

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

Annual Pre-Meeting with Auditors

Governing Body members of the Audit & Risk Committee met with representatives from NIAO and RSM NI at 4.45pm, prior to the full Committee meeting.

Minutes of the unreserved business meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee held on 18 November 2020 on Microsoft Teams, commencing at 5.00pm.

Present: Mrs M Hamilton, Mr W McCluggage (Chair), Mr T Montgomery

In Attendance: Mr D Conliffe (DfE), Dr P Graham, Mr M Higgins, Ms D Kerr (67.13(i)), Mr S Lavery, Mr K Leckey (67.7), Mr I McCartney (RSM NI), Mr B McGahan, Mr B O'Neill (NIAO), Prof T Scott, Ms J Small

Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

67.1 Apologies/Welcome

An apology was noted for Mr Hutchinson.

The Chair welcomed Dr Philip Graham to the meeting as an observer, pending his appointment to the Audit & Risk Committee by the Governing Body on 25 November 2020.

67.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

5.09pm Mrs Hamilton joined the meeting.

67.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2020 were approved.

Proposed: Mrs Hamilton Seconded: Mr McCluggage

67.4 Matters Arising

The updated Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference were taken as read. Members endorsed the document for presentation to the Governing Body.

The first draft of the College's Raising Concerns policies for staff and external bodies was considered and members' comments on the separation of policy and procedural elements of the documents noted.

ACTION: The draft policy would be revised to reflect members' feedback and submitted to the next meeting of the Governing Body in February.

Members noted that all other matters arising had been included as agenda items.

67.5 Chair's Communication

None.

67.6 Correspondence

Members noted an update on the College Development Plan (CDP) previously circulated on 14 October 2020. Ms Small highlighted that the change in enrolment figures shown in the updated version of the CDP resulted from the exclusion of unregulated activity, at the request of the Department.

It was agreed that a number of Registers would be considered as the next item on the agenda.

67.13(i) Registers

Ms Kerr updated members on the current status of the Information Governance, Freedom of Information and Raising Concerns registers and stated that information on 'near misses' would be reported to future meetings of Committee.

Ms Kerr advised that one Subject Access Request (SAR) was currently ongoing and members noted that details of SARs are included in the Information Governance report.

The Chair and Dr Graham endorsed the online Information Governance training provided for staff and commented on its high quality.

ACTION: An update on Information Governance would be brought to the next meeting, with emphasis on staff awareness training.

5.37pm Ms Kerr left the meeting. Mr Leckey joined the meeting.

67.7 Health & Safety Update

Mr Leckey spoke to his report on Health & Safety and expanded on key issues including accidents, and insurance claims, where the effect of legacy issues was clarified and the current review of insurance noted. Members noted that NRC were the only college to date to have undergone an internal audit on Covid-19 actions by the college, which had received a satisfactory assurance rating with 1 minor recommendation. Mr Leckey also reported that the first meeting of a reconstituted College Covid Committee to focus on business as usual had taken place earlier in the day.

Members were pleased to note that the College was operating within the guidance of the Public Health Agency (PHA) framework for Covid-19, along with the continued reduction in accident numbers.

The Chair thanked Mr Leckey, members of the Estates team and all staff involved in promoting Health & Safety across the College, especially in relation to the Coleraine decant.

5.53pm Mr Leckey left the meeting.

67.8 Internal Audit

Mr McCartney presented the Internal Audit report on Covid-19 Measures and Lessons Learned which, as previously advised, had received satisfactory assurance with 1 minor recommendation.

The Chair was happy to note the level of assurance received, especially given the extensive and diverse spread of campus locations, and thanked Mr McCartney for the separate report on Board Assurance for FE Colleges, which he had circulated.

Committee noted the Internal Audit Progress Report and welcomed the clear reporting schedule. Mr Lavery advised that the College maintains its own record of internal and external audit recommendations, which would come to the next meeting of Committee as part of a report.

ACTION: Mr Lavery will provide the Chair with a copy of outstanding audit recommendations.

Mr McCartney acknowledged open and responsive interactions and a good relationship with College managers.

67.9 External Audit

Mr O'Neill took members through the Draft Report to those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG), noting information on further testing to be completed. He reported that it was proposed to certify the 2019/20 financial statements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modifications.

Mr O'Neill gave credit to Mr Lavery and the finance team for a good report with very few adjustments and thanked members for agreeing to the deferment of the meeting, which had allowed completion of the audit.

Committee reviewed the findings set out in the report and agreed that:

- all actions had been completed;
- members were comfortable that liability relating to adjusted misstatements detailed on page 9 of the report had been recognised by NIAO.

Mr O'Neill confirmed that one assessment of risk at planning was not considered a significant risk

The Principal confirmed that a Priority 3 recommendation had been addressed and that adequate arrangements were in place to track recommendations coming from NIAO.

Mr Higgins thanked Mr Lavery and the finance team for their work to ensure completion of the audit. Referring to holiday pay, he advised that adjustments had been made in final accounts by all colleges, as agreed with DfE and NIAO.

The Chair commended NIAO and College managers for a good collaborative working relationship.

67.10 Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements External Audit

Mr Lavery presented the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements. He detailed key changes to the previous version of the report and advised that presentational and text issues would be amended for the published version, which would be agreed by the Governing Body before being laid in the NI Assembly.

ACTION: The Audit & Risk Committee agreed to recommend approval of the Annual Report and Financial Statements 2019/20 to the Governing Body.

Proposer: Mrs Hamilton Seconder: Mr Montgomery

67.11 Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report

Members considered the Committee Annual Report and suggested changes, which would be included in the final version. The Chair obtained assurances from the Executive team on specific statements in relation to fraud and assurances within the annual report.

The report was approved subject to the amendments.

Proposed: Mr Montgomery Seconded: Mrs Hamilton

ACTION: The report would be presented to the Governing Body.

67.12 Risk Register

Mr Higgins outlined changes to the Risk Register at October 2020 resulting from a recent risk workshop. He noted members' comments in relation to risk of personal data breach and areas of risk narrative.

ACTION: Risk relating to personal data breach would be retained on the Corporate Risk Register and gross score to be updated accordingly.

67.13 Registers

Committee noted information on Direct Awards Contracts (DACs) to 18 November 2020, including CPD comments on any DAC above £5,000.

Mr Laverty advised that the Gifts & Hospitality register would be published on the College website shortly.

67.14 Any Other Business

Dr Graham thanked members for the opportunity to sit in on the meeting prior to his appointment to Committee.

67.15 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on 10 March 2021.

There being no other business, the meeting concluded at 6.48pm.

Mr W McCluggage



Chair

Date 10 March 2021

Mrs K Wallace



Secretary