Minutes of the STFC Council meeting – 16 July 2026

Virtual

Attendees

Council members:
Michele Dougherty (Chair)
Adrian Belton
Stan Bentvelsen
David Charlton
JT Janssen
Jana Kolar
Jayne Lawrence
Angeli Moeller
Andrew Pontzen
Carsten Welsch

Council Observers:
Keith Grainge, Chair of Science Board (PPAN)
Howard Stone, Chair of Science Board (F&L)
STFC Secretariat

Other attendees:
Item 3-4 – Roger Eccleston, Exec Director NL & Head of RAL
Item 3-4 – Chris Wrench, STFC Transformation Finance Lead
Item 3-4 – Keith Zimmerman, COO
Item 3 – Grahame Blair, Exec Director Programmes
Item 5 – Ian Chapman, UKRI CEO

Apologies:
Andy Schofield (SIM)
Julia Sutcliffe, CSA DBT
Hitesh Thakrar

Science and Technology Facilities Council

1 Welcome and opening remarks

1.1 Michele Dougherty welcomed everyone to the meeting. No conflicts were noted.

2 Minutes

2.1 Council approved the minutes of the January and March 2026 Council meetings for publication. It was agreed that the minutes for May and June would be updated to take account of members' comments and be approved for publication via written procedure.

2.2 Council raised the amendment made to the December 2025 Council minutes. A new procedure for approving minutes was proposed, as part of continuous improvement efforts.

2.3 Council supported the proposal and requested that any future changes to published minutes include a statement explaining the changes to ensure clarity.

3 STFC Prioritisation Update

3.1 Council were provided with an update on the outcomes from the prioritisation process, following the announcement made the previous week.

3.1.1 STFC cost base had increased substantially since 2021, with key drivers including increased costs of major projects, rising staff costs, inflationary pressures and rising international subscriptions. Substantial cost savings were necessary for STFC to become financially sustainable by 2029/30.

3.1.2 UKRI had approved STFC's plan and was providing an additional £135 million over three years to ease the transition until STFC could reach a sustainable footing.

3.1.3 PPAN budget would decrease by 2.7% over four years. This included an increase in funding to maintain PPAN post-docs and a 10% reduction in PPAN projects. Where possible, Science Board PPAN recommendations for the 10% scenario had been followed, but some changes were required for strategic reasons.

3.1.4 Multi-disciplinary Facilities (MDF) budgets would reduce by 15%, and the rest of national labs would see a 58% reduction in core funding, with several mission-focused departments challenged to become cost neutral. Where possible Science Board F&L recommendations had been followed, but the level of savings required meant difficult choices had to be made.

3.2 The proposals had Ministerial and UKRI Board approval and now STFC had to move towards implementation, including development of a target operating model. An advisory board for STFC's transformation programme was being set up.

3.3 There were two gateway points: September 2027 to check whether sufficient progress was being made on delivery of the savings and in April 2028 to check if revenue generation growth was on target. The fallback was closure of a major facility.

3.4 Council members expressed concern about the foreign exchange rate risk and the rising cost of international subscriptions and projects. These were impacting national facilities and threatened to undermine sovereign scientific capabilities.

3.5 Council advised that continued communications both with staff and communities impacted would be essential.

4 Science Board Facilities & Labs Update

4.1 Howard Stone provided an update from the Science Board F&L meeting on 23rd and 24th June.

4.2 Science Board F&L strongly opposed reductions or loss of unique national capabilities, particularly those rated as 'red'.

4.3 Science Board F&L warned about irrevocable losses, as well as reducing the ability to support the government's industrial strategy and secure the additional external revenue. Careful impact assessments were urged before proceeding.

4.4 Science Board F&L remained concerned about the level of STFC's engagement with the facility user communities.

4.5 Science Board F&L appreciated the engagement from STFC throughout the prioritisation exercise, in what had been some challenging discussions.

4.6 The paper to the June Council meeting had been reissued and split into two papers to clearly define the process and inputs and separately the recommendations from Science Board F&L.

4.7 The need for a clear framework for engaging academic partners and industrial users in supporting STFC facilities was discussed.

4.8 Council noted some of the constraints that STFC was operating under.

4.9 Council discussed the division between Science Board F&L and Science Board PPAN, and it was agreed that the two boards should work more closely moving forward, with more joint meetings and potentially merging into a single, unified Science Board.

5 Q&A with the UKRI CEO

5.1 Ian Chapman, UKRI CEO joined the meeting and thanked everyone for their hard work and efforts in making some really difficult decisions. UKRI was liberating £135m from its budget to ease STFC's transformation

5.2 Council asked a number of questions, with views from the CEO including:

5.2.1 STFC and UKRI more widely needed to be better at leveraging our considerable assets, so that revenue generated could be reinvested back into research.

5.2.2 A new UKRI Chief Development Officer role had been set up, responsible for maximising IP, attracting investment, leveraging real estate, and increasing business development against fixed assets, with the aim of supporting all UKRI councils.

5.2.3 In balancing national and international investments, UKRI needed to invest in the highest impact and the best outcomes for the sector and for the country.

5.2.4 In balancing fundamental and curiosity driven research, approximately half of UKRI's budget went into unrestricted and applicant led schemes; around a quarter into the industrial strategy priorities and around a quarter into helping companies to start and scale.

5.2.5 The December 2025 Council minutes had been amended as per standard UKRI practice, as they contained incorrect information.

5.2.6 Once the principal investigators and partners for the PPAN projects had been informed, STFC planned to publish further information on the implications of the prioritisation on the PPAN portfolio.

5.2.7 The STFC Council's primary function was to advise on scientific priorities and national impact, rather than duplicating the corporate governance role of the UKRI board.

5.2.8 Council members were encouraged to contribute their expertise to support the Executive, which could include ad personam coaching.

6 Any Other Business

6.1 It was agreed that a session on revenue generation would be organised for the next Council meeting in September.