UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER

COUNCIL

Meeting was held on Wednesday 6 May 2026 at 2.00pm in the Council Room, First Floor, Fielding Johnson Building

Minutes

Attendees: Neil Goulden, Nishan Canagarajah, Henrietta O'Connor, Kerry Law, Sophie Dale-Black, Richard Tapp, Hilary Coyle, Kevin Nagle, Alison Snape, Cathy Ellis, Liz Blyth, Stewart Fishwick, Matt Schofield, Lauren Bartlett, Mary Curnock-Cook, James Fitchett**,** Glynis Wright, Martin Cullen, Edith Malemba, George Acquah, and Owen Woodley

Apologies: Rishi Madlani and Jack Chambers

In attendance: Geoff Green, Paul Gowdridge, Sally Priddle, Mitesh Vaghela (observing member of the governance team), Angie Pears (Item 6), Emma Stevens (Items 10-12) and Kirsty Woodward (Item 13)

PART 1- PROCEDURAL MATTERS

INTRODUCTORY BUSINESS

1. Welcome and Declarations of interest

1.1 Council welcomed Owen Woodley, new Lay member of Council and Chair of Audit and Assurance Committee, and thanked interim Chair Mary Curnock-Cook, and noted the handover will happen at the Summer Term meeting.

1.2 Stewart Fishwick and Edith Malemba declared a conflict under item 12 as the Head of School and a Postgraduate Researcher student respectively in the School of Geology, Geography and Environment. No actions were required to manage this conflict.

2. Minutes

2.1 Council considered the minutes of the Meeting held on 3 March 2026.

2.2 Council noted the updates on all actions and that matters were progressing.

Resolved:

2.3 Council **APPROVED** the minutes of the Meeting held on 3 March 2026.

3. Chair's Business

3.1 Council noted the ongoing review of the CUC Code of Practice; the final draft was out for consultation and would be submitted for approval at the summer plenary.

3.2 Council noted a Lay member recruitment would be launched in June 2026, to recruit for the vacancy arising from Jack Chambers not undertaking a second term.

3.3 Council noted that the Office for Students had responded to the two previously reported events- withdrawal of Modern Languages and Film Studies and the potential Apollo campus- and following receipt of additional information had confirmed they were satisfied and had no additional questions.

3.4 Council noted that the Chair had approved the submission of a reportable event to the Office for Students because "A masters programme was advertised as being accredited by a professional body for a period of 9 months when the University no longer held that accreditation." All affected students had been contacted, a bespoke complaints and compensation scheme had been opened, and a task and finish group had been established to look how the incident arose, review accreditation oversight, escalation and control of

public-facing information and identify additional controls required to prevent recurrence. The Chair of Council had asked to receive a report from the task and finish group with their findings and proposed actions.

4. President and Vice-Chancellor's Business

4.1 Council received an update on developments in the Higher Education Sector and at Leicester from the President and Vice-Chancellor. The President and Vice-Chancellor had undertaken visits to the USA and Canada to launch the fundraising campaign with alumni, meet with research partners, was hosted by the British Embassies, received positive feedback on the University's brand and work. Canada is a strong recruitment market for Leicester; additional dedicated resources had been appointed in-country to support recruitment to Leicester.

4.2 Council noted that the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor had been part of a university delegation to Ghana and Nigeria, the visits had demonstrated the strong alumni network and opportunities to mentor graduates and support recruitment.

4.3 Council noted the outcome of the University of Sussex versus Office for Students case; that the University had undertaken an analysis of the outcomes and were looking to further strengthen policy oversight, clarity of delegations and decision-making processes.

4.4 Council noted an update on UCEA pay negotiations, at present it was not clear whether there would be industrial action in response to the offer, but it was clear that the sector was struggling financially. Post 92 institutions were struggling with the teacher pension scheme contributions, which was leading to individual institutions looking at their own pensions' negotiations.

4.5 Council noted an update on the current recruitment position.

4.6 The President and Vice-Chancellor was continuing his visits to all Schools and Professional Services divisions.

4.7 The University had a series of celebrations arranged for Sir David Attenborough's 100th Birthday.

4.8 Council noted that UCU had industrial action scheduled for 5, 11 and 18 May because of the University being unable to rule out compulsory redundancies; there were arrangements in place to ensure minimal impact on teaching activity. There was no marking and assessment boycott as part of the industrial action.

4.9 The University was continuing to have positive engagement with the City Council, but the University was experiencing negative implications of not being part of the devolved regional combined authority. The University had raised concerns about access to funding; the City Council agreed change was required.

4.10 Council discussed the impact of the conflicts in the Middle East on University operations, it was noted that there were some inflation implications, especially for the estate. There was limited impact on student recruitment at present, although some students were delaying their start dates due to travel challenges.

4.11 Council discussed the University Defense Alliance and the opportunity for funding. The work would align with Space Park and the University's existing research with the arms alliance; however, the University was aware of the Students Union referendum to demilitarize campus. The University would need to express interest in joining the alliance and then submit specific funding bids, it could provide an opportunity to grow computing facilities, enhance AI infrastructure and meet the Government's skills agenda. These initiatives would have to be carefully considered alongside the Students Union's position.

REPORTED BUSINESS

5. Finance and Infrastructure Committee

5.1 Council considered an update from the Finance and Infrastructure Committee. The Committee had considered the increase in overdue student debt (£4.6m) and received assurance that new staff were appointed to improve the management of debt collection. Staff FTE was down year on year by 112

(excluding externally funded roles) and pay had improved by £1.3m with continued control via the Vacancy Review Group (VRG). It was reported that increased international agent commission costs were confirmed as a strategic choice to protect recruitment. Further scrutiny was requested on agent commission timing, bad-debt recovery and reporting methodology in the Financial Performance Improvement Plan.

5.2 Council noted that the Committee had considered and approved the refreshed Estates Masterplan, the plan focused on affordability and deliverability, increased teaching capacity, and downsizing and better utilisation of the estate.

5.3 Council noted that the Committee had considered and approved a proposal for an institution-wide investment in Microsoft 365 Copilot for all staff and students, positioning the University as a frontier institution in responsible AI adoption. The Committee noted concerns regarding the need for further assurance on procurement compliance, the clarity of the student value proposition and evidence of student benefit, and the importance of careful communications, particularly regarding workload and workforce perceptions. The implementation would require proactive engagement with the Students' Union and campus Trade Unions.

5.4 Council received a presentation setting out the strategic case for investment in Microsoft 365 Copilot as a core component of the University's AI strategy. This built on substantial institutional momentum across strategy development, policy frameworks, piloting and capability-building, with internal pilots demonstrating potential productivity gains and rapid growth in adoption across staff and students. The proposal aligned with an ambition to position the University as a sector-leading "Frontier University" in AI. The evolution of the University's AI approach was reported, including development of an AI Charter (currently under consultation) and integration of AI as a strategic theme in the forthcoming Strategy Refresh. It highlighted established policies governing AI use in teaching and research, alongside extensive experimentation across academic areas embedding AI in curricula, research and innovation. This was supported by a safe and secure Microsoft-based digital architecture and growing organisational capability, including specialist roles, communities of practice, and training provision.

5.5 Council noted that M365 Copilot was proposed as a core orchestration platform, offering integration with existing systems, strong security and compliance, and the potential to support education, research and operational efficiency. A managed, use case-led implementation approach was proposed, with benefits tracking and staff-first deployment. Key risks included cultural resistance, delivery complexity and financial sustainability, product and technical risks, with mitigations focused on governance, engagement and alignment with institutional strategy.

5.6 During the discussion, the following points were made:

5.6.1 It was an exciting opportunity for the University, but Council needed assurance there was sufficient senior capacity to lead, enable and embed the transformation. Benefit tracking needed to be clear and constant as things would move at pace. It was reported that the Registrar and Secretary and Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of College for Science and Engineering were the Executive Board sponsors for the project, and the Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of College for Science and Engineering was leading the Artificial Intelligence strand of the strategy refresh. The Chief Information Officer appointment would be key to driving activity.

5.6.2 The Net Zero sustainability risks were not included in the presentation, it needed to be clear how these aims could be realized if the University was embedding AI at this level. It was reported that Microsoft had sustainability commitments but more work on this was planned and would be communicated. It was noted that other Higher Education Institutions had committed to greener AI and turned their investment into a positive environmental message.

5.6.3 Implement needed to be supported by clear policies and expectations on when AI could be used and when it could not be. It was reported that this work would be part of the implementation project to ensure staff and students had clarity.

5.6.4 A point was raised about inconsistent engagement and confidence with AI across the University, particularly amongst academics. Colleagues needed capacity to be able to be upskilled and engage with new platforms.

5.6.5 It was a great initiative to be a Frontier University and would be a positive marketing tool for prospective students and parents. The messaging needed to be clear that the project made AI more equitable and used to support critical thinking rather substitute it.

5.6.6 It was requested that at the Council Away Day, the strategy refresh, AI and efficiencies are brought together so Council could understand the holistic approach to developing and embedding new initiatives.

6. People, EDI and Wellbeing Committee/EDI Annual Report

6.1 Council received an update from the People EDI and Wellbeing Committee. It was reported that staff workloads and capacity remained a risk the University was actively managing; it needed to be kept under continuous review, particularly in light of new initiatives, staffing structures and ways of working.

6.2 Council received a presentation on the University's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Report 2026, outlining progress over the past 12 months, trends in diversity across staff and students, and priority actions for the coming year. It was reported that there was continued increases in diversity across multiple characteristics based on five-year staff and student data, there had been progress across all key EDI strands, including expanded reporting on disability, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Further organisational embedding of EDI had been achieved, including development of infrastructure and resources and strengthened partnership working. Council noted that the University remained sector-leading in EDI benchmarking, being one of a small number of institutions holding combined Silver Athena Swan, Race Equality Charter and Disability Confident Leader (Level 3) status.

6.3 Council noted that the priorities for the next 12 months included a continued focus on building organisational capability in EDI, preparation for the Race Equality Charter Silver submission (July 2027), roll-out of a new mandatory combined training module (EDI and Unconscious Bias), and ongoing work to respond to the Equality and Human Rights Commission Codes of Practice and the implications of recent Supreme Court rulings for service provision and access.

6.4 Council thanked the EDI team for their work over the last 12 months and welcomed the progress achieved. It was suggested that there were opportunities to improve alignment and references to the Strategic Risk Register in future reporting.

Resolved:

6.5 Council **APPROVED** the Annual report on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

6.6 Council **APPROVED** the Annual report on Sexual Violence and Harassment.

6.7 Council **APPROVED** the Suicide Safer Framework.

7. Alumni Association Annual Report

7.1 Council noted the Annual Alumni Association Report and welcomed the improvements in the levels of international engagement, particularly the increased senior leadership presence. The increased engagement provided more opportunities for current and prospective students, as well as advancing institutional initiatives. It was reported that the University did not currently have an Indian chapter but one was being established, supported by the central alumni team.

8. Audit and Assurance Committee

8.1 Council received an update from the Audit and Assurance Committee. It was reported that the Committee would receive a report at a near future meeting on the University's approach to risk management of major projects, this would be key to receiving assurance on the approach to the Co-pilot project and potential

international campuses. The Committee had received a deep dive into the University's Estates risk and noted that the refreshed Estates Masterplan was centered on risk reduction and enabling strategic growth.

8.2 Council considered, on the recommendation of Audit and Assurance Committee, the appointment of PWC as internal audit service providers to the University. It was reported that the recommendation was made following the conclusion of a compliant tender process through the Crown Commercial Services Framework for Audit and Assurance Services Two (RM6310) and a panel evaluation exercise. Subject to Council's approval, the number of audit days in the annual plan, and the level of risk faced, would be considered by the Audit and Assurance Committee when the annual plan was proposed in June 2026.

Resolved:

8.3 Council **APPROVED** the appointment of PWC as the University's internal audit service provider on the contract term of four years initially with a three-year possible extension in line with the existing contract.

STRATEGIC REVIEW

9. Financial Update [RESERVED]

9.1 Council considered the Period 7 Financial Performance Report, which set out the forecast financial position for 2025/26 as at Period 7 (February 2026). The report indicated a forecast deficit of £2.7m (after property sales), which was favourable to budget, alongside an underlying surplus position. Operating performance had been supported by stronger than expected tuition fee income, partially offset by higher pay and non-pay cost pressures, including commission costs, inflationary pressures, and provisions for student compensation. Income contingency of £4.2m and non-pay contingency of £1.0m remained in place, and if fully released could improve the overall position further.

9.2 Council noted the continued pressure on cash performance, with operating cash forecast at £31.1m (7.6% of income), representing an adverse variance to budget but an improvement on the prior year. Year-end cash was forecast at £20.2m (4.9% of income), also below budget, reflecting working capital assumptions, reduced creditor deferrals compared to the prior year, and timing of property disposals. Whilst the strategic KPI of 15% operating cash by 2030 was now expected to be missed, covenant compliance was forecast to be maintained across all measures, with minimum headroom of £9.8m, and no revolving credit facility utilisation currently forecast at year end.

9.3 Council noted that financial risk remained assessed as very high, primarily driven by the level of operating cash and liquidity, albeit within a framework of active management and mitigation. Actions included delivery of the Financial Performance Improvement Plan, the Strategic Review and associated cost measures, and continued close monitoring of working capital and covenant sensitivity. There were no anticipated OfS reportable events, and the University was expected to remain compliant with liquidity and going concern expectations, although the position required ongoing scrutiny given sensitivity to underlying assumptions.

9.4 Council welcomed the report and emphasised the importance of maintaining financial sustainability and continued investment in strategic priorities.

10. Strategic Review [RESERVED]

10.1 Council considered a report on the implementation of the Strategic Review which provided an update on progress in delivering the University's Strategic Review to support long-term financial sustainability. The programme aimed to achieve operating cash of 15% of income and reduce staff costs to 53.2% by 2030, underpinned by a target of £14m pay savings. Current forecasts indicated total savings of £12.1m would be achieved by 2029/30 which was within the 30% contingency, with delivery supported by voluntary severance schemes and organisational restructuring across academic and Professional Services areas.

10.2 Council noted that the consultation and implementation planning activity were still in progress for College Operations and Technical and Research Infrastructure Services, with revised savings reflecting the changes in scope, staffing models and consultation feedback. The programme continued to carry organisational and financial risk, including impacts on workforce stability, operational continuity and delivery timelines, alongside sensitivities in achieving projected savings. Mitigating actions included phased implementation, continued engagement with staff, and the development of action plans to improve efficiency and income generation. Council noted that the overall trajectory remained positive, with continued monitoring required to ensure delivery of financial targets and compliance with regulatory expectations on financial sustainability and student protection.

10.3 Council agreed that the messaging around the Strategic Review needed to be sensitive to staff morale and that mitigating the need for compulsory redundancies still represented a reduction in staff.

10.4 Council discussed the challenges around calculating the research contributions of different areas and how staff's interdisciplinary research was valued. The University had clear messaging that research remained important and was essential to institutional success.

10.5 Council noted that Professional Services Phase 2 identified five operational areas that would be reviewed throughout Summer 2026 with the changes proposed brought to Council in Autumn 2026.

10.6 Council discussed the importance of managing capacity and implementing new ways of working to ensure the success of the changes and continued improvement of institutional operations.

11. (Previously item 12) Strategic Review Proposals for College of Science and Engineering [RESERVED]

11.1 Council considered the Strategic Review Proposal for the College of Science and Engineering which set out proposals to restructure the College. Council was asked to approve the disestablishment of the Schools of Chemistry and Geography, Geology and the Environment and the creation of a new School of Chemical, Earth and Environmental Sciences (CEES), intended to deliver a more financially sustainable and academically coherent structure aligned to research strengths, student demand and strategic priorities.

11.2 Council noted that the proposals also included the withdrawal of BA programmes in Human Geography and Geography, with student recruitment ceasing from 2026/27 and teaching concluding following teach-out by 2028/29, after which the academic discipline of Human Geography would close. The changes were driven by sustained low demand and financial unsustainability, with mitigations in place to protect student outcomes, research supervision and accreditation. The revised proposals were expected to deliver recurring pay savings of c.£1.6m per annum and improved financial contribution over time, while managing risks to staff, students and regulatory compliance, including notification to the Office for Students.

11.3 During the discussion the following points were made:

11.3.1 Council discussed the proposal including the equality implications of the proposals.

11.3.2 The Head of School of Geography, Geology and the Environment reported that they were comfortable with the teach out arrangements whilst noting the potential longer term accreditation issue. The need for change to ensure financial sustainability was understood but concerns remained about how research had been quantified and valued, in particular interdisciplinary research.

11.3.3 The University needed to establish an approach to continuously review its portfolio and offering, so that it was not in a cycle of substantial reviews.

11.3.4 The alignment of the new School with the industrial strategy was welcomed.

11.3.5 Ensuring staff felt part of the new School would be key to the transition and success of the new unit.

Secretary's note: Edith Malemba and Stewart Fishwick both abstained from the Council decision.

Resolved:

11.4 Council **APPROVED** the disestablishment of the School of Geography, Geology and the Environment.

11.5 Council **APPROVED** the disestablishment of the School of Chemistry.

11.6 Council **APPROVED** the creation of the School of Chemical, Earth and Environmental Sciences and the resulting College structure.

11.7 Council **APPROVED** the closure of the academic discipline of Human Geography and noted that, following consideration by Council, the closure of the academic discipline of Human Geography would constitute a reportable event to the Office for Students.

11.8 Council noted that based on the evidence and Voluntary Severance Scheme applications it was anticipated that compulsory redundancies had been mitigated and **APPROVED** that if compulsory redundancies became necessary to achieve the agreed savings and where no reasonable alternative was available, an Urgency Committee would be constituted in accordance with Council's Standing Orders.

12. (Previously item 11) VSS [RESERVED]

12.1 Council received an update on the Voluntary Severance Scheme (VSS), covering applications, approved exits, and associated costs and savings across both the University-wide scheme and areas subject to Strategic Review. As at April 2026, a substantial volume of applications had been received, with a proportion approved where they aligned to workforce planning objectives and delivered cost savings without requiring replacement posts. The scheme formed part of a phased approach to organisational change during 2025/26, supporting financial sustainability and workforce restructuring while mitigating the need for compulsory redundancies.

12.2 Council noted that the scheme continued to operate within an established framework, including equality analysis, risk management, and oversight through moderation panels and recruitment controls to protect savings and maintain operational capacity. It was reported that key risks included potential erosion of savings through backfilling and loss of critical skills, mitigated through strengthened vacancy scrutiny and managerial assessment of service impact. Equality analysis highlighted some differential outcomes across staff groups, though findings were constrained by small sample sizes and would be monitored further.

12.3 Council considered a proposal to open a further VSS in 2026/27 to support ongoing strategic review activity, workforce planning, and delivery of financial and organisational objectives, while managing associated risks through robust governance and engagement processes.

Resolved:

12.4 Council **APPROVED** the opening of a Voluntary Severance Scheme(s) as required during the Academic year 2026/2027.

13. Estates Masterplan [RESERVED]

13.1 Council considered a report on the refreshed Estate Masterplan for the City Campus and wider estate, setting out a revised, affordability-aligned programme to modernise the University's estate, support sustainable academic growth, and reduce strategic infrastructure risk over the period to 2034, with completion of the full risk reduction pathway to 2040. The refresh retained the overall strategic vision and principles established in earlier versions but reflected current financial constraints, delivery challenges, and the complexities of operating across a live, heritage campus environment. It also incorporated a stronger focus on deliverability, student experience, and long-term resilience.

13.2 Council noted that the plan consolidated previous programmes into three core City Campus programmes—Enabling, Charles Wilson, and Physics and Bennett—designed to deliver essential decants, refurbishments, demolitions, and significant public realm improvements, including a more pedestrian-focused campus and a new central transport hub. These interventions were intended to improve utilisation of space, enhance teaching and learning environments, and address a significant backlog maintenance position and compliance risk. The refreshed plan established a clearer pathway to reduce the current very high estate risk rating to a normalised level by 2040, albeit with a five-year extension to the original timeline.

13.3 The capital investment requirement for the City Campus to 2034 had been reduced to approximately £200m, reflecting tighter financial parameters, while secondary programmes for space optimisation, long-term maintenance and net zero carbon complement the core works. Parallel proposals for the Oadby, Knighton and residential estates continued to focus on disposals, consolidation and selective reinvestment, with identified projects to proceed irrespective of wider decisions. These combined residential and disposal initiatives were valued at approximately £27.25m and aimed to reduce operating liabilities while generating capital receipts.

13.4 Council noted that the masterplan aligned with institutional strategic aims, including teaching excellence, financial sustainability, and net zero carbon by 2040, and incorporated value for money, compliance, and accessibility considerations throughout. Subject to the established governance framework, individual projects would return through standard approval routes.

13.5 Council welcomed the plan and the clear alignment with the Strategic Risks. The plan provided a path to green approach to risk reduction.

13.6 Council discussed the implications of the masterplan on the University's sporting provisions and losing internal facilities would add financial costs for groups hiring external facilities. It was noted that Sports England would be engaged with on changes to facilities. Proposals would be based on demand data, utilisation of student facilities, and all year-round provision, as well as collating student feedback. The estates team proposed to work with students and staff to understand what was working and what was not.

13.7 Council noted that supporting the plan did not commit the University to all activities and spend, it would be continuously reviewed in light of the 5-year plan and risk profile, and individual projects within the plan would come forward for future governance consideration as required.

Resolved:

13.8 Council **APPROVED** the approach outlined in the refreshed masterplan for the City Campus.

13.9 Council **APPROVED** the outlined disposal programme residential projects in principle. This was with an understanding that individual programmes and projects would be brought forward and follow their own approval pathway in accordance with governance thresholds and procedures.

13.10 Council **APPROVED** the redevelopment of the former Informatics Building at a cost of £7.6m with an expected completion time scale of Q1 2028.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

14. Apollo Partnership

14.1 Council received an update on progress to establish a University of Leicester campus at Apollo Knowledge City, Chittoor, in partnership with Apollo Knowledge, following earlier approval to proceed with developing a University Grants Commission (UGC) application. A formal letter of support had been received from Apollo confirming its commitment to the Chittoor project and to a subsequent campus in Hyderabad. Initial engagement with the Office for Students (OfS) had been completed, with no further queries at present and preparatory work for the UGC application was underway with support from PwC, alongside ongoing

engagement with the British Council to inform the application process.

14.2 Council noted that market research was being commissioned, jointly funded with Apollo, to inform programme selection, demand, and the overall business case, with initial plans indicating a small portfolio of postgraduate health-related programmes and undergraduate provision from 2027/28. Financial modelling suggested that a mix of undergraduate and postgraduate provision would be necessary to achieve long-term viability, with further work required to finalise the operating model, financial arrangements, and responsibilities between partners. While progress was described as positive, several dependencies remained, including regulatory approval, market analysis outcomes, and agreement on key operational elements.

14.4 Council noted the update with the understanding that future developments would be returned to Council and relevant Sub-Committees for appropriate scrutiny ahead of proposals being taken forwards.

15. Use of the Seal*

15.1 Council noted the use of University's Seal since last meeting.

16. Dates and times of future meetings*

16.1 Council noted the dates and times of future meetings.

17. Any Other Business

17.1 Council thanked the Executive, Staff and the Students Union for their continued work and engagement with the Strategic Review.

6 May 2026