



An Daras Trust
Igniting Curiosity Growing Capabilities

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30/6/2020

Minutes
Audit Committee Summer 2020
Monday 29th June 2020 at 9.30am remotely via Zoom

1. Join Meeting

It was confirmed that all participants had audio and video.

2. Welcome and Apologies

Present: Steve Tavener (Chair), Peter Hague (Vice), Trudy Rudge, Carol Green, Will Hermon (CEO)

Apologies: Jo Callow

In attendance: Toni Martin (Governance Officer), Emma Gilbert (CFO)

ST welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the meeting.

3. Declarations of Interest/Pecuniary Interests relevant to this Agenda

None declared.

4. Confirm minutes of previous Audit Spring Meeting (11th March 2020) and Matters Arising

- Confirm premises and maintenance costs of Launceston Pre-School (WH). *WH and EG are looking at this matter. On the agenda for full Board for 8th July 2020.*

ST challenged the point that data collection needs to be looked at in terms of the 'so whats' and not just looking at the raw data. The TLA and Audit committee will look at data in detail in the Autumn term to ensure we have an accurate picture and can then assess that any recovery plans are having an impact.

Action: When data produced for Directors, it needs to include the 'so what' for the data collected (WH)

Action: Recovery Plans to be discussed at Autumn TLA and Audit committees (WH)

Committee agreed the minutes were an accurate record and the Chair signed a copy.

5. Risk Register

WH highlighted the latest risk register with his input but noted that input is also required from the Board when assessing risks. He focussed on what he considered to be the top 3 risks.

The first is the long-term loss of key leadership staff at short notice affecting the efficient running of the MAT. The committee discussed this in length and that the loss of school leaders is also a significant issue in the circumstances.

Secondly, the risk of becoming financially insecure due to falling role or other factors was discussed. WH noted that this risk has been managed but Covid 19 has not helped with securing pupil numbers and class sizes in future may be affected by matters outside of our control. The additional 'catch-up' funding was discussed but transpires to be only around £80 per pupil but accredited tutoring agencies have to be used and the MAT has to provide the first 25% of that funding. It will be equal to around 6 catch up sessions per pupil which may not be enough to have an impact. It was discussed that the catch up funding will need to be targeted and that knowing where it should be used is important. WH noted that not every pupil will have fallen way behind and we will need to look at each pupil on a case-by-case basis.

The third risk involves long term financial, staffing, governance, safety and legal risks which may lead to short term efficiency issues. WH noted that it is important to be aware of all the issues involved with Covid 19 and that it is important that we follow the advice given by the government otherwise we run the risk of litigation.

A Director challenged that perhaps the Trust should ring fence some reserves to cover the additional Covid 19 costs so it can be seen that we have reserves but are needing to ring fence them to cover additional costs if that money is not provided by the government. Is it possible to ring fence reserves against risk? WH noted that this is possible and the committee discussed the allocation of some reserves against risk. EG noted that the Trust is in a much stronger financial position and so we may not receive additional funding.

Action: Decision on ring fencing of reserves against risk to full Board agenda (TM)

A director challenged how the risk assessments have been done for staff working at home, and also if staff are told to self isolate due to the track and trace system, do they still receive sick pay as it isn't their choice to be off? WH confirmed that staff have been told to self isolate they will be paid as normal as they have been instructed to stay at home. WH confirmed there are standard risk assessments for staff working at home and school leaders have been through these with the staff previously. However, the aim is to get staff back to work where at all possible. A director challenged that this could have implications to staffing costs and WH agreed that this will need to be factored in. WH noted that some elements of working from home have been very good and perhaps in future, some staff may work at home for some periods of time in future.

A director challenged how well we are monitoring stress levels in terms of staff well-being, is it robust enough and has it needed adaptation due to the current circumstances? WH confirmed that there has been a robust system in place of regular contact to ensure staff are coping. There are confidential mental health and well-being services available to staff – this is provided by our insurance services. WH did note his concern that the school leaders have been pushed both mentally and physically due to ever changing circumstances, the need to cover other roles, dealing with parents and other issues. For example the Head of School at WHA has not only carried out her role as Head but has also been the secretary, the cleaner and a class teacher due to shortfalls in staff. The school leaders have done a great job of managing things in order to protect their staff. WH noted that child care for some staff has or continues to be an issue, allowing in some cases for staff to bring their own children into our schools. All this needs to be recognised and the Chair noted that the risk regarding leadership should specify some of this detail. WH also noted that there is also a slight sense of loss in the schools in terms of outcomes as a lot of work was being done to improve outcomes prior to Covid 19 lockdown.

Action: Amend risk register following Audit committee discussion and present to full Board (WH)

A director challenged if pupil numbers in September is going to be an issue? WH stated that this will be fairly stable, although nursery numbers is potentially an issue.

6. **Internal Audit (Responsible Officer Findings)**

Internal audit checks occur throughout the year but these have been delayed due to Covid 19. The checks will start remotely on 1st July by Bishop Fleming and EG explained the audit cycle and process. EG noted that the schools will be more involved in the audit process in future.

7. **External Audit Update**

WH noted the Academies Accounts Direction 2019-2020 that was made available to the Audit committee. He also noted that the Academies Financial Handbook 2020 has been issued by ESFA. TM will assess the changes to AFH 2020 and update cyclical plans as necessary. He also noted government policy on energy and carbon reporting, and it should be referenced in our audit report.

There was discussion regarding appointment of external auditors and this was considered sensitive and to be dealt with as commercial in confidence. This discussion is recorded in confidential minutes that are for the eyes of the Trust Board, CEO and CFO only.

Action: Add external auditor to full Board agenda for consideration (TM)

8. **School Resource Self Assessment Tool**

WH briefly reminded the committee what this tool is for and the committee discussed that it does seem to be replicating what is already looked at elsewhere. It was noted that our KPIs are more specific than this tool as this tool is very general. It should be used for benchmarking, although this is limited, and therefore the tool is more of an administrative exercise than a KPI tool. A director challenged that if we have to use this tool, are there any KPIs that we can drop off? EG confirmed that our KPIs don't take long and this tool is less specific than our KPIs.

9. **Trust and School AIPs**

WH gave a brief verbal update on the current Trust and School improvement plans that run January to January. Elements of the improvement plans can still be accessed and done, but a lot of them such as improving pupil outcomes are no longer applicable.

WH suggested that the current improvement plans be parked and new improvement plans be developed from September to September. It is not intended to be a huge exercise with lots of paperwork for school leaders and some of what is on the current plans can be carried through.

A director challenged how all of this is affecting the staff performance management cycle? WH confirmed that it is and that guidance has been received from the Unions on this matter. Essentially the guidance is to ignore any targets that are no longer relevant.

A director challenged whether the plan would run from October to October given that you need September to assess the situation. Another director challenged whether September is too soon to put something in place? WH noted that he envisaged it would be a stepped plan, where certain measures kick in at different times and we feel our way through this uncertain situation.

The committee agreed that trying to adapt the current plans or add to them was not sensible and that a new plan is required. **A director challenged that the plans need to be brief and simple, and not add to the pressure on school leaders by having to produce weighty documents.** WH noted that help will be given by the MAT Improvement Officer.

A director challenged how this all affects Ofsted inspections? WH noted that it appears the Ofsted programme is being rescheduled and so our schools Ofsted inspections are very likely to be pushed

back. WHA, SSCA and CG are also due at some point this year but now unlikely to be until later in 2021 due to back log. WH noted that there will be no IDSR for Ofsted to refer to and the most recent published data will be over a year and a half old, and they shouldn't refer to internal data but it is likely that is all that will be available.

It was decided that the plan should be called a recovery Plan not an Improvement Plan. It will likely have 2 strands – the Operational level and educational level – overall it starts in September but priorities will kick in at different times depending on what they are and what is known and when. It was noted that there will be financial implications to the recovery plan and these will need to be recorded and allocated.

10. AOB

Ofsted report for LT has been issued and Directors have had sight of this.

WH noted that we are unlikely to do summative assessment in September as this will not be fair on the children, but teachers will be required to make formative assessment on the children to identify where they are.

Original Director visits to schools were put on hold because of lockdown. TM suggested that to balance the aspiration for Directors to visit schools at this time against safety and not having too many extra people in schools at once, that Directors that are happy to visit, are allocated a school and then report back to the Board. This will allow a single visitor and can be done within the current risk assessments. TM will contact Directors and schools directly to arrange this.

11. DONM

Refer to An Daras meeting schedule for Autumn term – will be available at the full Board on 8th July 2020. It was agreed flexibility is required and it may be necessary to have an extra-ordinary meeting combining the Audit and TLA committees to look at recovery.

Meeting closed 11 am.

TJH Martin
Governance Officer

Distribution List:

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