

Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee Minutes

Meeting	Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee	Date	Tuesday, 21 st May 2024
Location	EKC Schools Trust Boardroom	Time	2.00 p.m.
Membership	Peter Goldsack (Chair), Peter Troke (PT), <i>Alan Horton (AH)</i> ; Emma Wilkinson (EW)		
In attendance	<p><i>Tammy Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer (CEO)</i>; Chris Legg, Chief Financial Officer (CFO) – left meeting at 3.15 pm, Sharon Hollingsworth, Group Director of Governance (GDG), Claire Edgeworth – Notetaker.</p> <p>Guest – Christiaan De Lange – Azets attended via TEAMS for Item 5 Summer Macer, Chief Operations Officer (COO) attended for item 4 Stephen Whybrow (SW), Group Director of Estate attended via TEAMS for Item 6 Dan Lewsey, (DL) Director of Projects, Safeguarding and Compliance attended for item 7</p>		

	ITEM	COMMENTS	ACTION
1	Welcome and apologies for absence	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
2	Declarations of Interest	There were no additional declarations to the meeting other than those declared as standing.	
3	Minutes of the meeting held 19 th March 2024	The minutes of the meeting held on the 19 th March 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and the Chair will sign the minutes after the meeting.	
4	Matters Arising not covered by this agenda:	<p>Item 4: Testing of LGB Business Continuity Plans – Update</p> <p>The COO joined the meeting to give an update on the Testing of the LGB Business Continuity Plans.</p>	

	<p>The COO advised there are some developments as part of the leadership programme next year. There will be termly workshops for leaders and Headteachers and BCPs will be covered first in Term 1. In the workshop, they will be provided with advice and guidance and complete a desktop testing exercise, and this will be part of the follow up works for the COO and Business Leaders and for Dan Lewsey (DL), Director of Projects, Safeguarding and Compliance, as part of his role from the 1st September 2024. The Trustees queried if this will be collective training and the COO confirmed it would be and depending on the session, site Managers might also be invited to the training.</p> <p>The Trustees questioned whether it would be up to the individual schools to review their BCPs and undertake their own desktop exercise, and the COO advised this was to be confirmed. The COO advised that there was some sensitivity around practical exercises involving an intruder on site, with primary aged children.</p> <p>Governors suggested that cyber security processes should also be tested. The CFO advised that the schools have their own systems, so there is a lower risk of a Trust-wide failure, than if all shared one system. The COO advised that at the Termly Operational Group Meetings with the Business Managers, cyber security is a standard agenda item. Following the last two Cyber Security workshops the Headteachers have been managing who needs access to emails.</p> <p>Trustees questioned what the Trust role was in the BCP and whether the plans were bespoke to each school. The COO advised that the BCPs are owned by the school, but the Trust will offer any support needed and offer guidance and support.</p> <p>The COO was thanked for her update and left the meeting at 2.25 p.m.</p>	
5	<p>Feedback from Internal Audit Review</p> <p>CDL, Internal Auditor, joined the meeting at 2.30 p.m.</p> <p>The Internal Audit Report 2023 – 2024 was shared with the RAC Committee prior to the meeting. The Chair welcomed CDL to the meeting.</p>	

	<p>CDL gave a quick summary of the report. The Audit was carried out in February 2024. Page 2 of the report explains the scope and that they had reviewed Payroll, IT Assets, Income and Budgets, and had looked at a sample of each. Budgets were reviewed and discussed, procedures were tested to make sure they were in accordance with ESFA requirements and to make sure everything was in place.</p> <p>CDL advised that on pages 3 and 4 they had noted some advisories. The Auditors looked at a sample of employee contracts, from payroll and worked backwards. A sample of contracts were looked at and not all the contracts were signed. As part of the process, the Auditors recommended that schools should amend their payroll records to the contracted wage/wage increase or issue an increase letter. Management advised they do not re-issue contracts to all staff after a pay award, although they do receive a notification. The last advisory for payroll was that any variances on the payroll report of more than £500 per month per employee, should be reviewed. The Auditors recommended decreasing the threshold. Management advised that this had been actioned and the threshold was now £300.</p> <p>The Auditors looked at IT assets and how they are recorded by the schools, and also looked at the Fixed Asset Registers. It would appear from the sample that schools are taking different approaches. The Auditors recommended that some guidance is issued to support the schools.</p> <p>CDL advised there were no points raised in the Executive Summary on income, and the income lines had been agreed back to ESFA correspondence and was correct and up to date. In the report there are some detailed notes from page 6 onwards, but the Auditors were satisfied with the income controls.</p> <p>Budgets had been discussed and the Auditors found there was a good level of detail being applied, it is updated every month and the Auditors felt there was a lot of thought gone into the assumptions for budgets.</p> <p>The Trustees queried the self-service expense claims which were highlighted in the report, and whether this was around mileage claims. CDL advised that they had highlighted a few comments</p>	
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	<p>in the detailed work, but it did not need to be included in the Executive Summary and this was not a control weakness.</p> <p>Trustees queried what constituted non-business supplies for VAT mentioned on page 5. CDL advised this was from the previous cycle and was just a reminder that if an Academy has any income e.g. hire of facilities which could be chargeable to VAT, if we incur costs in relation to the business activities these can put on Reclaim form 126.</p> <p>The CFO advised the Trustees that he felt it was a very pleasing report. CDL and his team were thanked for their hard work and CDL left the meeting.</p> <p>The Trustees discussed the signing of staff contracts and the CFO agreed with the report that this is good practice. The contracts are held in the schools and the COO is going to oversee this.</p> <p>Trustees queried the payroll variances and the CFO advised that the Payroll Manager produces a report each month for the CEO and CFO and provides a breakdown of why it has changed e.g. overtime.</p> <p>Trustees discussed school lettings and the CFO advised that the Secondary School would have a lot of lettings, so this will need to be reviewed.</p> <p>The meeting agreed that this should be put on the next agenda to check all items are covered. GDG to include on the next agenda.</p> <p>NOTED: Feedback from Internal Audit Review</p>	<p>GDG</p>
<p>6. Health and Safety update incl. feedback from H & S audits</p>	<p>SW joined the meeting to present the Health and Safety update report. The Health and Safety update, and an update from the Health and Safety Audits, had been shared prior to the meeting. SW was thanked for all the work he had undertaken.</p> <p>The Trustees did not raise any questions from the papers.</p> <p>SW advised that East Stour had been unsuccessful in their CIF bid.</p>	

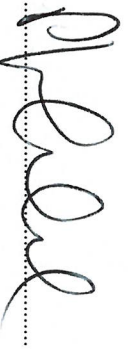
	<p>SW advised that there had been improvement at all the schools. SW is due to meet the COO to look at Risk Assessments. SW has put some example Risk Assessments on the Trust intranet, and no questions were raised from the Business Managers at the recent Termly Operations Group Meeting. There is no contractual work outstanding but there is some remedial work. Some work is being undertaken during holidays when it is less disruptive.</p> <p>Governors queried if SW would provide an update on the Sheppey Secondary School. SW advised that there was some sensitivity around being able to access the site. SW wants to look at remedials and what work is planned over the summer months, and SW is unsure if any servicing has been booked in. Trustees queried if we would continue with the current contractors at the school, and SW advised they would keep good contractors or those already in contract, but it was also an opportunity to look at best price.</p> <p>SW left the meeting at 14.49.</p> <p>NOTED: Health and Safety update incl. feedback from H & S audits</p> <p>The CEO shared an update paper prior to the meeting and DL attended the meeting to present the paper on behalf of the CEO.</p>	
7.	<p>Safeguarding Audits 2023</p> <p>DL advised that following a review of the Safeguarding audit process, it was clear that safeguarding checks at school, Governor and Trust level all happen throughout the year, but nothing ties them together. The new form will pull together all the three points of Safeguarding monitoring. This year the schools have completed a whole years monitoring in two days, and DL or the CEO has moderated this work. Next year there will be a plan showing when timely checks will be undertaken to ensure the right checks are being undertaken at the right times during the academic year e.g. key recruitment dates are May and October, so these are the dates that the recruitment checks need to be undertaken. This should ensure that the work is not being doubled up. Work needs to be carried out to ensure that Governor checks are also carried out at the right points, to provide assurances and triangulation of safeguarding monitoring and evaluation.</p>	

	<p>Trustees advised that they liked Appendix 1, and this shows what should have been done and what questions to ask. DL advised that he will devise some questions to ask which can support monitoring. Trustees acknowledged that at the Governors Conference, Governors felt it would be useful to have some good questions to ask and queried if there was an opportunity to look at trends. DL confirmed it was and that through the monitoring done this year, it was picked up that there needed to be some training around Prevent, as teachers and support staff do not know local threats. DL would like to put on some specific training in Term 6 around what to look for and how to respond.</p> <p>Trustees queried that some used a form from The Key and questioned which part of the CEO monitoring they should use as a sample. DL advised this would be different for each school and if they are RAG rated, this would be the starting point. Discussion followed how the form would support Governors.</p> <p>Trustees queried what the position was around social media checks on recruiting staff. DL advised that schools are undertaking it at different degrees. The COO has produced a Trust template and DL needs to review this.</p> <p>Trustees acknowledged that although it is good that schools are autonomous, a lot of what is discussed is around consistency and this makes it difficult. Trustees agreed that at the Trustees visits, they needed to make sure Safeguarding is being monitored.</p> <p>Trustees queried the timescale for DL to implement the form and DL advised he starts his new role on the 1st September but is aware there are some checks needed in September. Trustees questioned whether Safeguarding was a standard agenda item for the LGB meetings, and they were assured it was, but not what monitoring has been undertaken. This might need to be in the Headteacher report.</p> <p>Trustees questioned that in the paper it states that monitoring for schools would be all the time, Governor in the Spring and Trustees in the Summer. Trustees advised that they undertake their visits ad hoc. CDC will share the Trustee visits for next year and DL will capture this.</p>	<p>CDC</p>
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	<p>DL left the meeting at 3.28 pm.</p> <p>Trustees discussed Governors reports and how Safeguarding could be captured. The forms go to the full Trust Board and CEO has a copy of the minutes.</p> <p>NOTED: Safeguarding Audits 2023</p>	
<p>8. Risk Management including Risk Register</p>	<p>The CFO reflected on Risk 5, (safe culture and safeguarding) noting that it has reduced in probability following discussion by committee members at the last RAC committee meeting. The recruitment of a permanent Director of Projects, Safeguarding & Compliance is significant in building capacity within the central team to mitigate against this risk. This role will also support in the treatment of risks 2 and 8 by adding more support, challenge and oversight to all the Trust's academies.</p> <p>A new Trustee has been recruited by the Members and will bring extensive background in corporate affairs to the Board around risk management. At the end of Risk 5, (safe culture and safeguarding) where the risk was sub-categorised, GDPR has been added and the mitigations. This is a risk which cannot be removed.</p> <p>Trustees queried Risk 18 - secondary school provision. Finance is at a 3, but Trustees were under the impression that the school was being financed and had been reassured, so they were unsure why it was still a 3. The CFO advised that it was a long-term view as the Trust has financial protection around not hitting pupil numbers but is a risk at Year 3 when the protection runs out. The Trustees discussed what could happen if numbers were not reached and the CFO advised the finance risk is redundancy. The meeting discussed the TUPE process and the push for recruitment. Trustees questioned whether the risks could be split into separate ones and the CFO advised it was probably best to leave where it is for the short term, as our reputation could increase pupil numbers. The Trustees discussed if there might be a case for having a separate risk register.</p> <p>Trustees queried if safe culture and safeguarding would go back up when EKCSS goes online and the CFO advised that once we are in the school, the decision can be made.</p>	

		No further questions were raised.	
9.	RAC Committee self-assessment	<p>NOTED: Risk Management including Risk Register</p> <p>The GDG advised that in accordance with the Committees Terms of Reference, the Chair and GDG undertook a self-assessment exercise against the Terms to determine whether the assessment provided assurance that the Committee is meeting its Terms of Reference. The Chair advised that going forward the governance structure of the Trust is likely to include an Education Committee as the Trust is growing. GDG expressed concern that the Trustees already undertake a lot in their role.</p> <p>An emerging risk was identified that the Trust membership might need to be expanded so Trustees have capacity and oversight. GDG to add this to the Trust Board agenda.</p> <p>Trustees were satisfied with the reported self-assessment outcomes.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">GDG</p>	
10.	Any Other Business	No further business.	
11.	Matters Considered Confidential	There were no matters considered confidential.	
12.	Date and time of next Meeting	The next meeting is 26 November 2024 at 2.30 p.m.	

There being no further business the meeting closed at: 3.42 pm.

Signed: 

Print: R Goldsack

Date: 5/2/25