

CORPORATION OF HILLS ROAD SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on 22 February 2023

Present Laragh Jeanroy (Independent Chair of the Committee), Anthony Omo (Vice-Chair of the Committee), Adrian Clark, Kevin Taylor.

Clerking Services Robert Smith (Clerk to the Corporation)

In Attendance Saira Hanif (Vice-Principal: Finance & Operations), Chris Rising (MacIntyre Hudson – Internal Audit Service),

1 Apologies for Absence and Quoracy

Apologies for absence were received from the following members of the Corporation: Alistair Day, Carrie Anne Philbin.

Rory Seddon (Director of Business & Finance) was unable to be in attendance.

The meeting was quorate.

2 Declarations of Interest

None.

3 Minutes of the Previous Meeting: 1 December 2022

The minutes were approved as a correct record of the business transacted, and *prima facie* evidence of the proceedings to which they relate.

4 Matters Arising from the Minutes: 1 December 2022

Minute 12: it was reported that Stone King, in the person of Dr Ron Hill, had been commissioned to conduct the External Review of Governance at the College during the summer term.

Minute 13: it was confirmed that, subject to the approval of its Chair, the Corporation will be invited, at its meeting on 29 March 2023, to consider the inclusion of a members' appraisal element within the internal review of governance to be conducted from the 2023-24 year.

Minute 13: it was confirmed that, subject to the approval of its Chair, the Corporation will be invited, at its meeting on 29 March 2023, to determine whether role descriptions for the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Corporation should be drawn up, and by whom, and whether the Vice-Chair's role should include discrete responsibilities additional to acting as deputy for the Chair in the event that the latter is unavailable.

Minute 13: it was reported that the Nominations Committee, at the Audit Committee's request, had conducted an updated survey of members' skills and experience, and will consider the outcome at its meeting on 21 March 2023.

It was agreed that consideration of the Financial Statements Audit Re-Tendering Policy be held over to the 14 June meeting of the Committee.

5 Review of Staff Expenses

The report of expenses reimbursed to staff covering the period from 1 November 2022 to 31 January 2023 inclusive was received and noted.

6 Safer Recruitment Compliance

A report covering staff appointments with commencement dates in the period from 1 December 2022 to 5 June 2023, setting out the membership of staff selection panels in terms of persons trained in safer recruitment, was received and noted.

7 Reasons Given by Persons Leaving Employment with the College (Anonymised)

Data were presented by the Vice-Principal: Finance & Operations, noting *inter alia* that:

they constitute the first termly report to the Committee concerning the recruitment and retention of support staff (an increasing risk identified by the Committee), and that future reports will take the form of prepared papers;

they reflect surveys returned by leavers in the Autumn Term 2022-23;

staff who leave are sent a link to an online survey and are offered the opportunity to speak to the Deputy Principal or the HR Director as part of the exit process;

staff are invited to identify their reason for leaving, with multiple options able to be selected;

the options are: better benefits, work closer to home, conflicts with colleagues, family/personal reasons, improved work-life balance, better career prospects, concern about security of post, end of contract, higher pay, retirement, other;

10 former employees (out of 19 eligible) had completed the survey, between them checking 32 reasons for leaving; and

20 (out of 32) reasons had related to better career prospects, family/personal reasons, higher pay and improved work-life balance.

It was agreed that future iterations of the survey would enable a growing database to be established.

At 53% the rate of return was thought low. It was agreed that the manner of the survey's presentation to leavers is crucial, and that participation rates might be higher were the confidential nature of the data collected, including its aggregated and anonymous presentation, more clearly emphasised to respondents.

It was suggested that national attrition rates for support staff would provide a context for evaluating the College data.

It was agreed that, although it would be neither possible nor useful to collect precise data as to where staff secure future employment, it would be helpful to gain a broad appreciation in this regard (e.g. taking up employment within, or outside, the education sector).

Were "benefits elsewhere" to be a frequently checked item, it might be valuable to ascertain an insight into what is meant (e.g. flexible working, financial benefits, social benefits).

8 Confidential Reporting: Staff

There had been no instances to report.

9 Confidential Reporting: Members of the Corporation

There had been no instances to report.

10 Fraud and Irregularity

There had been no instances to report.

11 Board Assurance Framework and Risk Register

The most recent iteration of the Board Assurance Framework (BAF) & Risk Register (divided between Key Risks & Controls and Operational Risks) was received for information and discussion.

It was noted that the register, excluding BAF 9, is updated by the College Strategy Team for review by the Audit Committee. The Committee directly determines BAF 9. The Key Controls section (BAF 1–10) is then used to update the Corporation. Additionally, the Corporation, which owns the Risk Register, reviews all risks at least annually. The Corporation's opportunity for annual review occurred at the meeting held on 1 February 2023.

The following risks had been included in the BAF:

Leadership and Management

- BAF 1 Failure to monitor financials
- BAF 2 Failure to recruit and retain students
- BAF 3 Failure to monitor student outcomes

Human Resources

- BAF 4 Failure to recruit and retain high calibre staff

Teaching and Learning

- BAF 5 Failure to maintain the quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Safeguarding

- BAF 6 Failure to keep students safe including radicalisation/sexual conduct
- BAF 7 Being unable to meet the growing number of social, emotional and mental ill health needs of students
- BAF 8 Poor Health and Safety practice

Governance

- BAF 9 Failure to be ready to respond effectively and in a timely way to changes in the structure of further education

Data Protection and Network Security

- BAF 10 College suffers a cyber-attack and loses data or is unable to function

BAF risks, 1-3, 5 and 9 had been rated Green (low risk following the application of mitigating actions).

BAF risks 4, 6-8 and 10 had been rated Amber (medium risk following the application of mitigating actions).

Residual risks scores for all BAF items had remained unchanged from the Register's previous iteration.

The Vice-Principal: Finance & Operations drew particular attention to BAF 4 (Risk 2.1), noting that the HR Director had taken ownership of the Support Staff Voice, with the first meeting having taken place in December and been well-received.

In relation to BAF6 (Risk 4.1), it was reported that, although there had been an increase in the number of reported safeguarding incidents, this had reflected the raised awareness among students of the College's safeguarding provision and the active promotion of a "sharing culture". None of the incidents reported had taken place on the College site, or entailed inappropriate use of College resources.

In relation to Operational Risk 2.2, it was reported that, in the event of intensified or extended strike action by teachers, online learning would be

provided to a majority of students (with provision for vulnerable students to continue to attend the College). Use would be made of pre-set work and online resources, with learner activity directed towards private study.

An updated report on the implementation of recommendations following the internal audit review of College IT was received and considered. It was noted that the following matters await completion (with dates):

Cloud backup (February 2023)

Review and Update of IT Disaster Recovery Plan (June 2023)

Agreement with senior management on recovery time and end point objectives provided in the IT Disaster Recovery Plan (June 2023)

CCTV signage to be in accord with relevant code of practice (April 2023)

Review and documentation of privileged groups (February 2023)

Provision of Network Security Policy (June 2023)

Server room security assessment (April 2023)

It had been reported immediately before the meeting that the College had successfully completed the immutable backup piece of work following the Veeam 12 release.

The Committee congratulated the IT team on the significant progress made in implementing internal audit recommendations.

12 Reclassification of the College to the Public Sector

An interim report prepared by the Clerk to the Corporation was received for information.

It was noted that detailed guidance had been published by the DfE in relation to:

*Senior Pay Controls;
Special Payments, including Severance, Compensation and Ex-Gratia Payments;
Novel, Contentious and Repercussive Transactions;
Write-Offs and Losses; and
Indemnities, Guarantees and Letters of Comfort.*

Detailed guidance is awaited regarding:

*Land and Other Asset Disposals;
Borrowing (effectively, borrowing will not be permitted); and
Related Party Transactions*

An SFCA funding and finance conference is to be held on 18 March which will be attended by appropriate College representatives, and which it is hoped will set out additional information.

13 Data Protection Policy

The business was held over to the 14 June 2023 meeting.

14 Bye Laws of the Corporation

Revised Bye Laws of the Corporation, with a guide to the proposed changes (of a minor nature to reflect updated nomenclature or in the interests of improved presentation), were received for consideration and recommended for approval by the Corporation.

It was agreed that the financial limits stated in Bye Law 6.5.4 be increased to £1,000 and £4,000 respectively (plus VAT at the standard rate).

15 Any Other Competent Business

None.

16 Meeting Evaluation

Members considered how the interests of students had been served as a result of the Committee's deliberations and actions at the meeting, and noted the following:

the follow-up on the College's safeguarding provision; and

the follow-up on the College's IT provision.

17 Dates and Times of Audit Committee Meetings 2023-24

The following dates and times of meetings were approved:

Wednesday 15 November 2023

Wednesday 29 November 2023

Wednesday 21 February 2024

Wednesday 19 June 2024

It was agreed that the meetings be held online, except for that on 19 June 2024 which, public health circumstances permitting, will be held in-person.

18 Date and Time of Remaining Audit Committee Meeting 2022-23

The following approved date and time were noted:

Wednesday 14 June 2023 (6.00pm)

Public health circumstances permitting, the meeting will be held in person. The meeting will be observed as part of the external review of governance.

List of Actions Arising from the Meeting:

<i>Agendum</i>	<i>Responsible Person(s)</i>	<i>Action</i>
4	Vice-Principal: Finance & Operations	Prepare Financial Statements Audit Re-Tendering Policy for consideration by the Committee at the meeting to be held on 14 June 2023.
13	Vice-Principal: Finance & Operations	Provide a revised Data Protection Policy for consideration by the Committee at the meeting to be held on 14 June 2023.
14	Clerk to the Corporation	Present revised Bye Laws for Corporation approval as recommended by the Committee, and subject to the agreed change to the financial limits expressed in Bye Law 6.5.4.