

Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee Minutes

Meeting	Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee	Date	Tuesday 25 th May 2023
Location	EKC Schools Trust Boardroom	Time	2 p.m.
Membership	Peter Goldsack (Chair), Peter Troke (PT) - virtual, Alan Horton (AH)		
In attendance	Tammy Mitchell (CEO), Chris Legg (CFO), Sharon Hollingsworth (DG), Claire Edgeworth – Notetaker, Stephen Whybrow (SW), Group Director of Estates (item 10)		

	ITEM	COMMENTS	ACTION
1	Welcome and apologies for absence	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There were no apologies for absence.	
2	Declarations of Interest	There were no additional declarations to the meeting other than those declared as standing.	
3	Minutes of the meeting held 21 March 2023	The minutes were agreed as an accurate record and the minutes were signed by the Chair.	
4	Matters Arising not covered by this agenda:	The Chair queried whether there was an update on cyber security and the CEO advised that the online cyber module has been shared and the Local Governing Board are responsible for checking this has been completed. Barry Boden, Group Director of Digital, will arrange something separately and cyber security will be in the strategic plan for next year. Trustees queried if the actions from the cyber audit had been picked up and the CEO advised that as per the Scheme of Delegation, this is delegated to the Heads and Chairs to check. Trustees questioned how they could be reassured this has been completed and the CEO advised there are mechanisms in place but cyber security is not a statutory duty. CEO will add this on to the Chairs Forum agenda. Trustees shared concerns regarding online mechanisms and felt the level of risk has increased and once the Trust becomes more public, the risk increases. The CEO reassured the Trustees that the schools do not have a	CEO

		central IT system, so any attack would only affect one primary school. The other schools can share resources. Trustees advised they wanted to make sure all schools do their best to mitigate risk and the CEO agreed that this was a priority for training next year. Discussion followed about safeguarding, reputational risk and the various platforms the school's use.	
5	Trust Internal Audit Plan	<p>The CFO shared the Trust Internal Audit Plan prior to the meeting. The Chair felt the document put into perspective what was being looked at by the Auditors. The Trustees found the level of detail reassuring and useful to understand the detail.</p> <p>The Internal Auditors will be attending the RAC Committee meeting on 12th July to present the findings from the Internal Audit.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTED: Trust Internal Audit Plan 2022-23</p>	
6	Safeguarding Audits 2023	<p>The CEO shared the Safeguarding Audits 2023 prior to the meeting.</p> <p>The CEO and Director of Operations conducted full Safeguarding Audits in all 6 schools during March 2023. A Trustee accompanied CEO on two of the visits to monitor the effectiveness of the audits and gain reassurance on the strength of safeguarding provision to feedback to the Trust Board. Local Board Governors also attended three of the reviews and this opened up more questions.</p> <p>The CEO advised that there were no statutory concerns and had found it useful to have the Trustee on the visits. The CEO undertook another visit to the schools, and it was noted that all the actions have been completed. The Trustees advised that they found the results of the Audits reassuring.</p> <p>The CEO advised that some Trusts have external people undertaking the reviews, but this service is expensive, but it would offer external quality assurance and asked the Trustees for their thoughts. The Trustees acknowledged that this was labour intensive, and the CEO might not have the time to complete the Audits in the future, especially if the Trust grows. The CEO advised that some Trusts have a Safeguarding lead, and some have a reciprocal arrangement to undertake reviews for each other. A suggestion was made that an external person could undertake a three-year review, and</p>	

		<p>this might offer a different viewpoint and would provide an independent judgement on the Trust and this could be via a reciprocal arrangement.</p> <p>The CEO advised that she will be advising the Trustees at the next Trust Board meeting, that the Galaxy Trust MOU has come up for renewal. The Galaxy Trust has merged and are now the Golden Thread Trust. The MOU states we will undertake three Trust level audits next year and maybe the Safeguarding Audit could be added to this. The Trustees queried if part of the Audits could be delegated to a local level. The CEO will investigate and will bring back to the Committee.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTED: Safeguarding Audits 2023</p>	CEO
7	Headteacher Support and Challenge Survey	<p>At the last RAC Committee meeting, the Trustees asked the CEO to provide reassurance that our Headteachers were appropriately looked after and were receiving appropriate levels of support and challenge from the Trust and their Local Boards.</p> <p>The Director of Operations had sent a confidential survey to the Headteachers and asked them to share their honest opinions about their experience of support and challenge from the Trust and from their Local Board. The results were circulated to the RAC Committee prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Overall, the results were very positive, and Chairs and their Local Boards should feel reassured that in general, the Headteachers have strong relationships with the leadership and governance arrangements and there are very few areas for concern.</p> <p>At the recent Headteacher's meeting, all the Headteachers agreed that there could be more probing and challenging questions at the Local Governing Body (LGB) meetings, and a plan has been put in place to provide some modelling for each Board. One of two of the Boards have invited the CEO to conduct a professional development session, and this can be made available to any of the Boards who think this would be of value.</p> <p>The report was shared with the 6 Chairs and will be discussed at the next Chairs Forum. The report shows that at three out of six schools, there is some work to be undertaken with the LGBs. Feedback at the Headteachers meeting was that there was lack of support and challenge and this</p>	

		<p>was a concern. Some Headteachers advised they would like their local Board to take more time to thank and praise staff. The Trustees queried that from the report it would seem only one school was unhappy, and the CEO advised that she did not know which school this was.</p> <p>The CEO had met with a Headteacher where the Chair is stepping down. The Headteacher advised that they would like a named governor who will be in touch regularly. The CEO acknowledged that she found the result from the final question concerning, that Headteachers did not feel confident that they could share concerns with someone on the local Board.</p> <p>AH advised, in his role as Chair at Holywell, that the school now has an Executive Headteacher but was unsure if queries are raised and reflected whether queries should be raised with the Chair or Executive Head. AH felt this might need including in the Scheme of Delegation.</p> <p>The Committee acknowledged that as the Trust grows, there needs to be stronger relationships between school leaders and LGB's but recognised that the CEO might not always be able to offer full support in this area. The CEO acknowledged that she felt her capacity was 10 schools, but over this would cause a problem.</p> <p>PG advised that in his role as Chair at Briary, he had discussed with the Headteacher the reasons for the lack of challenge. The CEO felt that some Governors do not want to challenge as they want to support their Headteacher and in particular Parent Governors, as they want to be supportive and steer away from challenging the Headteacher. It was also acknowledged that sometimes the Headteacher Report is comprehensive and therefore no questions are raised, or Governors lack confidence.</p> <p>The CEO advised that some Headteachers advise they do not see their Chair. Trustees felt that they would expect the Chair to be the confidante and offer support in all areas and maybe there needed to be more training. Trustees acknowledged that it is difficult if the Headteacher is not reporting any concerns, to identify if there are any problems but it was agreed that seeing someone face to face, enables you to identify easier if the Headteacher appears concerned. It was agreed the meetings needed to happen regularly and the Governors should be encouraged to look in the Governors Support Pack which has questions that Governors should be asking.</p>	
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		NOTED: Headteacher Support and Challenge Survey	
8	Growth Plan	<p>The CEO advised that Churchill Primary School are now in consultation and there is an expected conversion date planned for 1st December 2023. A Trustee advised that there had been some discussion on social media but the CEO advised that unless this has been put forward formally, then it is not accepted.</p> <p>The CEO advised that the secondary school provision on Sheppey has gone to the Academies Trust, we are therefore not taking part in any secondary school activity on Sheppey. The Chair of the Trustees will provide a full update at the Trustee Board meeting in July. The CEO advised that as a result of putting our name forward, this has led to being included in other useful meetings.</p> <p>The CEO advised that there is a Service Level Agreement in place between the Trust and Aylesham Primary School to provide one years' worth of school improvement and they will take part in all our training etc.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTED: Trust Growth Plan Update</p>	
9	Overview of Risk Register and Risk Movement Map	<p>The Senior Team, supported by EKC Group's Executive Director of Organisational Development, and Group Director of Governance created a new Risk Register in May 2023, and this was circulated prior to the meeting. The Trustees were reassured by the new document.</p> <p>The Trustees queried Risk 7 – Effective Implementation of the Trust Growth Strategy and whether any controls were needed; whether we are we actively looking for opportunities and what can be achieved in medium or long term. The CEO advised that the current strategy is that we are predominantly primary school provision, however if other opportunities presented themselves, we would look at it and it would be a Trust Board decision. The CEO advised that we are not actively looking for these opportunities. The CEO agreed that we needed a strategy should an opportunity arise and suggested that a call for an Extraordinary RAC committee meeting would take place to look at the risk and the Chair of the Trustees would be invited and anyone else who would have an interest. The RAC Committee agreed this strategy.</p>	

		<p>AGREED: If an opportunity for growth is presented, the CEO/Group Director of Governance will call an Extraordinary RAC Meeting and include the Chair of the Trustees and include anyone else with an interest.</p> <p>The Committee discussed expansion of the Trust and at what point a strategy for the future is needed. The CEO advised the plan was to reach 10 schools but felt that when we reach 8 schools, we probably need to start looking at a strategy. The CEO advised that some smaller Trusts have been advised that they will not be considered for expansion so there might be some opportunities to merge, but this would change the dynamics of the Trust.</p> <p>The Trustees reflected on the Headteacher Survey and relationships with other organisations had been highlighted as a concern noting they can impact on their ability to fulfil their role. A discussion followed regarding the risks and what they might look like, and these would predominantly be financial. The CEO will present a paper to the Finance Committee to help mitigate the risks and if approved they will recommend to the Trust Board in July. The RAC Committee will look at this at the first RAC meeting next year.</p> <p>The Trustees discussed the lack of understanding around high needs funding and external resources that help manage our more challenging pupils, which are over resourced. EKC Group are currently reviewing their strategies on how they manage this, and Trustees discussed if they decide to have referral centres, whether the schools could benefit from this. The CEO advised that she was due to discuss this imminently however the funding model between the two are very different. EKC Group are in a better position as they have a set price, which helps them to plan. The CEO will investigate this further.</p> <p>NOTED: Risk Register and Risk Movement Map</p>	<p>CEO</p> <p>CEO</p>
10	Health and Safety Audit incl. feedback from H & S Audits	<p>SW joined the meeting at 3.21 p.m.</p> <p>The Health and Safety Audits were circulated prior to the meeting.</p>	

SW advised that overall, the Health and Safety Audits were very strong, especially compared to last year. The only noticeable trend across the schools for improvement was around training records and Risk Assessments. The schools are utilising the National College, with minor changes at a couple to complete some of the Estate modules. Risk assessments are being completed at each school and all files are available to view. All schools are starting to implement improvements or changes to the way they write or share Risk Assessments, so by Summer 2023, all changes will be in place and actioned by each school.

Bysing Wood still have some actions outstanding, and SW is supporting them. East Stour have some training to catch up on and Palm Bay are putting modules in place with the National College.

Trustees queried that East Stour are behind on their playground equipment servicing and SW advised this was due to the Business Manager leaving but this is now being managed by the school.

Trustees questioned where the schools were, compared to when SW first visited the sites and SW advised that all compliance updates are up to date apart from any that are due shortly. All the schools are in a better place than last year.

The CEO acknowledged that SW and his team had had a big impact in the schools by supporting them and understanding the roles and responsibilities. The schools have different levels of staff support and experience in this area which can be challenging e.g., Bysing Wood have a Caretaker compared to other schools who have a Site Manager. SW has supported the Caretaker at Bysing Wood to understand his role. SW also acknowledged that Bysing Wood's audit has improved now they have a Business Manager, and they are catching up.

Trustees thanked SW and his team for their hard work.

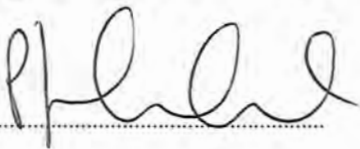
Bysing Wood have been unsuccessful in their CIF bid again but the reason is not known. East Stour and Palm Bay have been successful.

NOTED: Health and Safety Audit Update Report incl. feedback from H & S Audits

		SW left the meeting following this item.	
11	RAC Committee Self-Assessment	<p>In accordance with the Terms of Reference for the RAC Committee, the Committee is required to assess its performance against its Terms on an annual basis. At the last RAC Committee meeting the Committee Chair and Group Director of Governance agreed to carry out an assessment of the Committees performance against its Terms and the DG shared her report prior to the meeting.</p> <p>AH recommended that point 4.10 - the Trust Board and Committee membership are reviewed at every meeting - that it is an agenda item at each Trust Board meeting, so it is formally minuted. The CEO suggested that this was added to the DG report, and this was agreed.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AGREED – DG TO INCLUDE TRUST BOARD AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP IN HER REPORT TO THE TRUST BOARD.</p> <p>The Trustees felt the report was very comprehensive.</p> <p>The Trustees queried expanding the membership and DG advised that the Members have met with one new Trustee and are due to meet shortly with another one. The two new Trustees are due to attend the next Trustee Meeting. One of the new Trustees will be recommended to join the RAC Committee and the other to join the Finance Committee.</p> <p>The CFO queried that point 4.2 advises that one of the RAC Committee should have financial experience. The RAC Committee Chair has worked in the finance sector and the DG advised that our membership includes a Trustee with finance experience.</p> <p>It was noted that this would be an annual review.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AGREED – The RAC Committee Self-Assessment</p>	DG
12	Any Other Business	AH suggested that when Trustees visit the schools, it would be beneficial for the Trustees to meet afterwards to discuss the visit and complete the feedback report, it was proposed that a room be made available at the school to support this action.	

13	Matters Considered Confidential	There were no matters considered confidential	
14	Date and time of next Meeting	The next meeting is 12 th July 2023 at 1.15 pm for the Internal Auditors to present their report.	

There being no further business the meeting closed at: 3.43 pm.

Signed: 

Print: P. Goldsack

Date: 12/7/23