HUGHES HALL
CAMBRIDGE

COLLEGE COUNCIL
MINUTES
One hundred-and-forty-fourth meeting of College Council 24 February 2026
Council Room at 16.30pm

Present: Sir Laurie Bristow (Chair), Dr Bart de Nijs, Prof John Doorbar, Dr Joe Ellis (Acting Senior Tutor), Ms Zahra Grieve (MCR Vice President), Dr Aga Iwasiewicz-Wabnig, Prof Ajith Parlikad, Dr Guillermo Serrano-Nájera, Prof Nidhi Singal (Vice-President), Mr Laurie Smith (Bursar), Dr Alexis Willett, Mrs Kerry Wilson, Mr David Wolffe (MCR President).

Apologies: Prof Sonia Ilie, Dr Nigel Yandell.

On leave: Dr Tori McKee (Senior Tutor).

In Attendance: Mr Mark Harrison (Head of Domestic Operations) for items 44.9. – 44.11. inclusive, Sarah Langford (Head of Comms) and Pat Dunne (Assistant Bursar) for Open Business and Katherine Springthorpe (Secretary).

OPEN BUSINESS

Preliminary Business

44.1. Introduction

44.1.1. Welcome and apologies
The President welcomed Mark Harrison (Head of Domestic Operations) for items 44.9.-44.11. inclusive which were taken after item 44.2.4.

44.1.2. Declarations of interests for Open Business
There were none.

44.2. Minutes and Matters arising from Open Business of College Council, 27 January 2026

44.2.1. Minutes (44CC 01)
Council approved the Minutes of the previous meeting as an accurate record.

44.2.2. College Council action list: Open Business (44CC 02)
The Secretary noted progress on IT acceptable use policy and code of conduct.

44.2.3. Approval of starred items (***)
Council noted the starred items without discussion.

44.2.4. Matters arising not otherwise on the agenda
There were none.

Standing Items

44.3. President's Report

44.3.1 Strategic priorities (44CC 03)

Council received an update on strategic priorities and success measures as set out at the previous meeting. The President introduced the paper as a living document that would evolve over a six-month period and be iterated again significantly for the next academic year. He explained that the format was intended to provide focus and structure for Council and Governing Body on the things that mattered most.

The report was taken as read, with the following comments from members noted under the following priorities:

- **Impact:** One member felt these success measures should have been RAG'ed red due to significant uncertainty and the risk of losing momentum with the Impact Director's imminent departure. The feedback was noted, but it was also emphasised that work had only just commenced, which accounted for the more optimistic green and amber statuses.
- **Development:** The committee discussed upcoming milestones, including the Easter legacy campaign and Giving Day. A potential telephone campaign was considered as a future alternative to Giving Day; however, it was noted that whilst such campaigns offered deeper engagement, they often generated less funding and were more expensive to run.
- **Systems:** There was a need to develop a high-level AI policy to establish operating principles and data security to sit alongside the intended AI pilot. It was noted that the policy would apply only to College staff in the first instance (rather than students or Senior Members). Members emphasised that the need for staff training and personal development in the use of AI would be as critical as access to the tools themselves.

Council concluded that the report format was a positive start that helped focus discussion. In the short term it was agreed that clearer timelines would be included to help Council distinguish between completed items and those still in progress, and to give a better understanding of the overall anticipated timeframes for projects.

Iteration of the document towards an OKR-style framework was also noted as a longer-term aspiration. It was noted that this would allow objectives to be more clearly linked to success measures and would provide metrics and measures focused more on impact and efficiency outputs rather than completion.

The President concluded that the goal was to find a balance between having a clear plan and avoiding a situation where the problem was "greatly admired" but never solved. Council members were encouraged to view the document through this lens, with agreement that the document would continue to be iterated incrementally. Ongoing feedback from Council members was welcomed.

44.4 Officers' Report (44CC 04)

Council received and noted a combined Officers' Report providing a high-level summary of ongoing business as usual activity.

44.5 MCR Business

The MCR President and Vice President reported on the following matters:

- Students shared profound condolences regarding the passing of Anne Horwood (UG Admissions Administrator), noting her significant impact as the first point of contact for UG students. A card was being organised on behalf of the student body to recognise the significant contribution she had made to student life.
- It continued to be an exceptionally busy and successful term, with the President and Vice President attributing the vibrancy of events and activities in large part to the unique benefits of a combined UG and PG common room structure. A recent social highlight included a sellout Bop. Sincere gratitude was expressed to College staff for their ongoing support in facilitating events.
- Early bird ticket sales for the upcoming June event had sold out in just three minutes.
- The new room booking system was described as a game changer for both students and the Conference team, greatly improving administrative efficiency.

The President gave a vote of thanks to the MCR for their ongoing work.

Strategic and Operational items

44.6. Management Accounts to 31 January 2026 (44CC 05)

Council received and noted the Management Accounts to 31 January 2026. The Bursar reported that there had been little change since the recent Reforecast 2 (RF2).

44.7. Undergraduate College Tuition Fees 2027 – 2028 (44CC 06)

With two votes against and the remainder in favour, Council approved the proposed unregulated undergraduate tuition fee for the 2027-28 academic year.

44.8. Data Protection Officer's Report 2025 (44CC 07)

Council received and noted the 2025 Data Protection Officer's Accountability Assessment, noting the report identified all control areas as Low Risk and the majority of areas Fully Meet. Areas that Partially Meet the criteria had associated actions to improve their assurance rating, which the Compliance Team would incorporate into their action plan for the year.

Council approved the nomination of the Compliance Manager as College Data Protection Lead, with the Bursar overseeing data protection governance as Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO).

44.9. Student Accommodation Charges 2026-2027 (44CC 08)

Council received a paper proposing revised student rental rates for 2026-27.
The proposal was approved, with two votes against (the MCR representatives) and the remainder in favour.

The President emphasised that communication to students would be critical and that the College would work with the MCR to explain the rationale for the increase whilst recognising their clear opposition. It was also emphasised communication should include signposting to hardship funds.

44.10. List of Student Accommodation Fees and Charges for loss/damage/extra cleaning (44CC 09)

The Head of Domestic Operations re-introduced the paper concerning charges for loss, damage, and cleaning of student rooms. He emphasised that the document had been revised following earlier feedback to emphasise the fines imposed were necessary cost recovery and deterrent mechanisms.

Student feedback focused around:

- ongoing concerns that the language remained overly rigid and punitive.
- rapid turnover of rooms often leaving students with inadequate time or facilities to dispose of items properly. A lack of adequate disposal and recycling facilities on site had previously led to some students being unreasonably charged.
- the need to recognise these rooms as the students' homes, with excessive charging for minor issues like blue-tack marks leaving a "bad taste in the mouth".

The Bursar underlined that fair wear and tear would always be expected and that charges set out would only be applied in exceptional cases where there was clear and significant damage; minor issues would not warrant a fine. This was why simple flat rates had been adopted rather than banding or more nuanced 'up to £x' language,

The £150 charge for smoking was discussed. Student members were reassured to learn that a fine would only be levied when smoking had been proven.

To reduce the need for fines, Council discussed the possibility of naming an alternative to blue tack which would allow students to personalise their rooms whilst limiting the possibility of significant damage. There was also a commitment to increase rubbish disposal and recycling points on site at the end of term.

The President summarised that the document be considered approved, subject to:
- the tone of the document being reviewed,
- a "good faith" clause added to clarify that fair wear and tear was expected and that charges would be levied only in the event of significant damage.
- MCR consultation on these revisions.

44.11. Student Accommodation Allocation Policy (44CC 10)

Council received a paper proposing a significant shift in how the College allocated its student accommodation. The primary change was a proposal to cease prioritising continuing postgraduate students (PhDs) taking degrees of two or more years, in order to prioritise instead accommodation for all students in their first year, including one-year master's students.

The Acting Senior Tutor reported that the accommodation waitlist had reached 215 students the previous summer —the highest on record. Anecdotal evidence suggested one-year master's students were often forced into a sub-standard private rental market without having viewed the accommodation before coming to Cambridge. The proposed approach would ensure all new students had a "landing strip" in their first year, with the rationale being that continuing PhD students, having spent at least a year in Cambridge, would be far better equipped to navigate the local private rental market than incoming Master's students arriving from abroad or elsewhere in the UK. The policy also formalised the existing practice of holding back specific rooms for students with access needs and undergraduates returning from intermission.

To mitigate the impact to current students, it was proposed that the change in policy would come into effect from 2027–28, providing a one-year notice period for current PhD students.

Student representatives expressed strong support for the change, noting that master's students often faced harrowing situations in the private rental market. They agreed that PhD students generally had a better grounding after their first year and often chose to move out of College in subsequent years of their own volition.

Questions were raised about the first-year PhD upgrade viva being a high-pressure point which would coincide with the need for house hunting, with a request that the College provide

additional support mechanisms for these students. The Senior Tutor confirmed that the College lacked the necessary expertise to provide specific advice and recommendations but would signpost students to charities and services best placed to help them navigate the rental market.

The new allocation policy was approved, with a commitment to review its impact following one year of operation, as well as once additional rooms from the Pavilion Project became available.

Minutes

44.12 ***Minutes of committees

44.12.1. ***Unconfirmed Bridge Committee Minutes 5 February 2026 (44CC 11).

Council received and noted the minutes without discussion.

44.13. Any other Open Business

The Vice President reminded everyone that the research competition was currently open, encouraging everyone to share with their networks. An open evening would take place on Thursday 26 February.

Meetings 2026: 24 March 2026, 28 April 2026, 02 June 2026, 23 June 2026.

End of Open Business KS.