar of business) and revised in line with the SF sector guidance.
- Changes have been highlighted in the attached draft and key differences outlined including enabling social justice for all (rather than referencing social mobility) and the discontinuation of Adult Education provision(except adult counselling provision), together with a revision to the net zero target by 2030 to 2035 which on reflection was over ambitious.
- Governors are asked to approve the proposed new approach, terminology and other revisions as highlighted in the documents.
- The name change to Varndean Sixth Form College was noted although the Principal confirmed that this was not yet an official change and noting that the intention was to review whether to formally change the College name in the Summer term 2026. **ACTION: SLT**

The Corporation approved the proposals in the Front Sheet as presented by the Principal regarding the new Strategic Plan. **ACTION: SLT**

8. Student Governors' Report

Paper: **SU Constitution**

Toby Douglass and Jolanta Young provided the following update to Governors on various activities involving the SU and Student Governors, since the last meeting including the review of the SU constitution:

- Student Council Meetings: first meeting including feedback from Students together with discussions on improvements required and the second meeting took forward the outcomes from the first meeting and also covered collaborations with Sussex University and workers' rights (for Students) via the SU involvement with Citizens UK.
- Areas for improvement identified included the canteen with a broader choice of food options – a meeting with the Catering Manager has been organised this week to discuss this. Other improvements actioned this term included the extension of Student social spaces particularly during wet weather and the provision of additional study spaces provided pre-examinations, including classrooms accessible during lunchtimes, plus additional benches having been ordered by Management for

Students to use in common areas. The library provision and hours available were also noted.

- Communications with Students has improved too with updates provided by the existing notice boards and an additional board due to be provided. A weekly email/newsletter is also issued to Students to ensure progress and updates are provided on a regular basis, together with a reminder of tutorial matters and enrichment activities. The Student Governors reported that Students didn't generally use "My Varndean" and that the SU was aiming to make a tutorial video with the help of Lisa Watkin-Stevens and IT, to assist Students and explain how this works.
- SU Constitution: Referring to previous meetings' discussions on the issues arising from the SU election relating to the number of male and female candidates. At the last election for President/Student Governors there were 8 female candidates and 1 male candidate and the SU thought that this was inequitable as it generated greater competition for the female post, whilst the male candidate was elected by default. It was noted that as opposed to re-writing the constitution at this point further investigations were needed and liaison with others in the sector. **ACTION: SU**. It was also recognised that more male Students should be encouraged to stand in future.

  On the request of the Student Union, it was resolved that the Constitution should be revised regarding clause 1.6 on page 16 of the document as follows:

  1.6 An Uncontested Election

  Where there is only one eligible candidate for a President / Student Governor position (self-identified female or non-binary, or self-identified male or non-binary) at the close of nominations, the election for that position shall be conducted as a Vote of Confidence.
  All eligible voters shall have the option to vote 'For', 'Against', or 'Re-open Nominations (RON)'.
  The candidate shall be deemed elected only if the number of 'For' votes exceeds the combined total of 'Against' and 'Re-open Nominations (RON)' votes cast. If this threshold is not met, the position shall be declared vacant, and a new nomination period and election process for that specific position shall commence within 30 college days, in accordance with these regulations.
  During any such interim period, the Executive Committee may delegate the duties of the post to another member in line with section 5.3 of the Constitution. This process ensures democratic accountability while maintaining the gender balance requirements of Appendix 1.

  ACTION: SU/SLT/Corporation

  It was also recorded that there were no plans to propose to split the joint President/Student Governor role, although this had been discussed by the SU.

  The Student Governors also informed Governors that the SU would be investigation options to appoint an International Student Officer to the Student Union Executive in order to improve the representation of International Students.

Thanks were recorded to the Student Governors for their report.

9. Tea, Coffee, Comfort break – 10 minutes

10. Finance

a) **Draft Minutes of meeting held on 20th November 2025 – confidential –** the contents of the minutes and recommendations therein as presented by Simon Lindfield, Chair of Finance Committee, were noted and endorsed by the Corporation.

   Simon Lindfield introduced the various financial papers in the items below and Elaine French reported to the papers – the key points highlighted were recorded within each section below:

b) **Annual Report and Financial Statements to 31/7/2025**
   i) **Executive Summary**
   ii) **Report and Statements**
   iii) **Income and Expenditure Reconciliation to Financial Statements**

- 2024/2025 financial year – requires improvement financial health score.
- 2025/2026 financial year – financial health indication at this stage is good, with an improvement in the "good" score for the following year (2026/2027). Cash position is also showing improvement, owing to the increase in Student numbers and associated income, combined with the effect of discontinuing the Adult Education provision.
- Attention was drawn to the contents of the financial statements, noting that the latest figures had also been presented to the Corporation meeting held in October 2025.
- The figures have been audited and verified and the summary financial headlines as set out in the Executive Summary, were noted.
- The reconciliation figures were also reviewed, noting that these were based on accounting adjustments.

The Corporation approved the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year to 31st July 2025 and authorised the Chair of Governors and Principal to sign these, after which they'd be submitted by Elaine French to the DfE and noting that a copy would be placed on the website by the due deadlines. **ACTION: ELF**

c) **Financial Update**

2025/2026 Management Accounts

i) **Executive Summary**
ii) **Balance Sheet 03-25**
iii) **Income and Expenditure 03-25**
iv) **Cashflow Forecast to July 2026**
v) **Canteen Financials**
vi) **Executive Summary Forecast 2026/2027**
vii) **Forecast Summary 2026/2027**

Elaine French presented the management accounts referring to the executive summaries and various papers above and the following points were highlighted:

- Management accounts to the end of October (month 3) this year.
- The canteen financial performance report was noted and that it was at a very early stage as it has only been trading for 2 months.
- Financial health expected to be good for the next 2 years, as mentioned above.
- Aiming to improve cash reserves for the next 2 years and noting the FEC cash days benchmark of 45 days.
- In response to a question from Governors regarding in year funding, it was confirmed that in light of enrolling an additional 100 + Students, there would be some in year funding in respect of additional Students enrolled, above the first 100. Elaine French confirmed that the calculation was expected to be for approximately 70 additional Students. However, based on the fact that last year the DfE additional funding above the first 100 additional students, was only funded in the sector, up to two-thirds of the additional funding due, in order to take a prudent approach, this proportion has been calculated and included in the forecast figures.
- The Corporation also queried whether the LGPS pension funding costs might reduce which had been discussed at the recent Finance and Audit Committees, noting that the College was in the East Sussex Pension Scheme. Currently, the College has been including employer contributions of gross pay equating to 19.8% costs. It was reported that the pension scheme was revalued every 3 years and that the latest triennial valuation had been carried out with an update due to be provided to Colleges regarding any adjustment to the pension contributions, in March 2026. The expectation is that the contribution may be reduced which would help the College's accounts.
- In response to a question regarding Energy provider and costs, it was confirmed that the College's current contract was due to end in October 2026 after which the College would seek best options from its Energy broker.

viii) Staff Pay Update

Reference was made to the sub-item included within the Principal's Report together with the draft Finance Committee minutes and the following additional points were recorded:

- Details in respect of the pay award support staff - including pay analysis (staffing ratios, benchmarking data, impact from efficiencies etc)
- The Principal reminded Governors of the Teachers' strike action taken last year as a result of the Secretary of State for Education's announcement that the funding for Staff pay in respect of standalone SFCs would be less than that awarded to other FE Colleges.
- Governors were reminded that the pay award had been implemented for both Teaching and Support Staff but that owing to the reduced funding award from the Government and in light of the Teaching Staff strike action, the College was unable to back date the pay rise (from March to September) for Support Staff. However, SLT had recommended that if the College's finances improved sufficiently in the next budget, making it affordable to pay the outstanding Support Staff back pay, then this should be implemented as a priority. Discussions were held at the last Finance Committee and it was noted that the financial position continued to make this unaffordable, as the financial health was at the low end of good, and without

sufficient additional funding to cover the outstanding backdated pay, this would return the College to a financial health of requires improvement, which could inevitably result in financial intervention. The Finance Committee recommended that the decision regarding Support Staff back pay, should be deferred until the additional in year funding allocation was formally announced by the DfE (refer above). The Corporation understood the Finance Committee's recommendation and also recorded the need to rectify the Support Staff back pay situation as soon as it was affordable, noting the Support Staff continued hard work, workload and commitment, but also there great disappointment in not receiving the back pay at the same time as that allocated to Teaching Staff. **ACTION: SLT/Finance Committee – to review next term.**

e) Capital Works - Update

The Corporation was provided with an update on the recent quads project noting that rectification of various incomplete works, remained outstanding and that negotiations had been carried out with the contractors, with advice received from the College's advisers. Regarding the rectification of the paving work in the quads, the contractors had agreed to return once more (in February) with the aim of fixing the problem.

11. Curriculum and Standards

Keith Perera (Committee Chair) introduced the agenda item and reported on the meeting and James Gordon and Lisa Watkin-Stevens presented the various papers to the Corporation.

- Keith Perera had a pre-Committee Meeting with James Gordon and Lisa Watkin-Stevens to discuss the agenda and associated papers, based on the Committee terms of reference.
- The date and timing of meetings will be kept under review, to ensure that this is convenient for all Committee Members.
- The Committee title is quite long but it was thought it was appropriate to add "Student Experience" to the title.
- In due course the Committee will be discussing the new Ofsted Framework with input from SLT, regarding the various key changes and focus.
- Referring to Students, the Committee discussed the term "disadvantaged" which is used by the Department of Education, with suggestions that alternative terminology should be used.
- The Committee will complete its own self-assessment at the end of the Summer Term meeting, as do all other Committees.

Papers:

a) **Draft Minutes from first Quality, Curriculum and Student Experience Committee Meeting 27/11/2025 –** noted and the recommendations therein were endorsed by the Corporation.

b) **College Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) Executive Summary and SAR/QIP**

James Gordon presented item b and drew attention to the following:

- Positive trends reflected in document in respect of Student numbers, achievement and retention etc.
- The SAR and QIP (operating plan for next year) has been drafted to align with the new Ofsted framework and the new terminology was highlighted eg “good” is no longer used to grade a College. SLT is estimating that the College will get its next Inspection in approximately 3 years.
- Both the SAR and QIP, once approved by Corporation will be shared with Ofsted.
- Primary focus for the new framework will be inclusion - achievements and in relation to the different groups of Students, capacity issues in certain areas such as Additional Learning Support and Wellbeing. The College is currently graded as strong. Other areas to focus upon include Leadership and Management, data analysis, managing Student growth and engagement with stakeholders.
- Curriculum Teaching and Learning is also an area which has been updated within the new framework with a focus upon consistency in classroom experience.
- Achievement – although the College is strong in most areas, there will be some areas to develop including those where highly academic Students need to be challenged more together with some areas where retention and achievement needs further improvements.
- Other areas to focus upon will be Student participation, including attendance and reviewing the RAG system.

The SAR and QIP were approved by the Corporation. **ACTION: SLT**

c) **Progression Summary**
Executive Summary
i) UCAS Report HE by subject and HE by University placed
ii) Destinations Data Report

d) **Careers Report and Update**
Executive Summary and Report

The Progression and Careers Report have been included for information.

The Corporation noted that both progression and careers were referenced in the SAR and QIP too.

Other highlights included the following:

- Discussed what contributes towards positive progression as not all Students transition directly to Higher Education - some Students have a gap year and others following alternative non-HE paths.
- In response to a question from Governors, James Gordon explained the importance of focusing upon aspiration so that all Students are able to achieve their best results.
- The higher percentage of female students compared to male students, going to University was noted (61% females:37% males). SLT agreed that there were issues within this age group across the sector, where male achievement needs improving.

e) Settling in Survey
Executive Summary and Report

Lisa Watkin-Stevens introduced this Report and recorded the following key points:

- The results overall indicate that Students are happy, with positive feedback received via the survey in respect of the first 6 weeks at College. Part of the purpose of the survey is to check Students are happy and settled and to also ensure that they are on the right courses, have managed the transition from Secondary education to FE.
- Student input regarding workload remains positive but some issues have been raised particularly within the STEM subjects, such as homework setting and deadlines, which SLT will be reviewing.
- Other issues highlighted from the survey include those relating to travel, some issues arising from the work set for Students prior to starting their courses and some Students unclear where to seek support (mental health and wellbeing).

f) Safeguarding Report from Designated Lead Safeguarding Governor

Brendan Ward, the Designated Lead Safeguarding Governor provided an update to Corporation including details of his regular meetings with Lisa Watkin-Stevens, the last of which was held 2 weeks ago and included discussions regarding CPOMS (Child Protection Online Monitoring System – system used by Schools/Colleges to share safeguarding referral information when Students transfer to a new educational institution), the safeguarding team and the support being provided to Students. He provided assurance to the Governing Body that the Safeguarding Team appeared to be working well and efficiently in supporting Students.

g) Committee Terms of Reference – no change, following discussion at Committee which was endorsed by the Corporation**. ACTION: LEP**

12. Accommodation Working Group meeting held on 15th October 2025 - Confidential

Alan Walker provided a verbal update on the discussions held at the above meeting including a report on the planning proposal underway for a Sports Centre development on the site, noting that a pre-application visit from the Planning Officer had been held with outline planning permission given - further details to follow at the next meeting.

13. Audit Committee

Paul Herridge, Chair of the Audit Committee, introduced the agenda item and presented item b) Annual Report of the Audit Committee. Elaine French highlighted key aspects in the various papers for Governors' attention and information, as recorded in the draft Audit Committee Meeting Minutes. Referring to the draft minutes, it was also noted that in order to provide sufficient assurance to the Corporation, regarding the External Audit, Simon Lindfield (Deputy Chair of Governors) had attended the first part of the Audit Committee meeting at which the External Auditors presented their audit work on the Annual Report and Financial Statements.

a) **Draft Minutes of Audit Committee meeting held on 27/11/2025 –** the draft minutes were noted and the recommendations therein endorsed by the Corporation.
b) **Annual Report of the Audit Committee -** approved
c) **Audit Completion Report to 31/7/2025 (and refer to Annual Report and Financial Statements to 31/7/2025 in Finance section) -** approved
d) **Regularity Audit Self-Assessment Questionnaire July 2025 – supports regularity audit statement) -** approved
e) **Letters of Representation x 2 (supports financial statements and regularity audit) -** approved
f) **Governance Aspects – input from External Auditor/questions from Committee – refer minutes**
g) **Internal Assurance Reports from 2024/2025**
    - **Budgeting and Financial Reporting**
    - **Follow Up (plus SLT input and risk assurance – refer minutes)**
h) **Risk Management Annual Report, Risk Register and Assurance Map –** approved, and noting the new risks and the discussions held regarding the Finance Team capacity.
    - **Risk Management Annual Report**
    - **Risk Register and Management Action Plan**
    - **Risk Assurance Map**
i) **Internal Auditors Performance Indicators – review of 2024/2025 -** approved
j) **Fraud and Whistleblowing – refer to minutes**

As recorded above the necessary documents were approved and the Chair of Committee (Audit Committee Annual Report) and the Chair of Governors, were authorised to sign the required documents (Regularity Audit Questionnaire and Letters of Representation), along with the Principal (Regularity Audit Questionnaire). **ACTION: Chairs/ELF**

14. Search and Governance Committee

a) **Draft Minutes of meeting held on 19th November 2025**
b) **Governing Body Membership Matters –** the various membership proposals were endorsed by the Corporation, including the appointment of Lisa Wardle-Sharp as Jason Wye's successor (Teaching Staff Governor) with effect from 1st January 2026 for a 4 year term of office.

c) **Corporation Annual Reports – available on request**
d) **Corporation Expenses – available on request**
e) **Freedom of Information – available on request -** approved
f) **Confidentiality Review – available on request -** approved
g) **Governance Self-Assessment Report and Action Plan (QIP) -** approved
h) **AoC Code of Good Governance – evidence template**
i) **Annual Remuneration Report –** approved and the Remuneration Committee Chair authorised to sign this. A copy will be uploaded to the website.
j) **Governor Link Arrangements for 2025/2026 – refer minutes**

The Corporation considered the various items listed above and also reviewed and approved the various recommendations recorded in the draft Committee Minutes. **ACTION: LEP**

15. **Policies and Other Documents – refer committee minutes for discussion/recommendations held –** items were taken as read

a. **EASU Pension Valuation report – refer minutes**
a. **Fees and Charges – Finance Committee (executive summary and paper)**
c. **SPH Policies/procedures**
I SPH Performance Review Scheme
Ii SPH Remuneration Policy including reasons for changes from HR
Iii SPH Disciplinary Procedures
Iv SPH Grievance Procedures

v) Sector Reference documents available on request: DfE Guidance on SPH Performance Review; FEC Senior Pay July 2025; Financial Handbook reference on Senior Pay, Eversheds Bulletin on Senior Pay and HM Treasury Guidance

The Corporation approved the Policies and Documents. **ACTION: SLT**

16. Any Other Business

a) Last meeting Jason Wye (Teaching Staff Governor) – thanks were recorded to Jason for his service and support over the last 8 years.

17. **Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday 25th March 2026 at 5.30 p.m.

18. Any Other Business - none.

19. Confidential Business
(At this point it may be resolved that Staff and Student Governors and SLT Members, be asked to leave owing to the confidential nature of the business).

Confidential Part II Corporation business minutes – None

Senior Post Holders (SPHs) Remuneration recommendations – ***Minutes from SPH Remuneration Committee held on 20th November 2025 - sent separately to External Governors only***

At this point it was resolved that the Staff and Student Governors and SLT members should leave the meeting at this point owing to the confidential nature of the business relating to Senior Postholders appraisal and remuneration. The meeting remained quorate.

Jodie Braham, Chair of Remuneration Committee was not present as she had sent her apologies for tonight's meeting.

The Corporation considered the draft minutes from the Committee but there was some confusion regarding the details relating to remuneration recommendations for the 2 Senior Postholders.

Following a discussion and in light of the confusion, with no one at the Meeting who could help to clarify the proposals made, it was resolved to approve the 4% inflation related pay uplift for both Senior Postholders, in line with that received by all Staff, but that a further Remuneration Committee meeting should be convened next term to resolve any other matters which require further clarification. **ACTION: Chair of Remuneration Committee/DMJ/SL/LEP/HR**

Any other confidential business – None

20. **Enclosures for Information –** Meeting Schedule 2025/2026

Chair……………………………………. Date……………………………

Louise Pennington 10/12/25