

MINUTES

**South Essex Colleges Group Corporation Board
7E.03 Southend College
Tuesday 15th July 2025 at 18:00**

Date and timings:	18:00 to 21:00
Location:	7E.03 Southend College
Present (Governors):	Sally Dicketts (SD) (Chair) Rick Olver (RO) Denise Brown (DB) (Group CEO) Jo Brooker (JB) (Staff Governor) Kate Merritt (KM) Kianna Smith (KS) (Student Governor) Aaron Thompson (AT) Andrew Overs Dowsett (AD) (MS Teams) Tina Booth (TB) (Staff Governor)
Minutes:	Carrie Brown (CB)- Head of Governance
Clerk to the Corporation:	Lana Jackman (LJ)- Group Executive Director Governance and Strategy
In attendance:	Adam Fahey (AF) Group Deputy CEO- Curriculum and Quality Zed Mohammed (ZM) Group Deputy CEO (MS Teams) Ansar Mahmood (AM) Group Deputy CEO- Chief Information Officer (MS Teams) Jayne Sheehan (JS) Vice CEO- Innovation Marco Steele (MS)- Local College Board Member and potential Governor Rachel Meads (RM)- Marketing Consultant Ray Banton (RB)- Marketing Director
Apologies:	Gerry Bender (GB) Seye Awolusi (SA)

Item

- 00.00 Agenda**
- 01.00 Chair's welcome and introduction.**
SD welcomes attendees and opens the meeting.
- 02.00 Preliminary items.**
 - 02.01 Apologies for absence and declarations of interest.**
Apologies were received from Gerry Bender and Seye Awolusi.
 - 02.02 Declarations of Interest.**
No additional declarations of interest other than those already registered.
 - 02.03 Urgent business notified in advance.**
None.
- 03.00 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

03.01 Minutes of the meeting 3 June 2025.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2025 were **APPROVED** as an accurate reflection of the meeting.

03.02 Matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no outstanding matters arising from the minutes of the meeting 3 June 2025 that were not discussed elsewhere on the agenda.

03.03 Chair Appraisal.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Chair Appraisal feedback.

SD thanks those that took part in this process. SD notes that the appraisal document will be sent out to all Corporation Board members and this will be fully discussed in the October meeting.

STRATEGIC ITEMS**04.00 Marketing.**

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Marketing update and presentation.

Rachel Meads [RM] and Ray Banton [RB] join the meeting 18:00.

RM and RB present to the Corporation Board, noting that around 12–18 months ago the marketing strategy shifted to a more proactive approach, which includes a departmental restructure.

SD asks whether social media activity has previously been undertaken at SECG. DB responds that this area has not previously had a systematic approach.

RM advises that a new social media policy has been implemented to build engagement across the core social media platforms and maximise reach. RM reports that social media impressions are up by 149%, with engagement up by 97%.

KM asks about the marketing plan for applications. RM confirms that the 2026–2027 plan is already in place, which is considered very early. For the current year, the campaign focuses on an 'enrol now' message.

KM provides positive feedback on her experience of the SECG application process for her school leaver, noting the improvement compared to previous experiences.

DB notes that the work undertaken during the Board Development Day on purpose will be incorporated into the marketing plan.

AT asks about plans for student involvement in the social media strategy. RM confirms that there will be learner focus groups, digital content representatives, and a learner-led TikTok campaign.

KS comments that the SECG TikTok presence needs to be further developed.

SD asks whether students are being used as ambassadors in marketing activities. RM confirms that this is the case.

MS asks how quickly the social media strategy can adapt to new platforms and emerging trends. RM confirms that the approach is flexible and adaptable.

TB asks whether the Schools Liaison Team has been expanded. RB confirms that the team has increased by 0.5 FTE.

JB asks what actions are being taken to improve access for learners who do not have smartphones. RM advises that marketing activity is delivered across multiple platforms to ensure accessibility.

AT asks about Higher Education marketing. RM reports that the strategy builds on NSS results and includes earlier engagement in the cycle, as well as promoting direct entry routes for the mature learner market.

SD asks when the planned website upgrade will take place. RM advises that the project is currently at pitch stage, with bidders indicating a minimum timeframe of nine months.

AT asks about the differences between marketing strategies for younger applicants and adult learners seeking to reskill. RM explains that all campaigns take a digital-first approach but differ in tone and messaging. SD notes that the adult market is likely to be sector-defining.

SD asks whether any additional approaches are planned in the lead-up to results day. RM confirms that drop-in sessions will be available for learners receiving results.

SD thanks RB and RM for their presentation.

18:30 RB and RM leave the meeting.

04.01 Group CEO Report.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group CEO Report.

DB presents her report, providing a full update on the Strategic Objectives.

SD notes that future reports should include comparator data to enable year-on-year analysis and support the development of sector knowledge among Corporation Board members. DB advises that the 'distance travelled' measure serves as the primary comparator and confirms that SECG holds comparison data for areas showing negative movement.

18:38 AD joins the meeting.

DB recommends the establishment of a Task and Finish Group for English and Maths [E&M].

The Corporation Board **AGREE** to the setup of the Task and Finish Group for English and Maths.

SD asks about the purpose of the E&M Task and Finish Group. DB explains that the group will provide additional scrutiny and challenge, incorporating a design thinking approach to offer the Board greater assurance. TB, KM, and MS agree to sit on the group.

RO adds that the additional challenge in this area is welcomed.

MS asks about the transition from Windows 10 to Windows 11 and how business continuity will be maintained. AM confirms that the transition has begun to ensure a smooth rollout, with laptops already upgraded and all desktop computers scheduled for completion over the summer period. AM advises that there will be no loss of service.

04.02 Growth Strategy Plan.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE AND APPROVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Growth Strategy Plan.

AT asks about the level of investment required for the Growth Strategy and how this will be managed. DB confirms that this will be incorporated into the budget build process from next year. DB adds that the Pearl programme will include the applications for HTQs and emphasises the importance of being nimble and responsive to market demand.

MS asks how investment in the Growth Strategy will be distributed across curriculum areas. DB advises that this will be driven by recruitment and the associated contribution levels, targeting a 50% contribution rate.

RO asks about the role of subcontracting within the Growth Strategy. DB confirms that the strategy includes an assumption of subcontracted delivery where appropriate.

MS observes that the growth targets appear ambitious. DB acknowledges this, noting that some of the challenge relates to the introduction of HTQs, and that underperformance may result in clawback.

SD comments on the need for horizontal collaboration with other Further Education colleges. DB agrees, noting that SECG is now well positioned to engage in such discussions.

04.03 Strategic Plan Impact Report.

The Corporation Board **AGREE** the South Essex Colleges Group Strategic Plan Impact Report.

04.04 Letter from FE Commissioner.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Letter from the FE Commissioner.

OPERATIONAL AREAS OF CONCERN.

05.00 Applications.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Applications Report.

AF presents his report, noting that SECG is currently tracking around 13% behind in applications compared to the previous year; however, accepted offers are higher, and the Careers Team is confident that numbers will increase following GCSE results day.

AF expresses concern regarding recruitment in Creative Arts at Southend College, noting that this is a flagship area for SECG. He adds that historically, enrolments in Creative Arts decline during periods of economic recession. DB confirms that Art and Design courses are currently experiencing a downturn in applications.

SD emphasises the importance of promoting transferable skills and highlighting the value of creativity in an AI-driven world.

SD asks whether there are any concerns regarding oversubscription in particular areas. AF confirms that there are not, noting that applications at Thurrock College are up by 2%.

AT asks whether there is data available from schools on Year 9 and Year 10 subject choices and how these may have influenced current applications. DB explains that options at Year 9 are currently very limited in schools and that, unless these subjects are offered through extracurricular provision, learners are being diverted away from creative pathways. AF adds that obtaining data from schools remains challenging.

The Corporation Board discusses the potential for Saturday Clubs or early evening courses as a means of developing future demand and building a sustainable market.

05.01 Curriculum Plan 2025-2026.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Curriculum Plan 2025-2026.

AF reports that targets are set for each College, by subject area and funding stream, with the accompanying text highlighting any changes.

SD comments that the paper is difficult to interpret for those not directly involved in the sector. AF welcomes feedback on how the information can be presented more effectively.

SD suggests that presenting the data through a return on investment lens—incorporating risk mitigation considerations and long-term investment perspectives—would enhance the paper's clarity and strategic focus. SD emphasises that papers should be written in a way that is accessible to all Governors, including the Student Governor.

05.02 SEN Information Report.

The Corporation Board **DEFER** the South Essex Colleges Group SEN Information Report.

RO asks whether SECG currently has a Head of SEND in post. AF confirms that the position is currently vacant and out to recruitment.

AF notes that the SEND statement is required to be published and that, while similar statements at other institutions tend to be transactional, SECG's version aims to incorporate a more personal and values-driven approach.

The Corporation Board discusses the purpose and intended audience of the statement. LJ advises that the statement is intended for the Department for Education (DfE) to demonstrate that all parties are actively engaged in ensuring that SEND learners receive a high-quality education.

SD suggests that the statement could be framed to reflect the context of "what we provide within our financial constraints."

SD requests that the statement be redrafted to further strengthen SECG's credentials and commitment in this area.

05.03 Learner Outcomes Lessons Learned.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Learner Outcomes Lessons Learned.

SD reflects on the recent Burnley College Ofsted report and emphasises the importance of the Corporation Board maintaining close oversight in this area.

DB advises that the Board should undertake a review of data assurance processes, which may include commissioning an additional audit, obtaining a statement of accountability from the CEO, and securing further assurance regarding data capture procedures.

SD comments that positive outcomes should be recognised and celebrated.

AM notes that the most recent audit identified no issues with data accuracy and that data assurance forms part of the annual financial audit. AM adds that controls within the ILR process were commended during the audit.

ACTION: CEO Report to review the data assurance processes and come up with the framework for the controls around data integrity.

FINANCE.

06.00 Approval of Budget 2025-2026.

Moved to confidential items.

06.01 Management Accounts July 2025.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group July 2025 Management Accounts.

06.02 Group Insurances.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the South Essex Colleges Group the Group Insurances.

06.03 Estates and Asset Management Strategy- annual review for Board approval deferred.

Deferred.

06.04 Severance Payments and MPM compliance.

Deferred.

ACTION: CB to circulate the document post the meeting.

COMPLIANCE.

07.00 Financial Regulations.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Financial Regulations.

08.00 GOVERNANCE MATTERS

08.01 The Failure to Prevent Fraud Offence.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the Failure to Prevent Fraud Offence Report.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN PRINIPICAL** with a view to review the financial implications of the plan.

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL.

08.02 Ratification of Seye Awolusi Members to the Corporation Board.

The Corporation Board **DEFER** Seye Awolusi to have his term of office extended until the Chair has had a conversation with SA.

08.03 Register of Corporation Seal.

It was **NOTE** that the Corporation Board Seal was not used this academic year.

08.04 Written Resolutions Register.

It was **NOTED** that the Corporation Board did not have an written resolutions this academic year.

08.05 Subcontracting.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE** the subcontracting proposal.

SD asks whether the 20% allocation includes exam costs, quality monitoring, and audit processes for subcontracting. JS outlines the full process, confirming that exam costs are met by the subcontractors.

JS notes that two of the subcontractors are new and provides full detail on the business case supporting their appointment.

DB advises that the Growth funding for SECG is derived from subcontracting activity and that this approach has been financially prudent.

RO asks about the impact on the Football Academy at SECG. JS confirms that this is expected to double current participation figures.

09.00 STUDENT VOICE.

09.01 Student Governor Report.

The Corporation Board **RECEIVE** the verbal Student Governor Report.

KS provides feedback on a Student Governor Conference she recently attended and advises that she is making progress on the planned Culture Day.

KS expresses interest in attending further Student Governor Conferences, noting that such opportunities would help to increase interest and engagement in the Student Governor role.

ACTION: KS to be issued with a Governor lanyard to enable access to the Seventh Floor.

FORMAL APPROVAL OF POLICIES.

10.00 POLICIES.

10.01 Anti-Fraud Policy and Response Plan.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Anti-Fraud Policy and Response Plan with the amendment outlined below.

ACTION: MS asks about the escalation points and asks that this are made clearer within the policy.

10.02 Anti-Bribery Policy.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Anti-Bribery Policy.

10.03 Anti-Money Laundering Policy.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Anti-Money Laundering Policy.

10.04 Reserves Policy.

The Corporation Board **APPROVE** the South Essex Colleges Group Reserves Policy.

AT seeks clarification on Section 3, noting that the FEC benchmark differs. ZM explains that the figure is based on the DfE target, while the FEC benchmark represents a stretch target.

SD comments that the 15-day cash reserve level appears low. ZM advises that this figure originates from DfE discussions. SD suggests that 20 days would be a more comfortable target. DB notes that when the paper was drafted, 15 days represented a significant stretch, and proposes that 18 days would be an appropriate compromise.

The Corporation Board discusses the matter further, emphasising the importance of ensuring that SECG remains compliant with its policy and that funding flow is managed effectively.

ACTION: A paper to be presented to the Corporation Board providing assurance on cash flow fluctuations throughout the year.

10.05 Treasury Management Policy.

The Corporation Board **DEFER** the South Essex Colleges Group Treasury Management Policy.

ACTION: CB to circulate the Treasury Management Policy.

11.00 Any Other Business

11.01 Key Person Health Insurance.

SD proposes that the Corporation Board approve Key Person Health Insurance to provide staff with the option of private healthcare in a timeframe that aligns with business needs. The Corporation Board generally agrees to explore the associated costs.

ACTION: Costs for Key Person Health Insurance to be reviewed.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 21:00 hrs

Signed 

Dated 14th October 2025

Item	Actions	Deadline	Lead	Status
Actions from 15 July 2025				
05.03	CEO Report to review the data assurance processes and come up with the framework for the controls around data integrity.		DB/AM	
06.04	Severance Payments and MPM compliance report to be circulated post the meeting.		CB	Added to Governor Hub during the meeting, and emailed 6/10/25
09.01	KS to be issued with a Governor lanyard to enable access to the Seventh Floor.		CB	Emailed

10.01	Anti-Fraud Policy and Response Plan- MS asks about the escalation points and asks that this are made clearer within the policy.			
10.04	Reserves Policy- A paper to be presented to the Corporation Board providing assurance on cash flow fluctuations throughout the year.		ZM	December meeting
10.05	CB to circulate the Treasury Management Policy.		CB	Completed