

## Audit Committee

### Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2026 at 4:30 PM

**Location:** Riverside College Halton, Kingsway, Widnes, Cheshire

**Present:** Karen Banks External Governor, Chair  
Louise Frost External Governor  
Andrew MacManus External Governor

**In Attendance:** Leeann Bellfield Vice Principal (Head of Centre, Cronton)  
Vici Cadwallader-Webb Head of Internal Audit, ICCA\*\*  
Ged Hanley Assistant Principal, (Systems Development & Funding)  
Julie Holland Deputy Principal (Finance & Resources)  
Catherine Shaw Head of Governance

*\*\*Remote attendance, via Microsoft Teams*

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

**Resolved:** The Committee received and accepted apologies for absence from Paul Leatherbarrow (External Governor). The Head of Governance advised that due to a conflicting commitment, it had been agreed for the Internal Auditor to join the meeting remotely at approximately 5:45pm.

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#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None declared.

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#### 3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

##### 3.1 Approval of the Minutes *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The minutes from the previous meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

##### 3.2 Matters Arising *(previously circulated)*

**Resolved:** The Committee noted that that there were no matters outstanding on the action log, nor any matters arising from the minutes.

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#### 4. Key Strategic Risk 1 – Achievement of Planned Student Numbers and Funding

The Assistant Principal delivered a presentation encompassing how funding works, key

constraints and associated risk. He highlighted the following aspects:

- The qualifying periods that determine when the college begins to generate funding, advising that timings were dependent upon the type of programme.
- Adult Skills Funding (ASF) - emphasised that withdrawals before the qualifying point resulted in zero income and this was drawn to the committee's attention as a key risk. Circumstances were outlined whereby adult learners may generate additional learning support (ALS) funding.
- 16 to 19 Funding – the various key components of this funding formula which included (i) the retention factor, (ii) programme cost weightings, (iii) English and maths funding, (iv) disadvantage block funding, (v) large programme uplift, and (vi) area cost factor. An overview was provided explaining the main reasons for students leaving courses prior to the qualifying period. The committee received assurance that registers were completed from day one, which enabled the college to swiftly address any emerging trends relating to retention.
- Apprenticeships – significant variations were possible given the dependence upon group size and subject. There was a potential for funding to fluctuate month-to-month which was based on withdrawals and timely processing of learner status changes.
- Summary of key risks included (i) volatility of adult funding, (ii) learner retention in the early weeks, (iii) importance of accurate and timely withdrawal processing. The committee was advised that close monitoring and early intervention were essential to protect income.

*The Internal Auditor joined the meeting.*

During the subsequent discussion, a governor requested further information concerning the volatility of funding, particularly the impact of early withdrawals and whether unexpected variances could arise later in the year. The Deputy Principal (Finance and Resources) confirmed that funding was subject to monthly monitoring, with reasons for withdrawals analysed and funding profiles adjusted, as appropriate. This process ensured there were no unforeseen in-year funding issues.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the contents of the presentation and thanks were conveyed to the Assistant Principal.

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## **5. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS**

### **5.1 Apprenticeship Strategy and Delivery Model** *(previously circulated)*

The Internal Auditor presented this report and highlighted the following key aspects:

- Audit Findings and Recommendations – substantial assurance, strong compliance and high-quality support were evident. Recommendations included (i) monitoring contribution levels by group, automation of processes should a strategic aim be to grow the provision and (iii) setting caseload targets for staff.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – the introduction of standardised KPIs was recommended and reporting by exception to governors, to ensure any problem areas were identified and addressed.

A governor raised a question relating to prior learning price adjustments. In response, the Internal Auditor clarified the college's approach to adjusting TNP1(training price) and TNP2 (relating to end point assessments), together with the associated guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE).

During a discussion governors sought assurance on the financial efficiency and oversight of the apprenticeship provision. This related to the financial contribution, scalability, and performance monitoring. The Internal Auditor confirmed that the provision was cost-effective at the current scale, systems were fit for purpose, and performance was appropriately monitored. It was clarified that the resulting recommendations contained within the internal audit report had been made to strengthen contribution analysis and to introduce more standardised KPI reporting by exception, to support governance oversight.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the content of this report.

#### 5.2 **Additional Learning Support and High Needs Students** *(previously circulated)*

The Internal Auditor presented this report and highlighted the key findings. The audit provided substantial assurance, confirming that effective controls were in place. A recommendation was made to undertake a global year-end reconciliation to ensure that all additional learning support and high needs costs were fully recovered. This recommendation served to reflect the importance of robust cost recovery arrangements in light of evolving funding methodologies and increased sector scrutiny.

During a discussion, governors sought assurance regarding the effectiveness of additional learning support arrangements, including the College's approach to accepting students with high needs and the robustness of funding and cost recovery processes. The Internal Auditor re-affirmed the assurance provided in the report, noting the College's trusted status with local authorities and its practice of accepting only those students whose needs could be appropriately met. It was confirmed that the recommendation contained within the report would further strengthen year-end reconciliation processes and support full recovery of funding.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the content of this report.

#### 5.3 **Progress Report Internal Audit Plan 2025/2026** *(previously circulated)*

The Internal Auditor outlined the status of current and upcoming audits, including (i) the Board assurance framework, (ii) adult strategy, and (iii) readiness for qualification reform. She informed the Committee that no changes had been made to the audit plan as approved by the Audit Committee at the start of the academic year.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the report.

#### 5.4 **Emerging Themes and Sector Updates**

The Internal Auditor drew the Committee's attention to several emerging themes which included:

- The Schools White Paper on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Reform
- Revised Ofsted Inspection Framework
- Update in relation to the DfE year-end being 31<sup>st</sup> March for accounting purposes and reconciliation processes with colleges whereby year-end dates remain at 31<sup>st</sup> July.
- DfE Thematic Audits on areas such as learning support funding, bursaries, and advanced learner loans.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the report.

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## **6. RISK MANAGEMENT**

**To receive a report on risk management activities since December 2025 to date** *(previously circulated)*

The committee received a report on risk management activities that had taken place since December 2025. Governors scrutinised the updated Key Strategic Risk Register which included the sources of assurance mapping and the risk management action plan documentation. This confirmed that risk management processes continued to operate as expected and no new matters were raised for consideration.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the report.

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## **7. POLICIES**

**Disaster Management and Business Continuity Plan** *(previously circulated)*

The Deputy Principal outlined the proposed changes to this plan. The committee was advised that these included changes to the disaster management group / job titles and to ensure alignment with compliance and risk management requirements.

A discussion took place during which several questions were raised and addressed. In response, governors were advised of media communication arrangements in the event of a disaster, and they received confirmation that all appendices in the plan had been appropriately updated.

**Resolved:** The Committee recommended approval of the Disaster Management and Business Continuity Plan to the Board.

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## **8. FE SECTOR UPDATES RELATING TO GOVERNANCE AND RISK**

**Schools White Paper 2025, “Every Child Achieving and Thriving”** *(previously circulated)*

The major SEND reforms contained within the White Paper were considered by the committee in terms of risk, with discussions having taken place earlier in the meeting at agenda item 5.4.

**Resolved:** The Committee noted the contents of the report and awaited further information as it became available.

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## **9. ITEMS TO BE REPORTED TO THE BOARD**

**Resolved:** The Committee approved the items to be reported to the Board at its meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2026.

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## **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

**Resolved:** The Committee noted that there were no matters of urgent business for submission.

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## **11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:** The Committee noted that the next Audit Committee meeting was scheduled to take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2026 at 4:30pm.

**Signed**...Office copy signed by Karen Banks.....  
**Committee Chair**

**Date**.....22<sup>nd</sup> June 2026.....