MEETING OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Chair – Shona MacDougall Tuesday, 10th March 2026 at 5pm via Microsoft Teams

Committee Members

Chris Alliston, Independent Board Member
Derek Lewis, Chair of the Board of Management
Lydia Rohmer, Principal & CEO
Shona MacDougall, Committee Chair & Senior Independent Board Member

Also, Present

Debbie Miller, Vice Principal Strategic Developments
Derek Bond, Derek Bond, Vice Principal – Resources & Enterprise (CFO)
Doug Rattray, Head of Infrastructure and Estates
Ellen Campbell, Board Secretary
Hannah Ritchie-Muir, Vice Principal Academic
Stuart Gibb, Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange

1.QUORUM & APOLOGIES

Apologies: Alex Macdonald, Independent Board Member

The meeting was quorate.

2. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Minutes from previous meetings 16th December 2025 and 18th February 2026

Approved (correction page 2 of 4 in the minute correct time zone)

4. Action Tracker

Outstanding items will be addressed at agenda items later in this meeting. In particular, the deferred review of outstanding Financial Policies and overdue Review of Financial Regulations to be reported to next meeting of this Committee, May 2026.

Reviewed and approved.

5. *Health & Safety quarterly report Doug Rattray (DR) for Jim Hutton

UHI NWH had prioritised implementation of training of the executive team and senior management through IOSH Safety of Executives and Directors and IOSH Leading Safely respectively. Executive level training sessions were complete. Leading Safely completion rates were currently being reviewed and Managing Safely was being completed by the appropriate managers.

The Committee asked for further details pertaining to an incident within the report. DR would investigate and return to this Committee with further information.

Noted

6. *Mid-year procurement report Julie Fraser (JF)

JF introduced her report covering the six-month period of 01 August2025 to 31 January 2026. The college reported a six-monthly Non-Pay Spend of £2,769,273 of which £2,201,169 had been deemed as an influential spend. Compliant spend in the six-month period was 70% year to date, an increase of 8% from 2024/25, reflecting the work undertaken in increasing the level of compliant supplier contracts this year. It was noted that NWH were operating significantly above the national benchmark of 50% for the College Sector.

The Annual Report for 2024/25, as previously presented to this Committee required to be revised following the identification of a discrepancy between the Contract Uptake Report and the Spend Analysis Report. Capital expenditure had not been fully accounted for and the purchasing figures presented today had been adjusted to reflect the discrepancy. Although the overall level of reported spend was estimated to be £1.3m higher, the proportion of compliant spend had not changed and remained at 62% as originally reported.

JF was seeking best working practice advice from stakeholders while remaining compliant. The procurement department were investigating how to incorporate the Community Wealth Bill into their area.

The Committee Chair was content for the procurement team to continue in this vein of reporting. It was noted that very good progress was being made. The revised report as well as the six-monthly report had been very helpful for viewing the levels of compliance. A more detail report was requested for the 2025/26 annual report 2025/26.
Noted

<u>7. *Research and knowledge exchange (R&KE) quarterly report – Stuart Gibb (SG)</u>
SG opened his report covering the period November 2025 to January 2026, explaining it endeavoured to provide consistent information to all committees, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and UHI.

There were two elements to the R&KE funding applications. One gave updates on proposals submitted last period, the other listing new proposal opportunities. SG paused to highlight two significant proposals that missed inclusion to this report.
The UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Council had considered 538 applications, of which thirty-two had been funded. UHI were awarded two funding grants based purely on research.

The Chair and Committee congratulated SG and his team on these two good news updates.

SG had a degree of optimism for achieving grant funding through applications currently being made. The sector was very competitive. The number of applications had increased with more institutions chasing the same pots of funding. Training was ongoing with new staff who would assist in this area. It was acknowledged that certain areas of research would decline.

SG expressed a degree of confidence in maintaining grant monies coming in as well as producing publications out. Every opportunity presented was scrutinised for viability. Eighty percent of proposals were met with failure.

The Committee asked how support could be given to encourage more entrepreneurialism and spin out? Was there any infrastructure within UHI that could be utilised to assist? Spin out v startup was considered for some models. There was not much support available from UHI. It was intimated that other universities had their own resources to support these models, however UHI NWH were light on resources and expertise in the field.

Correction request from Committee - Chage from 25p to £2.5m on page 4 of the R&KE report as identified as an administration error.
Noted

<u>Confidential item - Withheld</u>

<u>8. * Estates and Capital works plan – Doug Rattray (DR)</u>
DR presented his report, drawing attention to the table referencing the estates major works plan for 2025/26 which highlighted two projects in more detail. After conducting a feasibility study and entering into talks with HIE and CNES to assist with funding, it was presented that the boiler system in Stornoway would be replaced with a hybrid system (an LPG boiler supported by ground source heat pumps and roof top solar panels). The estimated total cost would be £700k, with NWH contributing £250k of the total spend. If approved the project would be expected to start in 2027.

The second highlighted project identified that the original £84k requested for the Biomass boiler replacement in Fort William would increase to £214k and would include further urgent works on campus. SFC funding of £130k granted during 2025 would be utilised towards this project.

The Committee questioned why the Stornoway boiler replacement had often been described as critical work, though continues to be deferred. DR explained that there were four boilers on the campus. Two were750 kw boilers which were near end of life, resulting in constant repairs. If one failed, the other took the workload and vice versa. The remaining two were 350kw boilers which would need to work at full capacity to keep the heat on.

The Chair and Committee considered the increase in requested spend on these two projects since their original approval at Finance and General Purposes Committee in September 2025. DR advised that NWH had made their case to CNES for funding and a meeting with HIE was scheduled for tomorrow.
Approved

9. Policies and regulations for review - Derek Bond (CFO)
The Chair asked for a timescale as to when to expect a review of the financial regulations and policies. The CFO reported that there had been limitations on both time and resources. Being two senior members of staff down at present, the Finance department had been working at full capacity with budgets being given the priority. Talks were taking place with the Principal to bring in extra high-level resources to assist with the current situation. This item would be reassessed at the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee in May 2026.
Noted

10. External audit updates – Derek Bond (CFO)
The NWH 2023/24 accounts had been signed and lodged with Audit Scotland. The NWH 2024/25 audit was on course to be completed by end April 2026; all questions had been answered bar one. The NWH 2025/26 audit plan had not been presented by Deloitte as yet. Deloitte's audit fees were being contested.
Noted

11. Confidential item – Withheld

12. * Restricted item - College sustainability reports – Lydia Rohmer (The Principal)
Liquidity funding had been received (bar£200k). This risk had been significantly addressed. There were still questions around how much head room would be afforded from the funding application.
The UTF was key to sustainability, there was a critical dependency on these monies coming to fruition. CTF would be the next option as a fallback plan, if no funding were to be received at all, there would be an emergency review of NWH, possibly involving a fresh approach to cost and cost base. The recovery plan was highly dependent on UTF coming through.

The Chair thanked the Principal for her concise, detailed, and professional report, noting that it had been very straight forward and easy for the Committee members to read.
Noted for information on the external factors.

13. Confidential item - Withheld

14. * ICT Strategy Doug Rattray (DR) for Kate Hannay (KH)
DR offered to take back any questions raised by the Committee to KH.

The strategy discussed the key aspects of the current operational context that impact upon the college's ICT and KM provision, setting out a number of strategic aims, objectives and outcomes that would enable the ICT and KM function to support the wider vision of the college.

The Chair commented that this was a well thought out paper highlighting the sheer scale of the infrastructure that would be required as significant with a lot sitting behind this in terms of strategy. There were a lot of risks involved, though acknowledge that the paper had recently also gone through

A&RM Committee. In terms of the college's digital strategy, this paper pointed to all aspects of the college's future. UHI had not shared their digital strategy yet.
Endorsed

15. Grants / donations for approval
None

16. A.O.B.
None

Meeting closed at 7.11pm