



Empowering Success, Enriching Communities, Supporting Industry

**APPROVED MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON 15TH OCTOBER 2025**

PART ONE

Commercially sensitive information has been redacted in line with the College's FOI policy

Present: Gary Baines (Chair), Penny Haughan, Ali Amirkhalili

In attendance: Kevin Williams (Vice Principal – Finance & Resources), Gill Banks (Principal/CEO), Lisa Randall (RSM - Internal Auditor), William Simpson (RSM – Internal Auditor), - minutes 24 onwards), Lesley Venables (Interim Governance Professional), Louise Rhodes (Governance Professional), Jo-Anne Tam (Director of Finance), Phil Jones (Vice-Principal, Student Experience)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 1 There were no apologies for absence. As there were no relevant items on the agenda for Wylie & Bisset, it had been agreed that the attendance of the external auditors was not required at this meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2 There were no declarations of interest.

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

- 3 **Resolved –** That Gary Baines be appointed as Committee Chair for the 2025/2026 academic year.

MINUTES & MATTERS ARISING

- 4 **Resolved –** That the minutes of the meeting held on 4th June 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the amendment of the attendance list
- 5 Governors received for information a report on progress against the actions from previous meetings. The Governance Professional reported that there were a number of items missing from this and undertook to investigate further, with an updated report to be circulated. It was agreed that the completed actions should be removed from the active list, as done in other committees, to focus only on relevant and outstanding items, with the rest archived for record-keeping.

INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

- 6 The Internal Auditor presented internal audit reports on non-accredited learning

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programmes, T Levels funding compliance and a follow-up of previous recommendations.

Internal Audit Report - Recognising and Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) Framework

- 7 Governors noted that this review had been requested by management. The audit had classified the College's provision as providing a 'substantial' level of assurance, with one low-priority action and several areas of good practice, with no significant issues identified.

T Levels Funding Compliance

- 8 The review of T Levels funding had identified two high and one low priority actions due to non-compliance with DfE regulations. The internal auditor and the VP Finance & Resource explained the potential for funding clawback. *Governors queried the seriousness of the anomalies and the likely scale of any potential clawback. The auditor explained that, whilst it was difficult to give a definitive answer based on the relatively small sample size, there was potential for funding clawback, with any errors extrapolated across the entire student cohort. Management was confident that the College's systems were sufficiently robust to ensure there would be no recurrence of these issues.*
- 9 The Vice-Principal described the new system of compliance meetings and process improvements to ensure the timely resolution of non-compliance. *Governors had been informed at previous meetings that pockets of staff did not always adhere to the College's regulations, which should be addressed. The Principal reported that the business and curriculum planning processes were now aligned so that any difficulties could be dealt with at an earlier point.*
- 10 In response to a question from governors, management confirmed that this review had been undertaken for internal purposes only and that there was no requirement to inform the DfE of the outcome. *An assurance was given that the deadlines in the report were realistic and progress would be reported to the next Committee meeting.*

Follow-Up on Previous Recommendations

- 11 The Internal Auditor presented a report on the Follow-Up of previous recommendations. It was noted that 20 of the total of 27 actions had now been fully implemented, with the remaining seven downgraded in priority by the Internal Auditor due to the progress that had been made.
- 12 The Director of Finance provided details on ongoing efforts to address outstanding payroll and IT security recommendations. There was still a need for improved systems for payroll reconciliation and device encryption (which was now at 86% completion). Support for the HR team on the latter would be provided by Finance



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staff and revised processes were in place for management sign-off of any variances. Work was ongoing to address the issues raised on IT security and third-party supplier controls.

- 13 The Chair commented on the improved rate of progress in this report compared to previous versions and thanked the management team for their efforts.

INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

- 14 Governors received the Internal Audit Annual Report for 2024/2025. This had concluded that the College had adequate and effective systems, with some opportunities for further enhancements. The overall opinion was at Tier 2 on the 4 point scale, which compared favourably to the Tier 3 assessment in 2023/2024.
- 15 A total of 20 out of 27 recommendations made in-year had been completed. It was noted that RSM's process for the circulation of draft reports to management had been amended for 2025/2026, with these emailed directly to the College rather than uploaded to the RSM portal to enable a speedier response and a 10-day response period.
- 16 The Committee was advised that the Associate Director of RSM had delivered a training session to the wider management team on internal audit and the processes involved, which had been well-received.
- 17 A governor queried whether the timeline for the turnaround of reports was included in the scoping document for each visit and was assured that this was the case.

INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL PLAN 2025/2026

- 18 Following discussions at the June 2025 Committee meeting, management and the Chair had met with the Internal Auditors to finalise the Plan for 2025/2026. Governors received an updated version, which was recommended for approval by the Board.
- 19 **Resolved –** That the Board be recommended to approve the Internal Audit Plan for 2025/2026

REGULARITY SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE 2024/2025

- 20 The Governance Professional presented a draft of the annual Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire, noting that the DfE had made only minor changes compared to the previous year. The formatting of the final document would be updated to provide clarity when it was submitted to the Board.
- 21 **Resolved –** That the Board be recommended to approve the Regularity Self-

Assessment Questionnaire for 2024/2025

RISK MANAGEMENT

22 The Vice-Principal Finance & Resources presented a report on risk management.

[REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED]

26 Delays in two major capital projects could result in a £2.4 million DfE grant clawback if funds were not spent by the deadline of 31st March 2026. The Vice-Principal outlined a potential mitigation strategy, involving an Escrow account being established for the monies and legal contracts with contractors, while also considering options for the acceleration of on-site work.

27 The Committee asked for clarification of the position with slippage of the capital projects and requested that lateness penalty clauses should be discussed with the contractor in order to exhaust all possible avenues.

MONITORING OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

28 The Director of Finance provided an update on the monitoring of audit

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- recommendations, detailing progress on closing actions, the status of outstanding items and plans for improved reporting and the consolidation of contract and IT supplier data.
- 29 Governors were informed that 32 actions had been implemented or superseded, with seven partially implemented actions remaining, all of which had been downgraded in priority by the Internal Auditor due to the level of progress.
- 30 The Director of Finance summarised the status of the seven outstanding actions, including ongoing work on estates reporting, IT skills matrices, device encryption, third-party supplier databases, risk assessment training and payroll reconciliation, with plans to consolidate data and provide clearer reporting in future updates.
- 31 [Governors expressed appreciation for the detailed and well-formatted report which enabled them to clearly see the progress against each action.](#)

CYBERSECURITY UPDATE

- 32 The Deputy Director of MIS provided a comprehensive update on cybersecurity measures, including risk reduction, technical controls, staff training, backup strategies and incident response planning, with the Committee discussing ongoing governance and the need for regular oversight.
- 33 Governors received an update that the number of significant cybersecurity risks had been reduced from 15 to 8, [REDACTED]
- 34 [REDACTED]
- 35 [REDACTED]
- 36 The Vice-Principal outlined the College's incident response plan, which included having defined roles and backup procedures.
- 37 Further discussion would take place at a future meeting as to the most appropriate place for the governance of cyber-security. In the meantime, regular updates would continue to be provided to the Audit Committee as part of the cycle of business and the Governance & Search Committee would consider the appointment of a link governor for cyber-security.

ANTI-FRAUD ASSESSMENT 2024/2025

- 38 The Governance Professional presented an assessment of anti-fraud measures within the College, which was undertaken on an annual basis, in line with the Post-16 Audit Code of Practice.
- 39 The Director of Finance provided information on anti-fraud activities amongst staff, including training and policy alignment. A summary of a recent webinar attended by College staff would be circulated to Committee members for information.

COMMITTEE SELF-ASSESSMENT 2024/2025

- 40 The Governance Professional presented the draft Committee Self-Assessment for 2024/2025. Governors noted that there had been strong attendance, that the Committee had an appropriate balance of skills and that the terms of reference had been fulfilled in-year. A number of areas for improvement had been identified including continued compliance with Audit Code requirements, maintaining the current size of the Committee, and ensuring that governors received training where appropriate.
- 41 **Resolved** - That the Committee Self-Assessment for 2024/2025 be approved

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

- 42 The Governance Professional presented an updated Whistleblowing Policy. This had been prepared following discussions at a previous Committee meeting and was now felt to be simpler and more user-friendly. Governors were advised that the draft had been considered by the College's solicitors and any suggested amendments had been incorporated.
- 43 **Resolved** - That the Board be recommended to approve the revised Whistleblowing Policy.

FE COMMISSIONER'S REPORT ON INTERVENTION AT WESTON COLLEGE

- 44 The Committee received a report on the recommendations made by the FE Commissioner's intervention assessment on: Weston College.
- 45 The FEC had concluded that the full board of governors had not explicitly approved a series of remuneration payments to the former principal, amounting to £2.5m. It was critical of governance arrangements at the College, the lack of transparency in reporting and the bypassing of normal payroll procedures. These elements had led



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to a failure of proper governance processes and to poor decision-making around the appropriate use of public funds.

- 46 A total of 13 recommendations were made by the FEC, one of which was specific to Weston College. The report presented to the Committee assessed Wirral Met College's governance and internal control arrangements against the 12 recommendations, with some proposals for further action. These would be added to the overall governance action plan. It was noted that no significant gaps had been identified, but some enhancements of existing processes would be implemented.
- 47 This item had also been considered by the Governance & Search Committee and it had been agreed that it would monitor progress against the implementation of these recommendations. The new Governance Professional would be responsible for ensuring that any actions were implemented and reported back to the Committee, in consultation with the Vice-Principal Finance & Resources.

ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD

- 48 The Chair provided a verbal summary of the main points of the meeting, which would be reported to the Board on 23rd October 2025:
- a) Internal Audit reports on RARPA, T Levels and Follow-Up were received for information
 - b) Internal Audit Annual Report 2024/2025 was received and governors noted that the overall assessment was Tier 2 (Tier 3 in 2023/2024)
 - c) Revised Internal Audit Plan for 2025/2026, Regularity Self-Assessment Questionnaire 2024/2025 and Whistleblowing Policy recommended for approval by the Board
 - d) Reports received for information on risk management, monitoring of previous recommendations, anti-fraud assessment, cyber security and a comparison against the FE Commissioner's intervention at Weston College

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

10th December 2025

APPROVED:

Chair: Gary Baines

Date: 10 December 2025