

AURIGA AUDIT, RISK AND EFFECTIVENESS COMMITTEE MEETING

THURSDAY 21 JANUARY, 6.30PM – MICROSOFT TEAM SHARE

Attendees

- Susie Connor
- Ivan Pryce
- Jo Dixon (Chair)
- Mike Harlow
- Paul Roberts
- Lorna Goodwin
- John Kipps
- Don Blaylock
- Natasha Chander (Clerk)

Apologies

None,

Declarations of interest

None

Minutes

The minutes from the last meeting were agreed as accurate by the committee.

Matters Arising (not covered by agenda)

Item 1 - SC has written a draft of the Statement of Intent for the management of Websites but as the Admin Consultation involves some role changes it is on hold for the moment.

Item 2 - A statement is still needed for Capella on the Risk Register. IP and SC will look into that.

Item 3 - Discussing a common SDP format across the school needs to be carried forward. IP to pick it up with JK and DB and the new Capella Head.

Action IP: Pick up cross school SDP format

The Chairs actions in items 4 and 5 are completed.

Item 7 - AGM has happened.

Item 9 –The Finance and Resources committee are going to look at the annual programme.

Item 10 – has been done.

Item 11 – HJ to update the business plan. Action – IP to liaise with HJ and SC.

Item 12 – IP has investigated the Trust Leadership membership of the Key. He asked for further examples of what it might contain but nothing has been received which could differentiate it from the Trust for School Governors and School Leaders. He will send out some enquiries to other CEOs to see which of them are using it

Action IP.

Item 13 – Induction is still pending. SC is pulling together an induction policy to include everyone- trustees, governors, new staff and volunteers.

Ongoing discussions are being held about Governance.

Audit and risk:

Agenda item 4 – Note appraisal of Central Trust Staff

All Headteachers and the CEO have had their appraisals.

SC said that the Trust Administrator post had been tied in with the consultation because objectives can't be set until that is done. Once that is signed off, SC will undertake appraisal of central role holders.

Agenda item 5 – Management letter and actions in response to audit

All items have now been addressed.

Agenda item 6 - Appointment of Auditors

According to the new guidance in the Academies Handbook, the main auditors and internal auditors need to be separate. SC recommended continuing with MHA as main auditor. They provide a good service and have a set-up enabling them to do an external audit of financial statements efficiently and remotely. They also do have the history with the trust which helps considerably.

Chair agreed that they do give a very comprehensive presentation to the Trustees at the AGM which is very helpful.

Trustee question: *If the Trust Board approve the accounts which is accompanied by the audit findings previously, why are we looking at them again? Is it the normal process that the audit committee looks at the draft of the final accounts before the Trust Board signs it off?*

A: Chair confirmed that it is a case of picking up that the actions remain in hand and nothing is still outstanding at this point.

SC: On the Management Letter, if they were to raise something material, they give a time scale for resolving it. That is why it is necessary to carry on looking at it to make sure all the points have been addressed.

Governors agreed that they are happy with MHA continuing to do the external audit.

SC: Previously the external auditors did the internal audit as well but that is no longer allowed. The preferred option is a specialist external independent agency to give a robust opinion on the state of the controls within the Trust. Having looked at three companies, SC recommends Strictly Education. They are the cheapest and will audit every term which meets the requirements of the Financial Academies Handbook. They also have a good reputation in the sector.

Trustee question: *The bid included an enormous range of things the Trust could do over the three-year period. Do you think all these things are achievable in 3 contact days a term?*

SC thinks they will provide a long list of information they will require and a team will work through them in a day, with a follow up meeting or list of queries to be answered.

Governor question: *Has there been a dialogue with the auditors about what the programme should look like?*

SC: The Education Skills Funding agency provide a recommended list. Strictly Education have got a wide remit which has the advantage of not just being a financial audit (which is provided by the external financial auditors anyway).

Governors confirmed their support of SC's choice of internal auditors and appreciated the way the bid had been specifically tailored towards the trust. SC will contact Strictly Education about the programme and progress.

Agenda item 7 – Agree programme for 2020/21 Internal Audit

Trustee question: *We did have a provisional programme, set 3 years ago for this year for payroll, HR, data, IT and GDPR. Are these dependent on new systems being up and running or do we need to wait until the new systems are more embedded?*

SC's suggestion is to start with GDPR and to come back to HR management next round.

Action: The Chair to liaise with SC by email on the rest of the programme.

Agenda item 9 – Review progress since AAT Effectiveness Review

Trustee question: *Any questions on the circulated document 'Progress since the Effectiveness Review', which was previously undertaken about two and a half years ago and reviewed last year. Suggest that this or a similar exercise be done from scratch, post- COVID, when things are a bit more normal?*

IP: Unfortunately, the situation the schools find themselves in inevitably has had an impact in delaying progress towards some more of those points. All Heads have had to respond to changes in direction and to guidance from the Department of Education in terms of how to make schools safe. The next main priorities are the consultation and the scheme of delegation and they go hand in hand.

It was agreed that IP and SC would look at the next steps on the scheme of delegation and put a development plan together with a time line.

Action: IP & SC

The committee will pick this up at a suitable point and do a review from scratch when more progress has been made.

Agenda item 10- Review Risk register and AAT Risk Management

MH has experience and credentials in Risk Management and explained to the Committee how the risk register should be the talking point that drives actions. The starting point is to think about what the organisation is trying to achieve and what really stands in the way of that. The principal risks should be driving the agenda for this committee and the leadership team. Actions can bring risks to tolerable levels though they may still exist. The Trust and individual School Development Plans should be looked at, as well as who is responsible for owning the risk and how it can be brought down. The internal auditors should also be looking at the risks which are material to the schools' objectives.

SC would like to propose a revamp of the risk registers and how we manage them with MH's help. There will be a revised format for all schools and the Trust and will be a much shorter document.

Trustee question: *This sounds very positive. It sounds like a lot of work. Is there a time-line?*

A: Ideally by Easter. It should not be a huge amount of work as it is reflecting what the organisation is already worried about.

Action: SC to take forward with support as needed

Effectiveness:

1. Reports from Headteachers, including pupil numbers and any outstanding issues of concern:

IP Strathmore:

At the moment the issue is opening up for all pupils. On Mondays there is a regular Chairs of Governors and Heads meeting where everyone is updated and the information then cascaded down further. It is an update of the previous week at all schools and how the schools are responding to challenges with staff

and pupil attendance. The School is having to respond daily to changing events (for example this morning, a number of staff had to self-isolate -the DfE have pronounced that daily testing is no longer an option. This resulted in 3 classes being closed at short notice for staff, parents and transport).

Trustee question: *How is staff morale?*

IP: It has been positive and this has been helped by the fact that staff are now receiving appointments for vaccinations. Malden Oaks have been added to the list to receive them too.

JK Clarendon and Gateway:

Gateway are doing particularly well with 12 pupils in full time and 6 learning on-line (as a result of parental choice). Twickenham school have been very supportive and the relationship between the school and Gateway has been increasingly positive.

In Clarendon primary, attendance has been about 60% and the rest are not attending through parental choice.

In Clarendon secondary, it has become more difficult. There are currently 18 staff missing (about 40% of the staff) and 6 of them teachers (there are 9 classes in total). Parents have been very supportive and some positive comments have been received about the on-line offer. Morale has been good and was helped this week by news of the vaccinations, as by next half term, people will have reached a reasonable degree of immunity. Morale did take a hit this afternoon as a result of Track and Trace calls.

DB Capella:

With 75% of parents wanting to send children in, Capella had been running on a one-week-in, one-week-out basis, with on-line learning for those at home. Unfortunately, this week, with Track and Trace calls and no longer being able to do serial testing, there are only 3 staff left and the school has had to be closed for tomorrow. The school is one bubble because it is so small. Up until now morale has been good and parents have been generally supportive but some families are being less objective today and strong comments were received regarding the school closure.

IP: It is great that vaccinations are being scheduled in imminently. That will protect staff but the testing process must continue as the staff could still be carriers. Staff will be tested twice a week which is another drain on the time of staff trying to do two jobs – on-line and in-school delivery. The real risk is that all schools will almost totally shut if we run out of staff.

Chair: Thanks were given to management and staff for all that they are doing acknowledging the very difficult times.

IP: All Heads are in frequent contact and have a weekly catch-up including communication with parents and the wider professional community. Classrooms need to be properly staffed in order to be safe. In comparison with other special needs schools in the borough, the Trust has done very well in terms of remaining open for as many days of the week as possible. It may be possible to get data to compare this with other boroughs which would give some context for parents who are frustrated with the situation.

Concern was expressed by Trustees about the stresses faced by management trying to look after staff and respond to distressed parents going through lock down three, in the winter months. It was hoped that half term would be an opportunity for management to recuperate.

DB's imminent completion of his interim role from Capella was discussed. The deadline for HT applications is the 28th January. Interviews for Headteacher at Capella are on 4th and 5th February. There have been conversations with strong potential applicants from different backgrounds so it is looking very positive.

2. Review LGB Scrutiny of teacher appraisal and progression:

This has been deferred to the summer term on the basis that although the process has happened the full reporting has not yet come to Governors.

3. Plans for stakeholder engagement in all academies:

The previous staff questionnaire was circulated but in view of the present circumstances, the Headteachers' opinions were sought as to whether it would be appropriate to use for staff, already under pressure.

Heads agreed that this format would not currently be appropriate and it was felt that staff have been asked to comment on what well-being things might work for them and what is going to be supportive. The Governors of each the schools have been looking at making contributions to staff well-being to show appreciation.

4. Plans for governance self -review:

A strategy day has been booked but it is almost certainly going to have to be on- line again in which case schools may need to rethink how they do their strategic planning to avoid a potentially less productive full day on line.

The Chair suggested last year's self-review exercise would be a good one to do again.

Action: Chair to forward that to Chairs of Governors for doing at some stage in the summer term.

5. Any other business

None.

Chair: thanked everyone once again for all they are doing under very difficult circumstances.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 23 June 2021