

Audit Committee

Wed 14 February 2024, 17:00 - 18:30

MS Teams



Attendees

Present: Kath Causey (Independent Governor and Chair), Susan Snape (Independent Governor), Hayley Mercer (Independent Governor), Caroline Elwood (Independent Governor), Jo Toner (Co-Opted Governor), Sarah Smith (Co-Opted Governor)

In attendance: Joanne Platt (Director of Governance), Steve Scott (Finance Director), Louise Brown (VP Corporate Services), Dave Harrison (VP Data and Funding), Jane Butterfield (TIAA)

The Director of Governance confirmed that the meeting was quorate.

Meeting minutes

1. CONSULTATION WITH AUDITORS

AC-24-02-01

The Committee had a private discussion with the internal auditors. There were no issues of concern to draw to the attention of the Governing Board.

Louise Brown, Steven Scott and Dave Harrison joined the meeting at 5.10pm

2. Apologies for absence

AC-24-02-02

Apologies for absence had been received from Scott Gillon and Rory McCall (Wylie & Bisset).

3. Declarations of Interests

AC-24-02-03

There were no declarations of interests.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising

AC-24-02-04

The Committee reviewed the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2023 and agreed that they are an accurate record of the meeting. It was noted that there was a typing error in the Resolution for Minute number AC-23-11- 06 in that it should say approval of the Internal Audit Plan for 2023-24 and not 2022-23.

There were no actions.

Resolved: Subject to the correction noted above, the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2023 for signature by the Chair.

Platt, Joanne
10/06/2024 10:10:21



This file is sealed with a digital signature.
The seal is a guarantee for the authenticity
of the document.

Document ID:
245D3F2EDC0E428388492B62D47BE280

5. Internal Audit Reports

5.1. Health and Safety

AC-24-02-05

The Committee considered the Internal Audit report in relation to Health and Safety, noting that the auditors had given a Substantial Assurance rating and had confirmed that the areas of the control environment tested during the audit are designed and operating effectively with no significant weaknesses.

It was noted that there was one 'routine', non urgent recommendation arising from the Audit work carried out. This related to the template used to document the outcome of inspections and the Internal Auditor confirmed that this had already been actioned by the College.

The report noted that an appropriate training programme is in place for new starters and current employees, that an Estates and Sustainability Dashboard reports on Health and Safety (including accidents and near misses), Statutory Compliance and Sustainability, and the presence of asbestos in one building, with associated risks, is being managed considering medium to long-term plans for asset disposal and migration to new premises. A cost-benefit analysis led to the decision to effectively manage and review high-risk areas as opposed to removing this.

Good practice identified included adequate policies and procedures being in place, covering all aspects of health and safety across the College premises, and the Head of Estates being supported by a commissioned third-party contractor for relevant health and safety related tasks.

The recommendation related to the template used to document inspections in the samples reviewed by the auditors, which did not provide a section for comments associated with any recommendations made. Although the College documents this elsewhere as part of its follow up meeting notes, the template has nevertheless been updated to include a section for comments relating to recommendations.

The Committee noted the report.

5.2. Progress against the Internal Audit Plan - verbal update

AC-24-02-06

Jane Butterfield advised the Committee that all audits planned for 2023-24 are on track. The Chair reminded Jane that the Internal Audit Plan for 2024-25 should be reported to the May meeting of the Committee so that it can be approved by the Governing Board in July, ready for the start of the new academic year.

The Committee noted the update.

6. Audit Implementation Tracker

AC-24-02-07

The Committee noted that there was nothing to report on the Audit Tracker, as all previous audit recommendations had been completed and there haven't been any new recommendations to add to the Tracker since.

The Committee noted the report.

Platt, Joanne
10/06/2024 10:10:21



This file is sealed with a digital signature.
The seal is a guarantee for the authenticity
of the document.

Document ID:
245D3F2EDC0E428388492B62D47BE280

The Committee reviewed the Risk Register, which has been updated to reflect the current year's strategic outlook. The Risk Register is reviewed regularly by the Executive Team and an update is provided at each meeting of the Committee and the Governing Board. As usual, risks are deemed to be at their highest at the start of the academic year, when enrolment and income has yet to be confirmed.

Since the last report, one new risk has been added (positioned at number 1 on the report). This relates to resilience, business continuity and the College's ability to meet the Borough's needs, which could be negatively affected by rapid growth in activity across most / all funding streams.

The risk score has been reduced on seven of the 17 classifications (Risks 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 16). The risk score has remained consistent on 10 risks (Risks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 15 and 17), and none of the risk scores have increased. Risk will continue to be assessed throughout the year with termly reports to both the Audit Committee (for scrutiny) and the Governing Board (for assurance).

In response to a question from a Governor in relation to cyber security, it was confirmed that the College's arrangements for addressing cyber security had recently identified a potential risk being experienced in other colleges, and that the mitigating actions in place had enabled the College to address a potential weakness and prevent any breaches.

The Committee also discussed the increase in phishing emails and a recent exercise undertaken to test out the staff response to this, underpinned by additional training where necessary.

In response to a question from a Governor, it was confirmed that planning approval has recently been granted for the Transformation Project, which will have a positive impact on Risk 5 (Estates Strategy), although, as the project involves a £45m build, this is under constant review by the Executive Team.

The Committee noted the report.

8. Annual Anti-Fraud Report (including Statement on Gifts and Hospitality)

The Committee considered the Annual Anti-Fraud report, which included a statement on gifts and hospitality, noting that there had been no known instances of fraud nor reported gifts and hospitality to staff during 2022-23. It was noted that the report takes into account the guidance on anti-fraud reporting as provided within the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice.

Governors asked how the College knows if staff have been in receipt of gifts and hospitality and it was confirmed that staff are required to disclose all gifts and hospitality as a condition of their contract of employment with the College and that senior staff also have to make annual declarations. The requirement to disclose gifts and hospitality is also a part of staff induction.

The Committee noted the report.

Platt, Joanne
10/06/2024 10:10:21



This file is sealed with a digital signature.
The seal is a guarantee for the authenticity
of the document.

Document ID:
245D3F2EDC0E428388492B62D47BE280

9. Whistleblowing Policy 2024-26

AC-24-02-10

The Committee reviewed the Whistleblowing Policy for 2024-26, noting that this has been reviewed by the College's employment lawyers, who have confirmed that it meets requirements. The updates made since the previous policy include the addition of self-employed workers, changes to reflect the latest updates on the GOV website and 'Public Concern at Work' has changed its name to Protect, the details of which have been updated in the policy. Job titles that have been updated since the Policy was last reviewed have also been changed.

In response to a question from a Governor, it was confirmed that staff are very aware of who to contact if they have concerns, following which the College guides them through the relevant stages. It was noted that often a concern is raised which may end up as a grievance, a complaint or a whistleblowing complaint and that staff are fully supported to ensure that the correct policy and process is followed to address their concerns.

Resolved: The Committee agreed to recommend the Whistleblowing Policy 2024-26 to the Governing Board for approval

Jane Butterfield left the meeting at 5.44pm

10. Appointment of Financial Statements Auditors

AC-24-02-11

The Committee considered a report on the outcome of the tendering exercise for the Financial Statements audit contract, undertaken on the College's behalf by Tenet Services purchasing consultants via the CPC framework, which is a recognised procurement approach across the FE sector.

The details of the tendering exercise had been discussed with the Committee Chair and were also shared with the Committee. Based on the results of the evaluation, the recommendation is to award the contract to Wylie & Bisset LLP.

The College is familiar with the work of Wylie & Bisset and has previously assessed its performance as good. The Post-16 Audit Code of Practice requires the contract for this work to be tendered once every five years but specifically states that this does not prevent the existing provider from being re-appointed following a tendering exercise.

The Committee asked what the notice period is within the contract and it was agreed that the Director of Governance will check this and let members of the Committee know.

Resolved: The Committee agreed to recommend to the Governing Board, the appointment of Wylie & Bisset as the College's Financial Statements Auditors for a three year period, with the option to extend for a two further years.

11. Items to be included in the Committee Chair's Report to the Governing Board

AC-24-02-12

The Committee agreed the items to be included in the Committee Chair's Report to the Governing Board.

Platt, Joanne
10/06/2024 10:10:21



This file is sealed with a digital signature.
The seal is a guarantee for the authenticity
of the document.

Document ID:
245D3F2EDC0E428388492B62D47BE280

12. Any other business:

AC-24-02-13

There were no items of other business. The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions.

13. Date of next meeting: Wednesday 22 May 2024 at 5.00pm

AC-24-02-14

The meeting ended at 5.55pm.

14. Actions

AC-24-02-11: Let the Committee know the notice period in the Financial Statements Auditors contract

Action by: Director of Governance.

Platt, Joanne
10/06/2024 10:10:21



This file is sealed with a digital signature.
The seal is a guarantee for the authenticity
of the document.

Document ID:
245D3F2EDC0E428388492B62D47BE280