

Minutes of a Meeting of the Audit Committee held on Tuesday, 14th May 2024 in FO27 with participation by teams

Present: Denise Rollo (in the Chair); Val Pallister; Norma Boyes
By teams: Elaine Clinton

Apologies: Robert Milburn; Lee Todd

Also Present: Karen Wilson (Deputy Principal); Jane Murray (Clerk)
By teams: Marc Harvey (Internal Auditor); Karen Rae (External Auditor)

09/24 Chair

Agreed- that the apologies of Robert Milburn having been tendered, that Denise Rollo take the Chair

10/24 Minutes

Agreed – the minutes of the meeting held on 19th February 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

11/24 Declarations of Interest

Val Pallister noted that as a former Manager of the Data Services Department at Lakes College that she may have an interest in the Mock Funding Audit depending on the nature of the discussion. As detailed discussion was being deferred until the next meeting to allow for the participation of the Chair, it was not felt there was a need to withdraw for this meeting.

12/24 Internal Audit – Equality and Diversity

An experienced auditor in EDI had carried out the audit, which gave reasonable assurance.

The recommendations, which had been accepted, were detailed and included the need to include a list of policies and procedures in the policy, which it will use to protect against discrimination; that there should be an increase in visibility of performance in the Self-assessment report; that a copy of the action plan was not included in the annual report; that deep dives could also look to identify and share good practice in respect of EDI; feedback from learner voice on student support is not analysed by are level or protected characteristic.

The Committee noted that there was work to be done to tie work together and to bring back the EDI committee. It was asked about analysis and noted that there were a number of ways in which you could identify those with disadvantage and noted that there was postcode analysis, free school meals and ESFA funding. The Deputy Principal noted that she wanted to include EDI data in regular data analysis.

The Committee looked forward to tracking progress over the coming year, noting that performance would come to the Board.

13/24 Internal Audit: Performance Development and Succession Planning

The internal auditor presented the report which gave reasonable assurance. Of some concern was that PDR were not being completed in a timely fashion in some areas, nor some probationary reviews. The Deputy Principal reported that this had been discussed at Managers' meeting. It was questioned about the nature of the issue and it would seem that some managers had either not filled in the area they should or had been lacking in comment.

There was also some concern about the lack of compliance with mandatory training and asked whether the software was not user-friendly. It was felt that it was, but that there could be some people who struggled to find the links. The use of inset days continued for mandatory training. Both issues would be subject to compliance monitoring in the coming year.

Progress with a SQEP matrix for succession planning was noted, including the intent to roll this out to a consistent standard across the organisation.

14/24 Internal Audit: ESFA Mock Funding Audit

This item was noted in terms of the audit plan discussed which was to follow on the agenda, but deferred for discussion until the next meeting.

15/24 Risk 4

Continuing their scrutiny of risks (by individual risks at each meeting in addition to periodic review of the whole risk register), the Committee noted that the Estate was currently in good condition. In particular, it is noted that the Board would require to be mindful that digital equipment would require to be updated on a fairly regular basis and this had been factored into financial planning in the year 2 of the current financial plans. With an increase in cloud-based activity, some previously categorised capital expenditure was now considered as revenue expenditure, for example licences. Some questioning took place in respect of the (relatively) recent expansion of the estate and it was noted that the lease on the additional brickwork building would cease at the end of this year. In respect of the civils' field, it was felt that there was now some return on the investment, although slower than had been anticipated.

16/24 Audit Planning 2024-25

The board having approved a 1-year extension of the internal audit provider, the committee considered next year's plan. In respect of the discussion held for the provider to consider, it was felt that:

- Health and Safety would be a priority for audit in the cycle of business as it had been a few years since this had been fully audited.

- ESFA Mock funding audit should be repeated given the volume and nature of recommendations
- Contribution analysis and course design would assist with financial planning and it was felt that this should be carried out in the first term.
- Financial controls (new member of staff in this area)

The question of a Corporate Governance audit was raised and the Clerk noted that there had been an external review of governance the previous year which should satisfy the requirements for 3-yearly reviews.

The final plan would return to the next committee meeting, when the Chair of the Committee would have the opportunity to input.

Turning to the remaining audit for this existing year (a variation to the plan had been agreed) the proposal was for an advisory audit in respect of compliance with apprenticeship rules. There was to be a change of structures and it was felt that the knowledge and experience would be helpful.

The Finance Director took the opportunity to thank Marc for his in-year flexibility, which was endorsed by the Committee.

The external and internal auditors left the meeting

17/24 Provision of External Audit Services

The Committee was updated on the recent tender exercise with a recommendation going to the Board on Thursday. The committee noted plans for the internal audit tender for 2024-5.

The meeting closed at 1820h.