

People Committee Minutes

Meeting held on Thursday 6 March 2025 at 4.00 pm, via Teams

Governors: Fabienne Bailey (Committee Chair), Stuart Blackett (Corporation Chair), Coreen Bone, Liz Dixon (Staff Governor), Grant Glendinning (Chief Executive and Group Principal), Amanda Olvanhill (Committee Vice Chair) and David Watson (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Link Governor)

Apologies: There were no apologies for absence from governors.

Officials: Adele Currie (Group Director of HR and People Development), Phil Hastie (Chief Operating Officer), Fiona Sharp (Chief Financial Officer), Sarah Thompson (Group Director of Governance) and Sam Young (Governance Support Officer)

P25/1 Agenda Item 1 – Welcome, apologies for absence, declarations of interest, notification of items of other business

There were no apologies for absence as all members were present. The Group Director of Governance confirmed that Fabienne Bailey would be asked to leave the meeting during consideration of her reappointment under agenda item 11; there were no other declarations of interest in items on the agenda and no items of additional business were requested for consideration.

P25/2 Agenda Item 2 – Minutes of previous meeting

Minutes of the People Committee meeting held on 5 December 2024, including an appendix confidential to independent members, had been circulated and were **approved** as an accurate record of the meeting.

The action progress log had been circulated and updates were **noted**.

P25/3 Agenda Item 3 – Risk Management

A report had been circulated detailing the strategic risks delegated to the committee: STR0006: People and STR0011: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.

In response to a query, the Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that she had developed a good working relationship with the regional representatives of Trade Unions. In agreement with members of the Joint Consultative and Negotiation Committee (JCNC), a number of sub-groups had been collapsed and combined into a single meeting. There had been a formal request for recognition by the National Association of Schoolmasters / Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT); members of this union were based solely at Bede. As the proportion of membership was low relative to group total employees, the group had responded that member numbers were insufficient to constitute a 'bargaining unit'. However, a monthly surgery had been established to address staff queries; nine staff had attended the first drop in session and some were now seeking to join a union recognised by the group.

A governor noted that staff recruitment was scored as a [REDACTED] risk, but information provided in the People Statistics report at Item 4 of the agenda for this meeting indicated no issues with staff recruitment at present. [REDACTED] The risk score would be kept under review and amended as and when appropriate. Members then discussed the value of a probation period, recognising the importance of robust recruitment processes and options to remove unsuitable employees at any stage of their career. In response to a query, the Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that successful completion of the probationary period did not bring any additional benefits in terms of pay or other staff benefits at the Etc. and the group was seeking to move terminology to a focus on welcoming new starters to the group. It was acknowledged that the pending Employment Rights Bill could impact and was likely to increase barriers to moving staff on quickly.

Members suggested adding benchmarking data as a control, as well as an assurance.

Subject to the comments above, governors **confirmed** that they had received assurance on the controls in place, that the net and target risk scores were appropriate and no risks or opportunities should be added at this stage.

Employment Items

P25/4 Agenda Item 4 – People Statistics

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented her report outlining key staffing data and highlighted the intention to ensure more dynamic reporting, with month on month analysis and benchmarking data provided where possible. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that a three month reporting period would provide a clearer picture and more meaningful comparators. The group was currently tendering for a new HR system, which would provide real-time data, supporting this approach.

Governors suggested a breakdown of staff turnover to indicate voluntary and involuntary leavers would be helpful. The Group Director of HR and People Development agreed to seek to include additional information around reasons for leaving, particularly where staff were leaving in the first year of service. It was recognised that staff turnover appeared high at [REDACTED] % but it would be important to further understand this data and the impact of short term contracts, for example, for exam invigilators.

A governor highlighted that, while it was valuable to monitor the proportion of employees within individual diversity categories, it seemed inappropriate to aggregate diversity data to provide a ‘total diversity’ number. It was **agreed** to remove the total columns in future reports but that individual protected characteristics would continue to be monitored.

In response to a query regarding action to reduce the number of ‘unknown’ responses in relation to ethnicity, the Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that the group was reviewing the questions asked and seeking to offer as many options as possible, as well as an option for a free text response, to encourage responses. Data obtained would also be compared with external data from other colleges and ONS data.

Governors commented that the number of disciplinary and conduct cases appeared high and suggested more detail around the cases would be helpful. The Group Director of HR and People Development agreed to provide additional thematic detail as appropriate. She also clarified that

the cohort of 12 trained mediators would be identified from among existing staff at a variety of levels. Training would be provided by an external provider, potentially from June 2025, with the intention of minimising grievance cases.

Governors noted that sickness absence was above target for the current quarter. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that intervention by the Occupational Health team was taking place at an earlier stage and, while this had increased costs, this was expected to result in reduced levels of sickness absence. The low target reflected a very low external benchmark for FE colleges. The HR team was collating and analysing data, including at department level, to enable development of clear action plans.

Governors noted a very significant drop in the average days taken to fill a staff vacancy, from [REDACTED] to [REDACTED]. The Group Director of HR and People Development reported that this reflected a sharpening of HR processes and a more customer-centred approach across the HR Team.

Governors **noted** the report and commended the value of this information for the committee.

P25/5 Agenda Item 5 – Strategy Updates

A report had been circulated outlining considerations in respect of an updated People Strategy. Governors commended the ambitious and forward-thinking proposals but queried the reason for a complete overhaul, recognising generally positive feedback on the current People and Learning and Development Strategies. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that the proposals aimed to enhance the current offer by providing more proactive HR support via a business partnering approach and increased added value, for example, in management development and coaching. In response to a query around whether the organisation was prepared for this approach, the Chief Executive commended the strategic direction, which incorporated and built on the workplans and workstreams within the previous Great Place to Work and People Strategies, and introduced new language to ensure the group was firmly forward-looking. In response to a query regarding how achievement of the objectives would be measured, it was recognised that tangible objectives and methods of evaluation would be detailed in the final Strategy

Governors noted the intention to introduce 360-degree feedback; in response to queries, the Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that 360-degree feedback processes would be used for senior leaders only and the group was currently discussing potential options with software providers. External software would be used to protect anonymity.

The wider appraisal process for all staff was also being reviewed and consultation would be taking place on a new six weekly check-in process, which would cover performance against objectives, as well as staff health and well-being and aspirations. In response to a concern about additional time required of staff, the Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that this process would replace existing appraisal meetings and should be viewed as a valuable investment of time for both staff and managers.

A governor asked how the Strategy would directly impact on staff, timescales for introduction and plans for communicating the Strategy to staff; the Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that the Strategy aimed to enhance the employment experience for all

colleagues, from onboarding to exit. The Strategy would focus on ensuring competitive benefits for staff, a positive culture, improving Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) and enhancing succession planning. The Group Director of HR and People Development recognised that launch of a new strategy was an important opportunity to engage staff in the change process.

Governors queried the role of the Organisational Development (OD) Business Partner and timescales for appointment to this position; it was clarified that this role would focus on culture, talent management, succession planning and learning and development analysis. Proposals for a revised HR team structure would be presented as part of Business Planning for the 2025-26 academic year.

Governors noted responses in the staff survey had identified improvements needed to communication and queried whether staff voice forums were in place and effective. The Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that formal consultation groups were in place, including a forum for meetings with unions (JCNC) and staff focus groups. Team leaders and managers were also encouraged to discuss new developments with staff at team meetings.

Governors **noted** the updates and supported the proposals for an enhanced People Strategy focussed on proactive partnership support.

P25/6 Agenda Item 6 – Staff Survey

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented her circulated report outlining feedback from the 2024 staff survey. She highlighted a very high response rate, providing assurance that results were representative. There had been particularly positive responses in relation to the very high number of staff that understood their responsibilities in respect of safeguarding and equality policies, as well as high scores for questions relating to recognition at work and fair treatment. Governors commented that scores were extraordinarily good and queried arrangements for ensuring independence and objectivity. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that the survey was undertaken using an external product, GDP, a product also used for student surveys. All responses were anonymised and benchmarked against other colleges.

A governor commented that the questions used in QDP surveys could be ‘loaded’, and staff were reluctant to apply low scores to questions because of the potential impact on the individual or team. While there was an option for free text comments, these were not reported back to staff. The Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that around 1500 free text comments had been received and the circulated report included a summary of key thematic areas; the Chief Executive confirmed that he had reviewed all free text comments and was comfortable that the summary reflected these. He highlighted very few comments relating to pay; those received had been raised by staff at Bede and reflected a national dispute.

A governor queried whether options existed for staff to complete the survey in a different format, recognising that research indicated that neurodiverse people could struggle with traditional surveys. The Group Director of HR and People Development agreed to take this on board when considering how to further enhance future staff surveys.

[REDACTED]

Governors were pleased to **note** the very positive outcomes arising from the staff survey, acknowledging that consideration around the appropriateness of the survey would be helpful but recognising that the results were overwhelmingly positive and should be celebrated.

P25/7 Agenda Item 7 – Apprenticeships

A report had been circulated outlining use of the Apprenticeship levy across the Etc. In response to a query, the Group Director of HR and People Development confirmed that the group expected to fully utilise its apprenticeship funding and was increasing the number of apprentices employed. A governor outlined an approach taken in Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council requiring all recruiting managers to justify why a position was not being advertised as an apprenticeship; the Group Director of HR and People Development expressed an interest in learning more about this approach.

A governor queried how the college planned to respond to the national change removing the requirement for adult apprentices to undertake English and maths qualifications within their programme. The Chief Executive clarified that the group would approach this on a case by case basis; any apprentice that wished to re-take maths and English qualifications would be supported to do so but the group would not insist on re-takes unless this was essential for the role.

At a governors' request, the Group Director of HR and People Development and the Chief Financial Officer agreed to review presentation of the extract from the Digital Apprenticeship Service, to ensure this was more meaningful for governors.

Governors noted a higher proportion of male apprentices within the group. The Group Director of HR and People Development clarified that two of three current business administrator apprentices were male; this was a positive picture in a traditionally female-dominated area. Governors also noted that male employees were more likely to request training and development opportunities and it would be important to ensure opportunities were advertised equally and female staff were encouraged to access appropriate opportunities.

The Apprenticeships update was **noted**.

P25/8 Agenda Item 8 – EDIB Update

A report had been circulated providing an update in relation to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging activities across Etc. The Group Director of HR and People Development highlighted, in particular, the relaunch of the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy Group with three new volunteers joining the Strategy Group and improving the balance of members in terms of race and religion. In response to a query, she confirmed that the membership of the Strategy Group was being reviewed to ensure all members were currently active and would comprise a minimum of 12 members. David Watson, EDI Link Governor, commended the achievements of the EDIB Strategy Group in effecting significant change over the previous six months. Members were also advised that the Etc. had signed up to the Association of Colleges' EDI Charter.

Governors commended the range of actions taken to date, including a mentorship programme for underrepresented groups, and queried whether increased visibility of the group at local events, such as the Middlesbrough Mela, or Pride events, could help improve diverse

recruitment. The Chief Executive reported on plans to hold a Respectival later in the academic year.

Governors also suggested that targets be reviewed to ensure these were adequately ambitious; in particular, governors queried whether the target to increase diversity at leadership levels by 20% over three years was adequate.

Members were pleased to **note** the positive update in relation to focussed work around EDIB. It was **agreed** that the Group Director of HR and People Development, the Group Director of Governance and the EDI Link Governor would discuss further the most appropriate reporting route in respect of feedback from the EDIB Strategy Group.

P25/9 Agenda Item 9 – HR Policies

The Group Director of HR and People Development presented her circulated report requesting extension of the review date for a range of HR policies and procedures. This was to allow a full policy review to be undertaken during the summer break, taking account of the impending Employment Rights Bill as appropriate

Governors **agreed** to extend the review date for the following HR policies and procedures to 1 November 2025:

- Capability Policy and Procedure
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Employee Relations Combined
- Grievance Policy and Procedure
- Redundancy Policy and Procedure
- Pay and Pensions Policy and Procedure
- Absence Management Policy and Procedure
- Harassment, discrimination and bullying policy and procedure
- Maternity, Paternity, Adoption & Shared Parental Leave Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Recruitment Policy and Procedure
- Working Arrangements Policy and Procedure

Governance Items

P25/10 Agenda Item 10 – Governor equality, diversity and skills data

A report had been circulated presenting updated Board composition information for the Governing Body.

Governors noted a proposal to pause recruitment for a HE student representative on the Standards Improvement Committee and queried the impact on student governor succession planning. It was clarified that three student governors had been appointed for the calendar year 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025; in addition, two former student governors had agreed to serve as co-opted members of the Board to July 2025; and one candidate that had been unsuccessful in the student governor election had expressed an interest in joining the Standards Improvement Committee as a co-opted member. It was therefore felt most appropriate to pause further student governor recruitment at this time.

Governors noted that, while the data showed that [REDACTED] of governors were of non White British ethnicity, the majority of independent governors continued to be White British. Following discussion, members agreed that governor data should not be broken down to reflect separate governor categories but it would be helpful to reference such nuances within the narrative cover sheet.

Governors noted that no governors had experience in the low carbon / clean energy sector. As a key growth area for the group, it could be helpful to focus on this skillset during a round of future governor recruitment.

Governors were pleased to **note** that the composition data showed an improved gender balance and good age diversity. Governors would take the data into account when considering governor appointments and reappointments.

P25/11 Agenda Item 11 – Corporation and committee membership, recruitment and succession

The Group Director of Governance presented an update on governing body membership; she asked the committee to consider any changes to the recruitment priorities for the re-running of the Peridot Partners' search. Asked about the costs of the initial search, the Group Director of Governance confirmed that one appointment had been free of charge through the Department for Education governor recruitment offer, with additional governors recruited at a cost of £[REDACTED] each. Governors discussed skills gaps, including net zero, and the need to consider succession planning for the Chair of Standards Improvement Committee; it was **agreed** that recruitment to Standards Improvement Committee should run separately and that the priority for the search re-run via Peridot Partners should remain board diversity.

The Group Director of Governance then confirmed that Peridot's approach in these circumstances would be to have no fixed deadline for applications with a progress review after an appropriate period of time, agreed as Easter in this case. Peridot Partners had confirmed that they had received no formal applications to date but had been actively contacting potential candidates.

Fabienne Bailey left the meeting.

The Group Director of Governance clarified that Fabienne's first term of office would end on 30 June 2025 and that she was keen to seek reappointment; the reappointment analysis provided details of meeting attendance, some below the 80% attendance target, but evidenced extensive involvement in other events and governor development. It was also noted that, as the CEO of a qualifications awarding body, Fabienne brought valuable skills to the Corporation and governors **agreed** to recommend Fabienne's reappointment to the FE Corporation at their meeting in May.

Fabienne Bailey rejoined the meeting.

The Group Director of Governance informed Fabienne of the committee's decision; Fabienne thanked the committee.

Liz Dixon left the meeting.

In response to a proposal to hold a governors' workshop on Corporation leadership succession planning, the committee felt that this would be invaluable for collecting views. Governors then discussed the appointment of a Senior Independent Governor; though relatively uncommon in FE, this had been a suggestion during the external board review. A governor noted that the University of York had a Senior Independent Director rather than a Vice Chair and that the purpose of the role was often to give stakeholders a point of contact should they be unhappy with the Chair. As the Etc. Corporation had a Vice Chair then perhaps the role felt unnecessary. The committee confirmed that they had no firm opinions for or against the proposal but requested further information and also suggested that this could form part of the succession planning workshop.

Governors **noted** the Governing Body membership update and:

- i) following discussion under the previous agenda item, **agreed** to pause recruitment for a HE student co-opted member of Standards Improvement Committee, in light of other student governor appointments;
- ii) **agreed** to retain the original priorities for the recruitment approach by Peridot Partners, and the timescales proposed for this;
- iii) **agreed** to recommend the reappointment of Fabienne Bailey for a second term of office to the FE Corporation;
- iv) **supported** the suggestion to hold a succession planning workshop, and requested more information and perhaps discussion at the workshop around the Senior Independent Governor role.

Fabienne Bailey left and Amanda Olvanhill, the committee vice chair, chaired the remainder of the meeting.

P25/12 Agenda Item 12 – Governance Review and Development

The Group Director of Governance explained that the next external governance review would be due in 2026 and proposed holding this in the spring term to allow evaluation of a different element of the governance cycle. Governors were asked for their views on the process for identifying a reviewer, including how many providers to approach; it was noted that the process would be supported by the Group Procurement Manager and that his advice would also be sought.

Governors discussed differing approaches, for example legalistic or value added, that might be taken by different providers and the importance of determining what the Corporation required. As the group's legal advisers, governors also considered whether there would be a conflict of interest in appointing Stone King for this review and whether the approach taken would be too legally biased. The Group Director of Governance explained that the previous Stone King reviewer had been a governance professional and that she had had no links with Stone King's legal team though, as Tom Morrison was responsible for overseeing governance reviews, there could now be a potential conflict. On balance, governors felt that, although the last reviewer had given valuable feedback, a fresh perspective would be preferable. There was a suggestion of approaching other FE colleges to arrange peer reviews but the Group Director of Governance clarified that the Department for Education's guidance specifically advised against this.

The Group Director of Governance then presented the update on the Governance Action Plan and outlined a proposal to amend two Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), including excluding

special meetings from the KPI relating to the issue of agendas and reports at least seven days before meetings.

Noting the amber RAG rating, a governor asked about progress on establishing governor 'buddies' and the Corporation Chair explained that, during the last round of governor inductions, volunteers had been sought and four identified. However, matching volunteers with newly appointed governors had then not taken place and he **agreed** to progress this; he added that it was not expected to be too onerous and might just involve being a point of contact. Amanda Olvanhill expressed her interest in becoming a buddy.

Governors then discussed buddies for staff and student governors, recognising that all governors should be treated equally. The Group Director of Governance suggested that student and staff governors would value mentoring from senior managers. The low appetite from new governors to observe other committees was also noted; the Group Director of Governance felt that governor inductions were quite time intensive and that the timeframe for this action should probably be extended. She added that it might be preferable to extend the suggestion to all governors and remove the specific timescale.

Governors:

- i) **agreed** that the external board review should be held in the spring term 2026 and that the Group Director of Governance would consult with the Corporation Chair and the Chief Executive and Group Principal on the procurement process having taken advice from the Group Procurement Manager;
- ii) **noted** the proposed schedule for monitoring Governance Key Performance Indicators and **agreed** the proposed changes;
- iii) considered the progress updates against the Governance Action Plan and the Governor Development Plan and **agreed** the proposed changes and training needs proposals.

Closing Items

P25/13 Agenda Item 13 – Any other business

There were no additional items of business considered by the committee.

P25/14 Agenda Item 14 – Approval of documents for public inspection

It was **agreed** that the agenda and supporting documents should be made available for public inspection, with the exception of: reports to Items 3 (Risk Management), 4 (People Statistics), 6 (Staff Survey) and 7 (Apprenticeships), which were deemed commercial in confidence; and individual governor information provided under Item 11. Minutes would be made available following approval and consideration at the next meeting.

P25/15 Agenda Item 15 – Date, time and venue of next meeting

Next meeting: **Tuesday** 10 June 2025, 4.00 pm via Teams

P25/16 Agenda Item 16 – Meeting effectiveness and key themes

- i) Meeting effectiveness: what went well? Even better if ...
 - Governors felt that the quality of the challenge reflected the high quality of the Group Director of HR and People Development's papers and their presentation

- Meeting time spent constructively
 - Governors gained assurance from the Group Director of HR and People Development's input
- ii) Consideration of whether adequate assurance had been received etc.
Governors had nothing to add to their discussions under agenda item 3.
- iii) Key messages or concerns to highlight to the FE Corporation
The Governance Team would collate feedback in consultation with the Committee Chair and Vice Chair; committee members had no key messages or concerns to highlight.

The meeting ended at 6.20 pm

Approved at a meeting held on 10 June 2025