



## Audit Committee Minutes

10<sup>th</sup> May 2023

10 am

*To be held at Landscope House*

*Please note that the meeting will be recorded for minuting purposes only – any objections please raise with the Governance Professional before the meeting.*

**Present:** Dominic Course (Chair)  
Sarah Cox  
Graeme Scott

**In attendance:** Matt Matthew (DCEO)

**Minutes:** Charlotte Roe (GP)

No	Item	Action
1.	<p><b>Welcome and Apologies</b> The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome. The apologies from Nicky Dunford were accepted.</p>	
2.	<p><b>Declarations of Business Interests</b> The CEO is a trustee of the Bearnas Education Foundation. Dominic Course is Chair of Governors at South Dartmoor Community College and a director of DACORS Ltd. Sarah Cox is a shareholder of S Cox &amp; Co, and Naked Sprout Ltd, a trustee of The Fryer Welfare Trust and The Fryer Recreational Trust and a trustee of Drake's School PTFA. Graeme Scott is Executive Chair of The Mario Framework.</p>	
3.	<p><b>Any Other Business</b> Analysis of Members' Role 2022 presented at the last AGM in July 2022, the following was agreed for the Audit Committee: <i>Add a mechanism to the Risk Management Policy that any score above an agreed figure is reported to the Members, together with mitigating actions. The Audit Committee, supported by the Deputy CEO, will consider the appropriate score and ensure any risks above this level are reported to Members with the mitigating actions to reduce the risk.</i> It was agreed that this point would be dealt with under Item 14.</p>	
4.	<p><b>Minutes of the previous meeting</b> The minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2023 were <b>accepted</b> as a true record.</p>	
5.	<p><b>Matters Arising from the meeting held on 18th January 2023</b> (not included within the agenda) 5.5.10.3 Update on policy around parents transporting children in private cars. The DCEO and GP explained that this had been discussed with the Health &amp; Safety Lead who had advised that the DCC advice was that schools should avoid making arrangements on behalf of parents transporting children. Transporting pupils was already covered within the Devon Outdoor Educations Visit and Off-Site Visits policy which was adopted in conjunction with the Trust's own Management of Outdoor Education policy. Within these policies there was a use of parents/volunteers form which must be used if the school was arranging parents to transport pupils. <i>The Trustees raised concerns around whether schools were using the form as advised.</i></p>	

	<p>The DCEO <b>agreed</b> to send out a reminder to the Academy Heads. <i>The Trustees suggested that each academy had a pool of a few parents where the checks had been made including DBS and only these parents were used if the academy needed to arrange for a pupil to be transported.</i> The DCEO <b>agreed</b> to research into this.</p> <p>5.5.10 Clarification regarding the incident reported under H&amp;S (30th November 2022) It was confirmed that the ‘amputation’ reported was a tip of a finger. It was confirmed that a door jamb had been attached to prevent a reoccurrence. <i>The Trustees also suggested that the language used in reports was reviewed.</i></p>	DCEO
7.	<p><b>Internal Audit</b></p> <p>The finance systems internal audit report was circulated before the meeting. The DCEO reported that the finance processes had been monitored. The advice from the auditors was there needed to be more integrated processes between systems. At the same time, in F&amp;GP meetings, improvements had been suggested and made in the reporting systems such as the Finance Manager identifying key focus for reporting. <i>The Trustees asked if the F&amp;GP meeting still received the comprehensive finance dashboard.</i> The DCEO said that this was also circulated with the F&amp;GP agenda. The DCEO said that the auditors did not suggest a model of how to report the finance. The DCEO had made comparisons with other Trusts and felt that the Link Academy’s system was robust though time consuming. The auditors had since reviewed the improvements and confirmed that it addressed the issue.</p>	
8.	<p><b>External Audit</b></p> <p>8.1 Trustees considered the Bishop Fleming’s Kreston Academies Benchmarking Report 2023 – the report was circulated before the meeting. The Trustees discussed how the information was hard to analyse as the comparisons were based on pupil numbers only which generated varying factors such as the Trust’s pupils were spread across 16 schools. It was noted that nationally there was a reduction in reserves and an increase in costs. Across the report, the Link Academy was average apart from the teacher/support staff costs however that was related to the Trust being made up of small schools. <i>The Trustees asked if there was anything that could be done to reduce this budget line.</i> The DCEO explained that this was discussed in the F&amp;GP meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023. He added that there was also uncertainty around staff awards. It was felt that there would be little funding to support any pay awards. The DCEO advised that the finance team’s working theory was a 5% pay award for teachers for budgetary purposes. <i>The Trustees noted that the unions had rejected the last pay award on the grounds that it was not to be funded by the government. The Trustees suggested that there was consideration around growth and retention of pupils.</i> The DCEO said that across the Trust pupil numbers were down by 18. <i>The Trustees commented that in a small school the loss of 1 family of 3 children had a significant impact. The Trustees asked how the trust actively challenged the reasons why families moved their children and was there anything the trust could do, adding that it was difficult to separate anecdotes to fact?</i> It was <b>agreed</b> to raise this discussion at Board of Trustees. The DCEO added that the Trust was reviewing pre-school provision which would naturally increase pupil numbers. It was also suggested that local board governors could be having these conversations in their meetings with Academy Heads. <i>The Trustees asked about staff retention, in particular senior teachers.</i> The DCEO said that this was stable with not a lot of movement out of the Trust. The meeting had a discussion around succession planning.</p> <p>8.2 Recommendation for the appointment of external auditors (email sent on 1st February 2023 – Evaluation matrix was completed by the Trustees and it was <b>agreed to recommend</b> to the Members to remain with Bishop’s Fleming for 3 years.</p>	GP  GP
9.	<p><b>PE and Sports Grant</b></p> <p>It was noted that in the last year’s audit the Trust demonstrated that the spending of the grant was compliant. The Trust had had several Ofsted inspections and no issues had been raised. The DCEO confirmed that the current year’s funding was being spent accordingly.</p>	

10.	<p><b>Health &amp; Safety</b></p> <p>10.1 Proposal to report the threshold for violent incidents – GS reported that he had discussed the threshold with the Trust’s Safeguarding Lead who had made some changes to ensure there was consistency across the Trust. The most recent report reflected the changes. It was noted that it was not an exact science. It was further noted that under reporting must be avoided as well. It was noted that recent Ofsted inspection across the Trust reflected that safeguarding was strong trust-wide.</p>	
11.	<p><b>Data Protection</b></p> <p>The DCEO reported that there had not been any breaches. There had been 2 SAR requests which were not vexatious and had been addressed by the Trust’s DPO.</p>	
12.	<p><b>Cyber Security</b></p> <p>12.1 The draft cyber response plan was circulated before the meeting. The DCEO reported that Limbtec were addressing the action points. All the academies had policy cyber alarms installed which meant RPA requirements were being fulfilled. All staff/governance now have multifactor authentication. The meeting confirmed they all had it. There were still smaller tasks to be completed, some on hold whilst the filtering system was resolved. Once finished the cyber policies such as the cyber response plan would be completed. <i>The Trustees asked questions of clarification on timings and it was <b>agreed</b> that the committee would review the plan again in the Autumn and possibly select follow-up audits in specific areas. The Trustees acknowledged it was a substantial piece of work, however, was effective and vital to protect the Trust.</i> There was a discussion around considering having the Trust accredited through the Cyber Essential Scheme – it was <b>agreed</b> to revisit this in the new academic year.</p> <p>12.2 Back-up arrangements – DCEO reported that trust-wide back-up was through 365 cloud base. There was no onsite storage, thus mitigating risks. The DCEO added that the speed of the internet was improving trust-wide. 10 schools were part of the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Programme though this had not started as it was down to the government. <i>Following a question from a Trustee, the DCEO said it could not be expedited.</i></p>	<p>GP</p> <p>GP</p>
13.	<p><b>Safeguarding</b></p> <p>The Trustees thanked GS for his safeguarding reports. The meeting commented on the Ofsted comments and how consistency safeguarding was judged as strong across the academies. It was noted that the Trust must not become complacent. GS said that reporting was improving across the trust. The main issue was pupil on pupil incidences across the Trust. Supervision remained a need for the DSLs however this had a funding implication. Electronic reporting was under review – it was noted that Sparkwell school (who was joining the Trust in Autumn 2023) were using Myconcern and the Trust’s Safeguarding Lead was visiting the school to review the programme. The DCEO reported that 2 of the Trust’s schools had C-Poms in place. <i>The Trustees discussed the peer-on-peer increase and asked what could be done to reduce this.</i> It was reported that the Inclusion hub were supporting the schools and that more support from DCC with EHCPs would help. It was added that nationally there was an increase in incidences in this area however in The Link Academy was relatively small. It was felt that this was because of being small schools. The GP said that this was highlighted and discussed in the S&amp;C meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 and would be reflected in their minutes. It was added that the trust-wide relational approach strategy would also support this area as a long-term measure.</p>	
14.	<p><b>Risk Register and Strategic Plan</b></p> <p>14.1 The DCEO shared the Trust’s Every risk register dashboard. He reported that each academy’s risk register had been reduced through grouping items from over 30 to 12. The registers had now been handed back to the Academy Heads to review that the RAG rating and timescales still applied as well as the applied mitigations to the risks. It was felt it was much more manageable. <i>On reviewing it, a Trustee reported that the hope was that this piece of work would ensure consistency across the academies and felt there were still discrepancies, however recognised that there would</i></p>	

	<p><i>be individual risks to academies in areas such as old buildings.</i> It was added that preventing the registers to increase in risks again was important. <i>The Trustees suggested that there were user guides/videos for the administrators to use to ensure the register was being used consistently trust-wide. The Trustees also asked about the 'Assumed Treated'?</i> The DCEO said that this was part of the Academy Heads' review and so do not assume that this was the final document. The DCEO reported that Trustees were no longer owners and just had oversight. The central risks had been assigned to EIT/HR/DCEO and CEO. <i>The Trustees raised a concern about the amount of risks owned by the DCEO and CEO.</i> There were further meetings arranged to iron out the final details. <i>The Trustees said that it would be advantageous if there was an audit trail identifying the owner of the risk and the progress.</i> The DCEO said that any reports related to that risk would sit behind as well.</p> <p>The meeting then discussed at what point the risks were referred to Members. It was proposed that the red risks were shared to Members and Trustees, giving a breakdown of the risks. <i>The Trustees said that for reassurance they would like an oversight of the whole register and asked for a summary report with a RAG illustration.</i> The DCEO said he would investigate what reports could be generated from the Every system. In the meantime, it was <b>agreed</b> that once all the meetings had been completed to finalise the process, the Audit committee would then review this again.</p> <p>14.2 Timescales for the risk register It was <b>agreed</b> that the Every risk register process would be completed by the end of the current academic year.</p> <p><b>Strategic Plan</b> The DCEO reported that the Strategic Plan was being populated and then Trustees would be asked to complete their section.</p>	<p>DCEO GP</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p><b>Policies</b> 15.1 Risk management policy It was noted that this would be amended once the Every risk register process was completed and then presented to the committee. The GP advised that the policy was due for renewal. It was <b>agreed</b> that the DCEO would circulate it and the Audit committee would approve it by email as soon as it was available.</p>	<p><b>Trustees</b></p>

**Meeting finished at 11.11 am**