



Wirral Met College has a vision to be an inclusive, outstanding college

CONFIRMED MINUTES OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 26th FEBRUARY 2020

Present:	Joe McArdle	Independent Governor (Chair)
	Paul Smith	Independent Governor
	Nigel Woodcock	Co-opted Committee Member
In attendance:	Sue Higginson	Principal
	Michael Norton	Deputy Principal
	Will Jerram	Assistant Principal – MIS (minutes to 78-97)
	Lorraine Jones	Safeguarding Manager (minutes to 78-97)
	Andrew King	Head of Finance
	Lisa Randall	RSM, Internal Auditor
	Mark Holt	RSM, Internal Auditor
	Lesley Venables	Clerk to the Governors
	Louise Scott-Kelly	Administrator to the Governors

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

73. There were no apologies for absence.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

74. The following interests were declared:

- Joe McArdle declared an interest in any matters relating to the University of Chester and as a parent of a student who attends the College.
- Paul Smith declared that he was employed by the Local Authority and that his spouse was employed at the College.

PRE-MEETING WITH AUDITORS

75. The Committee met with the Internal Auditors in the absence of management and was advised that there were no issues that they wished to raise.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

76. **Resolved** That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

MATTERS ARISING

77. Governors received a progress report against the list of actions from the previous meeting and noted that all of the actions had been completed.

INTERNAL AUDIT VISIT 2 REPORT 2019/2020

Safeguarding

78. The Internal Auditor presented the outcomes of the Safeguarding audit. This had resulted in a 'Substantive Assurance' audit opinion, with 3 low priority recommendations made to enhance the College's internal controls.

79. The first management action was to ensure that the Visitor's Policy detailed the types of checks that should be undertaken for visitors and subcontractors. In response to a question from a governor as to how the policy differentiated between regular subcontractors and ad hoc visitors the Safeguarding Manager explained that all subcontractors were vetted via the HR process, whereas ad hoc visitors were supported and escorted around College sites at all times. Governors were informed that the proposed amendments to the Policy had been discussed recently at the Safeguarding Steering Group meeting and would be actioned by the Director of Estates.

80. Clarification was also provided to the Committee on the management action that identified a delay in social care feedback for safeguarding referral records. The Safeguarding Manager reported that the College's response was immediate in any instance where there was a risk of significant harm. However, the instance identified by the Internal Audit had been a level 3 multi-agency request, which the College accepted was graded as less of a priority and not, therefore, as time critical.

81. The third management action related to the conversion of all paper-based new starter files to electronic files. The Safeguarding Manager reported that the College had already commenced research into a paperless recording system.

Apprenticeships – Student Records

82. The Internal Auditor presented a report on the outcomes of the Apprenticeships – Student Records audit. This work was 'advisory', which meant that no overall opinion was provided. A total of 10 management actions had been identified; 4 'High' rated actions, 3 'Medium' rated actions and 3 'Low' rated actions.

83. The Deputy Principal acknowledged that the report highlighted several areas of concern (mainly relating to previous practices and now amended) and presented information with a detailed action plan which identified the responsible managers and dates for completion.

84. Governors were advised that it was evident that there was an issue with the apprenticeship sign up process which was fundamental to the apprentice learner journey. Previously, a member of the sales team had signed up any new apprentices. However, following a robust review of the area, apprentices would now be signed up by an experienced Trainer Assessor, who had the necessary expertise to assess the apprentices' ability and provide appropriate advice and guidance to confirm the learning plan, immediately commence the learning process and set expectations at the start of the programme.

85. The process had been streamlined to a new tripartite model involving the Line Manager, the Trainer Assessor and the Apprentice.

86. Any new starts would be compliant with the new, robust sign-up paperwork and procedures.

87. The second issue identified by the Internal Auditor related to the 20% Off The Job (OTJ) planning and calculations. Previously, OTJ was monitored and tracked using 'One File' (a tracking system software). Management had not been satisfied with this tool as it involved four separate report outcomes and was difficult to gain an overview of student progress. However, the College had since re-aligned the process as part of the migration from Frameworks to Standards.

88. The Principal added that there had also been instances when employers had been reluctant to release apprentices for their end point assessment, even where the College had judged them to be ready for this and that this was something that would be built into the contract and planning from the beginning.

89. A governor enquired about the date for completion on the OTJ actions. The Deputy Principal responded that it was an integral part of the process and was now routine practice within the Quality Department's monthly compliance checks.

90. In relation to the management actions on End Point Assessment Organisations, the Assistant Principal – MIS explained that the low rated action referred to a small niche Science End Point Assessment Organisation, which originally provided apprentices with a Memorandum of Agreement. Following the audit, this organisation had since had a formal contract put in place which aligned to the College's standard procedures.

91. Although the End Point Assessment management action was rated 'low', a governor enquired if the risk rating could increase as the number of End Point Assessment Organisations increased.

92. The Principal reported that the College's own Engineering department had been working towards becoming an End Point Assessment Organisation. All awarding bodies and examinations / assessments associated with the final assessment of student work were centrally managed by the Examinations Department, which sits within the scope of the Assistant Principal - MIS. End Point Assessment would be managed in a similar way with all organisations and registrations being centrally managed by the examinations team. In addition to central management, the external moderation and verification of programmes, including where the College has 'direct claim' status, would be centrally monitored by the Vice Principal - Quality and his team. The College has a Lead College Verifier, who was part of the Quality Team, to ensure independent compliance, consistency and scrutiny.

93. The Committee recognised the ongoing developmental work being undertaken with apprenticeships and noted that a further internal audit would take place later in the year to determine the level of progress made in this critical area of provision.

Progress Report

94. The Internal Auditor reported that progress against the Internal Audit Plan for 2019/2020 was on track for completion by the end of the academic year. The outcomes of audits on the Examinations Processes, Human Resources – Staff Sickness and Wellbeing

and the 2018/2019 Follow Up would all be reported at 17th June Audit Committee and more detailed scrutiny of performance related data will be reviewed by the Quality and Scrutiny Committee..

MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

95. The Committee received for information, the Management Accounts as at 31st October 2019 (which had also been reviewed by the Board of Governors on 11th December 2019) to monitor the solvency of the College, in accordance with the Committee's Terms of Reference.

96. The Committee were informed that the College's finances remained in a strong position with a high 'Good' rating for financial health. A governor commented that this was different from that reported at the December 2019 Board meeting, which had graded the College as in the lowest boundary within the category of 'Outstanding.' The Deputy Principal explained that the College had taken a prudent view of its finances to cover future expenditure such as the new national minimum wage legislation, which would be effective from 1st April 2020.

97. The Principal added that the College had continued to exceed its enrolment target and would need to consider space for future growth, particularly linked to the rising demographic trends with 16-18 year olds. There would be a need to expand its accommodation in the near future and to maintain high-quality learning and the College was discussing potential opportunities with the Local Authority. Consequently, a cautious approach had been taken with the financial health grading.

98. A special Board meeting had been convened to review and approve the new Integrated Financial Model for Colleges, which further detailed the College's finances.

99. A governor enquired about the slight difference between 'planned cash' and 'forecast cash' detailed in the accounts. The Deputy Principal explained that the cash forecast was managed robustly on a monthly basis and that the forecast cash was lower due to the timing of the debt readjustments.

RISK REGISTER

100. The Deputy Principal presented the Risk Management Update. Two new risks had been added to the Risk Register; Coronavirus and the ISO/IEC 27001 standards, as requested by the Committee at the previous meeting.

101. A governor enquired about the controls regarding the Coronavirus. The Principal advised that the College was following the latest guidance from Public Health England. Any risk assessments undertaken for student excursions abroad were being revisited close to the departure date and World Health Organisation recommendations were being followed. The Principal gave an assurance that the Health & Safety Manager and Director of People and Organisational Development would continue to update staff in accordance with National recommendations and information on contingency planning was being considered for, for example, students who were well enough to continue working but unable to attend, through self-isolation.

MONITORING OF PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

102. Governors received a report on the progress of the implementation of previous audit recommendations. There had been two internal audits since the last meeting which had resulted in 13 new actions. There were no overdue actions.

ITEMS TO REPORT TO THE BOARD

103. The Chair summarised the main points of the meeting which would be reported to the Board at its meeting on 18th March 2020:

- Apprenticeships – Student Records Internal Audit outcomes and the developmental work being undertaken were noted. A further audit would be undertaken later in the year to assess progress.
- Positive audit of Safeguarding procedures.
- The College’s Financial Health rating has been reduced from a low ‘Outstanding’ to a high ‘Good’ rating.
- The Coronavirus and the ISO/IEC 27001 Standards had been added to the Risk Register. The Committee noted the actions taken by management in relation to the former.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING – Wednesday 17th June 2020



Signed: _____ Date: 17 June 2020
Chair