Agreed by the Board, 6/7/26

HART LEARNING GROUP

Minutes of a meeting of the Hart Learning Group Board, held on Monday 27 April 2026, starting at 18.30, in the SITEC Immersive Room, on the Stevenage campus.

PRESENT

Philip Moore (Chair)
Jacquie Bamber
Kate Barclay (Vice-chair)
Toni Beck
Richard Cooksey
Kit Davies (CEO/Principal)
Stylianos Kampakis
Geoff Lambert
Claire McCafferty
Grace Wade
Richard Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE

Claire Anderson-Byrne (Deputy Head of Student Services) (Item 3 only)
Paul Harte (Group Finance Director)
Lizzie Jones (Corporate Services Director)
Emma Masters (Head of Wellbeing and Safeguarding) (Item 2 only)
Lorna McCallum (Executive Director-Apprenticeships and Partnerships)
Keith Turner (Deputy Principal, Curriculum, Quality and Inclusion)
Robert Dale (Company Secretary)

WELCOME

- The Chair welcomed Emma Masters (Head of Safeguarding and Wellbeing) to the meeting to present the termly Safeguarding Report.

ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Liz Chatman (Staff Governor)

ITEM 1B: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- Kit Davies declared that as well as being a Member and Trustee of the Hart Schools Trust, he was a member of the Board of WENTA, of the Stevenage Redevelopment Board and of the Hertfordshire Virtual School.

ITEM 1C: MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- Minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2026 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings and would be signed accordingly.

ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING/ACTIONS

- Actions had been addressed as follows:
  - Arrange to publish the 2024/25 Annual Report and Financial Statements on the Set up the [Search and Governance] Committee and issue diary appointments. **Action complete**. The Committee is expecting to interview Board candidates during the first half of May and to meet as a committee early in June.

- Amend the diary appointment for the next Board meeting to include a strategic thinking session and develop an agenda for the meeting. **Action complete**. This meeting is the result.

- Amend Annex E to include reference to governor training. **Action complete**. This Annex has been amended as suggested.

- Publish the revised Safeguarding, Child Protection and Prevent Policy on Sharepoint and the Group website. **Action complete**. This policy had been published as proposed.

ITEM 2: SAFEGUARDING REPORT – SPRING TERM 2025/26

- Emma Masters presented the latest termly report on Safeguarding activity at NHC and HL&D. The team sought to be proactive and to anticipate developments rather than responding as they arose. Highlights of the report included:

- **A focus on AI tools for students** – we were sharing reliable tools (CoPilot Chat, a limited version of Microsoft CoPilot) alongside training and information. CoPilot is one of the more closely monitored tools with safeguards inbuilt by the developers, making it one of the more reliable options.

- **3D printing review** – A recent Prevent network presentation highlighted concerns around 3D printers being used to create restricted or dangerous items. We presently have one 3D printer within the college and we used the disseminated information to create tighter protocols around access to the printer and logging usage.

- **Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026 -** the new edition has now gone live. A summary of the key changes has been shared with the safeguarding forum team and relevant actions reviewed accordingly.

- **Food banks** - The college was now a referral partner for Trussell's North Hertfordshire Foodbank, covering Hitchin, Letchworth, and Baldock. For Stevenage, referrals can also be made to Foodshed, offering similar support.

- **E6 Condition of Registration** - Following conversations with external networks, our document has been updated to include all courses of Level 4 and above, not just those in traditional HE qualifications. Links have been added to the relevant pages of the external website and materials circulated to the relevant curriculum area.

- **Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026** – The Association of Colleges (AoC) has been encouraging all providers to give their own direct feedback to the consultation.

- **Unit 6 Review** – We recently had a case of ketamine being taken during college hours. A review was held to ensure this did not become a wider issue beyond these individuals including greater monitoring of the space used, an increase in drugs dog visits, and more training for staff to recognize signs of drug use.

- **One World Week** – This took place from 16–20 March across campuses as a celebration of global culture, community and inclusion. The feeling of being understood and accepted is an important part of safeguarding and wellbeing and ties in with our work for College of Sanctuary.

- We supported upwards of 484 students this year – a 22% increase from the 397 this time last year. The top concerns were Self-harm, with Home/parenting issues jumping

into second place above Emotional related concerns. Mental health overall remains the prevailing area of concern and there is a mental health aspect to most cases.

- Governors noted that the Safeguarding governor had been reassured by her engagement with the team over whether there were sufficient resources to cope with this growth in demand, but it remained an area to watch.

Question: *Was the growth in demand for support the result of genuine growth in need or better reporting?* Probably both, but growth was expected to be seen over the coming year as well as use of ProMonitor and CPOMS became more embedded and effective.

Question: *How were student concerns about PAD sessions being addressed and was there a better route to raise awareness of AI among students?* PAD sessions were not the only route; this was also being embedded in curriculum provision as well. It would also be incorporated into induction.

Question: *Had the apparent ketamine use been reported to the Police?* Reports were made when this was appropriate. Staff also sought to signpost students to relevant support services.

- Governors noted that the growth in more complex mental health issues often reflected what was available (or not) from other services; CAMHS for example had long waiting lists. There was good engagement with the Mental Health network run by the local NHS Trust which provided a suite of training for support coaches.

Question: *What else could be done by the college to support learners?* There was constant reflection and participation in local and national networks to seek the latest best practice. The Safeguarding Forum had this as a standing item on its agenda.

Question: *Could data be presented as a percentage of the student body as well as a number?* Yes, that would be incorporated into future reporting.

- Training is substantially up to date.

- **The Board thanked** Emma Masters for her thorough and detailed report and **accepted** the report.

- Emma Masters left the meeting.

ITEM 3: STUDENT GOVERNOR REPORT

- Five candidates had come forward for election as the Student Governor for 2026/27 and the election was under way, with anonymised candidate profiles. The supporting group of student ambassadors was being selected with a role description and probationary period built in. This would support succession planning. Each ambassador would be given a specific project focus, including possible social events within and outside the college.

- The student governor and team was approaching students to explore in more detail their concerns about the Personal and Academic Development (PAD) curriculum and ideas for improving it. This was to get underneath the decline in positive responses to questions about this offer that had surface in both student voice surveys and the recent Governor in College session with students. One idea was to combine PAD content with mentoring sessions but no final decisions had been taken.

Question: *Had student governor elections been anonymised before?* No; this was an experiment. The annual student governor elections provided an opportunity to talk about democratic practice.

Question: *What had been done to address student voice concerns about digital skills and IT access?* Further analysis of responses showed that those learners with concerns had tended to be first years, which suggested that an improvement was needed to the induction programme. This would be in place for the new academic year.

- **The Board accepted** the report.

- Claire Anderson-Byrne left the meeting.

ITEM 4: STAFF VOICE

- Governors discussed analysis of the Staff survey undertaken in December 2025 which had generated a response rate of 42.8%, compared with 42% in 2024/25 based on a staff population of 560. Corporate Services and Hart L&D teams had the highest response rates.

- Responses had been good overall at 89%, with no change year on year. There were some questions where satisfaction levels had reduced, mainly in respect of communications, IT support and the working environment. Most of these changes were minor.

- The results had been analysed by department and share with heads who had been asked to lead sessions with their teams to develop action plans relevant to their departments. The recent staff voice session at the governor in college day had identified similar themes – for example around the adequacy of communication- and it was expected that addressing this would be part of these action plans. These would be monitored and impact would be assessed by considering changes in survey data year-on-year.

Question: *Was the role of staff voice champion going to be rolled out?* The role will be announced shortly with them to be in place for September 2026. This role would help check the details underlying survey responses.

Question: *How would champions be identified?* Volunteers would be sought.

Question: *How are managers intended to undertake these staff conversations?* Team meetings were expected to consider the findings of the survey, seek to surface issues and concerns particular to that department, and would be assisted in managing ongoing communications by staff voice champions. The people strategy included four key areas and KPIs over which engagement would be sought. Leadership training for managers had already begun.

Question: *How were managers responding to the training?* Feedback had been good with managers reporting that they were using insights from the training in their practice. Governors asked if the schedule of training could be shared at the next Q&C Committee meeting.

Action: Add Leadership Development programme schedule and outline training content to next Q&C Committee agenda.

Question: *Was there a goal to increase the response rate?* There was no target at present, but this could be reviewed. Part of the rationale for the approach taken this year was that it had worked with Hart L&D.

Question: *Was it possible to interview staff that did not complete the survey to ask why they did not?* It is a genuinely anonymous process, so we don't know who had or hadn't completed the survey. However, staff voice sessions were being used to explore this issue and to promote understanding among the staff community that completion was important. To be fair, the response rate was not unusually low for such surveys.

- **The Board accepted** the report.

ITEM 5: SANCTUARY STATUS – PROGRESS REPORT

- The college had submitted a bid to achieve College of Sanctuary status, which sought to provide a coherent framework for strengthening inclusion, equality and social justice in FE. The bid aligned directly with core institutional priorities: improving recruitment, retention and progression; evidencing strong practice for Ofsted; and delivering tangible impact against equality, diversity and inclusion objectives.

- It would also strengthen the college's role as a trusted anchor institution within the local community, deepening partnerships with refugee and migrant organisations, enhancing reputation, and opening new avenues for external funding and collaborative projects.

- In achieving this status, the college would be making a commitment to ensuring individual learners did not face barriers to learning. While there was an obvious relevance to people with refugee status, it was relevant to the whole student body and sought to encourage inclusive practice. It would be helpful evidence for Ofsted looking for a greater focus on Inclusion in its widest sense.

- The college's bid had been highly regarded and it had been asked to mentor two other institutions following the same path; this suggested that we might regard practice in this area as exemplary.

- Governors noted that the Quality & Curriculum Committee had previously discussed the bid and agreed that this was expected to apply across the whole student population in ways relevant to individual learners, whether this meant supporting young people experiencing family break-up, signposting support for mental health needs or helping with language learning. The curriculum teams were developing a Universal Design for Learning that would support this.

Question: *What would the Universal Design for Learning look like?* It introduced four new elements to curriculum design: Co-design with employer support; the inclusion of 'cultural capital'; tailoring to individual student needs; and multiple pathways for engagement. The approach would be rolled out across the curriculum teams in June.

Question: *Would there be opportunities for student engagement with local charities?* Yes, the aim was to stimulate student volunteering and community engagement soi that their time at college was about more than education.

Question: *What risks were there – eg staff resource, cost or political?* There were risks, and the team had noted the opposition of certain councils to specific education programmes, but this approach was intended to give all students the best possible education experience, not just a few.

Question: *How would these risks be managed?* Other Colleges of Sanctuary had not experienced an significant negative responses to date. The Sanctuary organisation was a charity, not receiving public funds, so there was no immediate financial risk.

- The Board welcomed and supported the approach but advised that it would be sensible to promote the status in a way that focused on how this would support the whole student community, not just a cohort within that larger group.

- **The Board accepted** the report.

ITEM 6: CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S OVERVIEW

- The financial position was strong with a forecast year end surplus of c£0.9m. Work on the 2026/27 budget proposals was under way, and there were some significant revenue headwinds to be considered, despite the expected growth in 16-18 funding. Adult Skills Fund (ASF) revenue was declining by £0.7m, and Apprenticeship revenue was likely also to be flat at best. While there would be more funding for learners with higher needs, these also generated additional costs.

- To help manage this, it was likely that the use of sub-contractors for delivery would fall again next year, and discussions with key apprenticeship clients were exploring alternatives to the loss of management apprenticeships.

- Capital expenditure works to spend the full £6.4m DfE funding allocation had been completed by 31 March and the final statement would be returned to DfE shortly. There was no anticipated clawback risk. Bids for future capital funding pots (eg to the Post-16 capacity fund) had been submitted but outcomes were not known. Hertfordshire County Council had also for the first time offered some capital funding to support SEND provision, and a bid proposing a modular facility on the Stevenage campus was boing submitted.

- College outcomes were placing NHC in the top 10% for Maths and the top 15% for English and overall in the top quartile for all results.

- Several new senior roles would be filled in time for the new academic year: (a) a Head of Management Information and Learner records - a key role responsible for the quality and timely provision of data and insights; (b) a Director of Finance and Funding, working closely with that role and managing a Finance team; (c) a Chief Financial Officer, working on strategic financial direction, procurement, and risk management etc; and (d) a Director of Governance.

- A team of students had secured first place at a recent Maths competition and reached second place in the national finals. This was a remarkable achievement.

- **The Board accepted** the report

ITEM 7: AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT AND CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

- The Audit Committee met on 20 April 2026. As well as standing items, the Committee received a report on work to strengthen against cyber attack, and to increase resilience in the event of a successful attack. The Committee was content that a lot of effort was being put into this work, reflective of the higher threat environment.

- The Committee also reviewed the current iteration of the risk register which the SMT kept under regular review. It was likely that an emerging risk concerning the eligibility

of certain courses for support from the Apprenticeship Levy would be moved to the main register as details had now emerged

- The Committee had approved a minor adjustment to the current Whistleblowing Policy to reflect a recent amendment to the Employment Rights Act 1996. This made clear that workers who 'blow the whistle' on sexual harassment can benefit from whistleblowing protections against detriment (adverse treatment) and unfair dismissal..

- **The Board accepted** the report.

ITEM 8: FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT AND P7 (FEBRUARY 2026) MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS REPORT

- The Finance Committee had met on 16 April 2026 when it considered (a) the mid-year reforecast; and (b) the P7 (February 2026) Management Accounts report. In addition, a verbal update on the P8 (March 2026) Management Accounts report was given.

- The latest year-end forecast was for an improved surplus of c£0.9m, which took account of some unforeseen improvements in revenue such as the forecast achievement of 110% of Adult Skills Funding (ASF) when the budget had assumed 100%. There had also been an increase in 16-18 funding rates and numbers.

- The Committee had reviewed progress with capital projects, which were on target and and approved amendments to the Financial Regulations (largely relating to the merger of the Hart Schools Trust with another multi-academy trust).

Question: *What was the reason for the lower capital funding allocation?* It appeared to relate to errors in student postcode records. Unfortunately, there was no ability to challenge this allocation.

- **The Board accepted** the report.

ITEM 9: QUALITY & CURRICULUM COMMITTEE REPORT

- The Quality & Curriculum Committee had met on 26 March 2026 when it had considered a report on NHC's bid to become a College of Sanctuary. This was intended to support inclusion in its broadest sense, ensuring that learners were supported and welcomed into the college community. This included students undertaking ESOL programmes, asylum seekers and refugees, albeit these formed a small proportion of learners.

- The Committee also reviewed data and analysis from the Course Impressions survey of student views. This showed positive feedback about tutorials and tutors supported by value-added data. The main areas of criticism related to the Personal and Academic Development (PAD) curriculum, where students were looking for significant improvements. This was being worked on.

- Governors welcomed good progress being made with the 2025/26 Quality Development Plan (QDP). This included the ability to analyse learner data by inclusion characteristics, with the aim of examining this including considering intersectionality.

Question: *Would College of Sanctuary status lead to greater pressure on SEND staff?* This was not considered likely; a properly inclusive approach might enhance retention but should not require additional efforts from the staff team.

Question: *Would this approach lead to more students with extra needs being attracted to attend the college?* Yes, that was a possible consequence.

Question: *Could the data be analysed to assess whether or not more disadvantaged learners were being recruited?* Yes, it was possible to provide evidence in this area.

- **The Board accepted** the report.

ITEM 10: POLICIES REVIEW

- The Data Protection and Management Policy was subject to a three yearly review, absent any legislative developments or lessons learned from data protection activities. There had been no legislative developments that required material changes.

- However, since the previous review, the Hart Schools Trust had merged with another Multi-academy Trust (on 1 April 2026) and references to the Trust no longer need to be made in the Policy. The proposed changes were shown using Track Changes. Most related to the removal of such references although there were a few minor amends to correct textual infelicities. One final element (a new diagram illustrating who does what) was being updated and the new policy would not be re-published until that had been completed.

- Governors suggested that the frequency of training for staff should be considered and that practice and procedures should be reviewed.

- Subject to the diagram being amended**, the Board approved** the revised Data Protection and Management Policy.

Action: Update the diagram of responsibilities and publish the revised policy.

ITEM 11: 2025/26 MEETING CALENDAR AND AGENDA OUTLINE

- The Board reviewed a proposed programme of meetings and governor engagement for 2026/27, along similar lines to arrangements prevailing in 2025/26. Subject to any adjustments suggested by individual Chairs, the proposed calendar was acceptable.

- **The Board approved** the proposed calendar of meetings for 2026/27.

Action: Issue diary appointments for 2026/27 meetings.

ITEM 12: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

ITEM 13: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Monday 6 July 2026, 16.00, at the Hitchin campus, followed by a Board dinner.

ITEM 14: INFORMATION PAPERS

- The Board noted three reports from governors reflecting on participation in governor in college sessions and making recommendations which the SMT was following up. These sessions were really valuable in providing governors with insights into college practice. The staff voice session noted some issues with wifi connectivity in some parts of the estate while the student voice session highlighted issues over the PAD curriculum, as also reported to the Quality & Curriculum committee. Students had

been overwhelmingly positive about their experience at college, reporting that staff genuinely cared about their success and encouraged students to achieve and do their best. The staff and student voice sessions had been introduced in response to feedback from the Chair's conversations with governors.

- Students were articulate about how they felt PAD sessions could be changed while staff had been happy to speak frankly to governors which they felt indicated an open and transparent culture. Accessibility issues had been raised by one member of staff and these were being worked on with that individual.

ACTION LOG

Meeting	Minute Reference	Summary of Action	Who	When
27/04/26	4.	Add Leadership Development programme schedule and outline training content to next Q&C Committee agenda.	Robert Dale	30/04/26
27/04/26	10.	Update the diagram of responsibilities and publish the revised policy.	Robert Dale	31/05/26
27/04/26	11.	Issue diary appointments for 2026/27 meetings.	Robert Dale	31/07/26