

THE COLLEGE OF RICHARD COLLYER
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON Wednesday 16 March 2022 at 08.00 via Zoom

Present: Mr Karl Banister, Mrs Sarah Ediss, Mrs Susan Martineau, Mr Hugh Stafford-Smith, Mr Dom Valente

In attendance: Members of SMT - Mr Ian Dumbleton (FD), Mr Rob Hussey (VP Pastoral, Curriculum), Mr Dan Lodge (Principal)

External - Mr Stephen Carville (Consultant), Mr Chris Rising (MHA MacIntyre Hudson)

Ms Nicola Whitehead (Clerk), Mrs Russha Sellings (in-coming Clerk)

In the Chair: Mr Hugh Stafford-Smith

1. Introductions

The meeting opened as scheduled and Mr Rising and Mr Carville were welcomed for relevant sections under Items 6 and 7.

2. Apologies for Absence

None received.

3. Declarations of Interest

None declared with respect of the agenda items.

4. Minutes of the meeting 17th November 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting were **approved** without amendment.

5. Matters Arising

Item 3 (ref 5): Share risk survey (MHA) noted as complete by Mr Rising

Item 4a: Annual report update (MHA) noted as part of the review.

6. Internal audit/ Board assurance incl

Paper: Internal Audit Report (Governance – Committees structures and reporting)

i) Governance

Mr Rising spoke to the findings of the report, providing a positive endorsement of the current structures, framework, and reporting cycle. Two matters were suggested under enhancements:

- Principal's report – summarise key strategic updates for Governors
- Assurance framework – Risk Register development to demonstrate the evidence of the appropriate controls to mitigate risks and follow-on updates to the Risk Register as part of the cycle of review.

In addition, there was an advisory note on consistency of top sheets.

The Chair remarked on the small number of questions in the governor questionnaire and capturing additional comments as a means to assess effective governing body performance, especially around performance management and he asked Mr Rising to reflect on this. Mr Rising believed the main challenges arose when there were polarised responses which indicated likely issues or the majority being 'strongly agree' which pointed to a tendency for

governing bodies to be less willing to challenge or commit to further development. Neither was the case with Collyer's Governors.

Members welcomed the recommendations and good practice guidance as marginal gains. The Principal confirmed the commitment to actively address refinements to reporting, especially around risk assurances and in light of the strategic planning review. *Mr Rising agreed to share further insights and examples of good practice of assurance reporting following members' request (Action: i Internal Auditor ii Clerk to add agenda item for next meeting).*

Members noted that further consideration of the AoC Code of Governance (see Item 11) would be undertaken by the Nominations Committee in respect of governance practice (Action: Nomination's agenda item for next meeting).

ii) Strategic Planning

Paper: Stephen Carville – Report on Strategic Planning

Mr Carville referenced the four key areas of his report and was pleased to convey many positives in his findings. He praised the Principal for his support during the process.

The following was brought to members attention and questions were posed in response:

1. The **landscape** was well understood by leaders and Governors and consistently relied on to inform priorities. It was observed Adult Ed could have more focus and student retention the same reach and rigour applied to that of VA, creating a more balanced approach (to be addressed via the Ofsted Action Plan). There was a cautionary note related to this that national data for retention could be improved to inform retention strategies.
2. College culture, sense of community and support for young people was exemplary and well regarded as evidenced via **consultation** of all key stakeholders. Mr Carville also noted the highly informed quality of discussion from Governors regarding the educational character of the College. Parental views on assessment of and feedback on students' work to inform improvement priorities could feature more highly in the planning. The scope of external stakeholder consultations had already been extended and could go further to other relevant groups (e.g. employers and HE organisations). Members queried the level of scrutiny of the survey results, noting the observations of the report.
3. The **structure of the strategic planning cycle** effectively informed the future direction of the College with buy in from key personnel. It was observed that the sub-strategies could risk a lack of alignment of certain areas but that empowering ownership of planning with support and monitoring could be advantageous. Members asked whether less structured or precise plans could be explained e.g were the managers new in post, did they need training, what additional support may be required. Mr Carville hadn't identified any particular patterns other than differences by department which reflected the nature of the work undertaken.
4. **Implementation, monitoring, impact** – the College QIP was deemed highly effective and in line with broad headings of the strategic plan. Mr Carville's suggested approach would however be to expand the framework to an operating plan to embrace all overarching strategic aims, enabling their impact to be monitored and for this to be replicated at directorate level. More rigour and precision on KPIs might also be helpful to ensure achievement of goals. The Principal explained the 3 year trajectory is documented in the strategic plan with high priority elements translated each year to the QIP, which may account for apparent gaps in operational planning. Members believed the translation of priorities from the strategic plan to the QIP was in essence the most important aspect. It was also noted during the discussions the broader alignment of the SAR with the strategic plan and how this review might dovetail with the review of reporting, which would also be the subject of deliberations by the Nominations Committee.

Members discussed the best way to relay the outcomes of the report to the rest of the Governing Body and also provide feedback to staff (**Actions: Clerk i Governing Body agenda item ii iii Principal to feedback to UMG Awayday**)

Members thanked Mr Carville for his very helpful report, and he departed the meeting at 8.52.

7. Risk and Assurance 21/22 update including:

i) RMG minutes

Paper: RMG minutes 14 Feb 2022

Highlights were shared. Members heard Covid related risks were lessening over time. There were some longer term wider political developments that could potentially impact the core identity of the College and would be explored initially by Working Parties reporting back to the Governing Body.

ii) Potential External Risks

Members asked about inflationary increases and the impact on funding. The FD responded that the ESFA had built inflation into their modelling and there were uplifts for example in respect of teacher pensions and retention. Most of the metrics were now positive and the forecast for the following financial year was better than previously thought, though payroll pressures were anticipated. Forecasts also needed to be updated as inflation continued to grow against the complex geopolitical backdrop.

There was also a member question about cyber security risks. The Principal advised a recent certification process had taken place. An audit of IT security would commence shortly to be led by the new IT Network Manager who had been in touch with Mr Rising.

iii) College-wide risks

Paper: College Risk Assessment and Controls 2021-22

Following members' challenge, the Principal agreed to continue to adapt the Risk Assessment where risks had closed. Mr Rising suggested assurances were documented against closed actions or items for one final time before their removal. (**Action: Principal to review Risk Assessment**).

iv) Covid risk assessment

Reported under Item 7 (i).

[9.05 Mr Rising departed the meeting]

v) EQR: Lesson Observations

Paper: EQR Nov 2021

Mr Hussey was present to update members on the most recent EQR review. This and the outcomes of the pilot of the new lesson observation system were in the process of being reviewed before any recommendations were implemented. There were challenges in interpreting qualitative feedback in terms of individual subject areas and personal development and middle and upper managers might require further support and training in overseeing the scheme. The object of the scheme would remain developmental. Mr Hussey acknowledged the feedback from Ofsted may need to be factored into the process of review.

8. Review of performance of the Financial Statements Auditor 2020/2021

Paper: Performance indicators for audit of financial statement

The FD informed members he was satisfied with the overall performance and there was value add with regard sector developments and advisory aspects of some specific issues.

9. Appointment and remuneration of the Financial Statements Auditor 2021/22

Including

(i) Tender update

Paper: due to timescales, tender proposals were circulated to members following dispatch of papers

The Clerk advised members of the requirement to retender for external audit services every 5 years and this was also an opportunity to continue to ensure value for money with particular attention to value add. Of 5 audit companies invited to tender, 3 had agreed to submit bids.

(ii) Interview preparation for 23 March

Preparation for the interview and selection process was discussed. 4/5 Audit Committee members would attend, and the ordering of presentations was agreed. *The Clerk took actions to draft and circulate a programme and proforma for scoring with exemplar questions. It was noted it would be useful to ask about experience of the new AoC Governance Code and source emerging issues reports from the two new audit companies (Actions: Clerk i draft and circulate programme and proforma ii) share emerging issues reports from auditors).*

10. Appointment of the internal audit service

A one year extension was considered appropriate and would allow the internal auditor to commence planning for the next cycle of reviews following the outstanding one for 2021/22 on cyber security as previously discussed.

Recommendation: The Governing Body approve the 1 year extension of the internal auditor contract.

11. Governance Code for 2021/22 Accounts

Paper: College adoption of an appropriate code of governance and AoC Governors' Council Code of Good Governance for English Colleges

The Clerk appraised members on the increased pressure on compliance as reflected in the latest AoC code of governance which was the most pertinent of the best practice guidance open to colleges. Members **endorsed the recommendation** from the Clerk and SMT to adapt to the requirements of the new AoC code before full transition for reporting against the 2022/23 accounts, which was considered a sensible timeframe. Nominations would be updated on relevant aspects of governance practice within the code such as the new requirement for colleges to undertake triennial external governance reviews.

Members asked about the wider implications of the code on the DfE's route to academisation which could come up in discussions with the Systems Leadership Working Party.

Recommendation: The Governing Body approve the approach towards adoption of the AoC Code of Governance.

12. Meeting assessment

Key areas from Stephen Carville's report to be considered in terms of future reporting.

13. Date of the next meeting: Wednesday 22 June 2022 at 16.00

The meeting ended at 09.46

Chair.....

Date.....

RRS 23/03/22