



**Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held via MS Teams on Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2025 at 15:30**

**MEMBERS** Charles Heaton, Chair  
**PRESENT:** Alison Griffiths, Vice Chair  
Theresa Hodgkinson  
Nick Butler

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Andrew Cropley, Principal  
Jon Fearon, Finance Director  
Roopa Patel-Harji, Validera – internal auditor (from 15:40)  
Eloise Hopkinson, Head of Governance  
Louise Knott, Vice Principal: Communications, Engagement and Student Experience (until 15:35)

		<b>ACTION by whom</b>	<b>DATE by when</b>
<b>1</b>	<b><u>WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u></b> Apologies were received from David Hoose (Mazars – external auditor) and Lee Glover (Validera – internal auditor). The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience attended the meeting to provide a brief verbal update in relation to the college website. This was presented prior to the rest of the items of business but was recorded under ‘any other business’ (item 10).		
<b>2</b>	<b><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST</u></b> The chair reminded everyone present to declare any interests that they may have on agenda items to be discussed. Standing declarations were noted.  (The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience left the meeting at 15:35.)		
<b>3</b>	<b><u>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER 2025</u></b> The minutes were reviewed and it was agreed that they were an accurate record of discussions.  AGREED: to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2025.  There were no matters arising.		

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_ Chair

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026

4 **ACTION PROGRESS REPORT**

The committee members were happy to note the content of the update provided.

It was noted that the finance director and auditor had discussed the actions relating to the audit scopes and these suggestions and requests have all been implemented into the amended scopes, so these actions could all be closed. Outstanding scopes have been provided within the papers for this meeting for approval by the committee.

5 **COMPOSITE COLLEGE RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT**

The finance director presented this paper. He noted that some actions were outstanding and assured the committee that these were being chased with the appropriate individuals.

It was noted that the counter-fraud health-check actions were not up to date, and the finance director explained that he was going to revise the college's fraud policies in line with the Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023 and that this would involve some significant work to review. However, the college had implemented a brief fraud element into the staff induction and briefings to all staff in order to bring fraud updates to the attention of staff and highlight the whistleblowing procedure and any other relevant guidance. The next task will be to prepare and issue training in relation to the organisation's responsibilities under the 2023 Act. The finance director assured the committee that the anti-fraud policy will have been revised in time to be presented to the committee at its next meeting, which is scheduled to take place on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026. He indicated that he would ensure that as many defence mechanisms as possible had been built in to ensure that the college cannot be held accountable if any instances of fraud do occur. He intends to provide indicators of where potential for fraud lies within the college's practices, in order to reflect how potential fraud can be avoided and, if it does take place, identified and reported.

One governor questioned why some of the actions have deadline dates of the end of October and whether these would require an extension. The head of governance explained that, on this occasion, the relevant leads had been chased slightly later than would have usually been the case and that, at the point of the meeting, she had not received any updates from the other leads. However, she assured the committee that this did not necessarily mean that extensions would be required, as it may be the case that the actions were closed but she simply had not been informed.

The finance director explained that one of his managers was on long-term sick and a replacement had only just been appointed. Therefore, the audit actions had been delayed and some of them may require an extension. He stated that he would pass an update to the head of

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governance after the meeting, and the head of governance assured the committee that she would circulate an updated recommendations report as soon as she had this information.

The principal asked that the Executive team be informed in future if there is no response or resolution to any of the audit actions, and he asked the head of governance to chase up incomplete actions sooner so that delays can be raised with the Executive team and a timelier update can be provided to the committee.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

**6 FRAUD, IRREGULARITY AND WHISTLEBLOWING**

The finance director informed the committee that there had been no instances of fraud, irregularity or whistleblowing since the previous meeting.

AGREED: to note the update provided.

**7 RISK MANAGEMENT**

The head of governance presented the risk register for the committee to note and discuss. Key points highlighted were as follows:

- Two new risks had been added since the previous meeting, one pertaining to issues within the flooring at Portland Square and the other in relation to high needs funding and changes within the local authority's ICDS team. The director: IT, estates and learning resources was handling the former issue and receiving quotes and solutions to resolve the matter. The latter issue was being monitored by the vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience.
- There were ten red risks on the register, nine of which had been present at the date of the previous meeting. Of the red risks, four had been added since summer 2025 and the remainder were older risks. Four were from 2021 or before.
- One risk, relating to learners not achieving English and maths targets, had been removed. The justification for this removal was that the risk was now wholly contained within another, similar, risk.

The finance director provided more background in relation to the high needs risk, explaining that the local authority's ICDS team was changing its structure and this would result in the college having a different lead. This had since been mitigated slightly as the key specialist with whom the college currently engages had confirmed that Mansfield and Ashfield would no longer be split between two teams, as was originally going to be the case. However, this key person will no longer be the college's main contact, so the college will need to build positive relationships with new personalities. Furthermore, the local authority is seeking to implement a matrix funding model, wherein individuals will be placed within a funding

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band rather than each learner having a costed plan, which is the current arrangement. The local authority has agreed to map WNC's learners into this proposed scale before it goes live so that the impact can be noted and the college can be involved in the consultation before the new model is taken forward. This could potentially have a large financial impact on the college, so it is positive that the college is being invited to be involved so closely so early on in the process. The finance director explained that this methodology has been in use within the schools sector for a while, so it is not completely new.

Governors were particularly invited to comment on the updated reporting format, which included an overview of risks in addition to the usual narrative detail. The chair observed that this report was clear and helpful, but he asked the head of governance to swap the order so that the narrative is at the front, and he also asked that any financial implications be noted within the tables.

Head of  
Gov.

Dec  
2025

One governor asked whether the timeline for the website risk needed to be updated due to the extended 'go live' date. The principal did not feel that this was necessary, as he noted that it was not an excessive delay.

The principal encouraged governors to still read the entire risk register in order to grasp the full detail. It was agreed that the chair would remind the entire board of this when delivering his report in December.

AGREED: to note the content of the update provided.

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#### **INTERNAL AUDIT**

The internal auditor presented their progress report and the two remaining scopes for 2025/26. Some key points were particularly highlighted from the progress report, namely:

- The company has strengthened its sector services by expanding the team and beginning work on the direct funding assurance contract with the DfE.
- The company continues to seek and be involved in corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- The Internal Audit Strategy and audit plan remain 'live' documents, and the auditors, senior management, and the Audit Committee maintain continual dialogue to ensure assurance needs are met. The IAS was considered and approved by the committee in October 2025, and there have been no amendments to the plan since its approval.
- Committee members and the Executive team were encouraged to follow Validera on LinkedIn in order to receive important sector updates.
- In relation to progress against the plan, the auditor has caught up with management and agreed timeframes for each audit. They are now awaiting key contact information. Some audits

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have been flagged for a December start, but it was noted that the Christmas break was now very close.

The chair raised a question in relation to the limitations to the student records scope, referring specifically to the statement indicating that audit testing will not be sufficient to provide an opinion on the accuracy or validity of the entire student data. He asked what the college could do to secure this opinion. The auditor explained that this is a caveat – assurance is provided based on a selected sample, and a full funding audit would be outside of this scope. She indicated that a full funding audit can be offered but would be separate and in addition to the agreed audit days.

The finance director provided further information, explaining that this particular audit will be carried out on live information in-year rather than on the final funding claim. To secure the assurance which the chair was seeking, the audit would need to be carried out on the submitted R14 data. It was noted that the auditor will look at a number of matters as part of this student records audit, and there are a number of checks through which the DfE will also examine the data. It is up to the college to review the final data and ensure it is clean, but the DfE does accept a certain level of variation within an audit (a 5% error rate). It was noted that this is a complicated matter, and any given college's return is unlikely to be completely perfect. The point of the audit and checks is to minimise errors to the very lowest level. Furthermore, the external auditor has to review revenue and carry out some checks, but this is still not a full funding audit carried out by the DfE. A sample of learners will be selected from across all revenue sources and an opinion given, but this will not provide total assurance and there will always be small funding adjustments throughout the year (e.g. in the tens of thousands in terms of value). A real assurance audit can only be conducted once the academic year has closed – the in-year audit is to enable the college to be aware of errors and rectify these.

The principal suggested that the college could ask the internal auditor to focus on this as a larger piece of work in the next academic year, but he felt that seeing the report from this smaller audit would provide assurance and, therefore, it should go ahead as planned. The chair felt assured that there were mechanisms in place across the internal and external auditors and other checks carried out.

The principal suggested that it would be worthwhile to conduct a larger funding audit in academic year 2027/28 to give assurance that the new team has a handle on things, considering the impending retirement of both the finance director and the learner records manager. The finance director explained that intensive development is being conducted with two staff members who will step up to replace the learner records manager, and he is coaching them so that they feel empowered to challenge and fulfil their roles effectively.

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It was noted that the college is also now accountable to EMCCA, which is introducing continuous in-year audits, and a desktop exercise is about to commence with the combined authority. EMCCA was noted to be keen on conducting small, focused audits through the year.

It was agreed to continue to monitor this, but the committee members confirmed that they felt assured.

AGREED:

- to note the content of the updates provided
- to approve the student records and information governance audit scopes as presented.

## 9 **AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

The head of governance presented the proposed final version of the annual report to the board, which would be presented to the board in December. It was noted that this had been shared with the committee very shortly before the upload deadline for comment.

It was noted that the one section still awaiting an update was the financial statements audit, which could not be completed until after the joint meeting of the Audit and Finance & Estates Committees.

Head of Gov. Dec 2025

The head of governance also indicated that she had found a best practice guide in relation to the format of this report and, as such, was likely to change the format next academic year.

Head of Gov. July 2025

Governors noted the updates and, in response to a question raised, were informed that work would commence on the new-style report earlier in 2026 so that this could be shared with the committee in a timely manner.

AGREED: to approve the annual report to the board, as presented.

## 10 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The vice principal: communications, engagement and student experience presented a brief update in relation to the college website. She explained that, for various technical reasons, the pre-Christmas 'go live' date became less definite. Consequently, it was felt that it would not be ideal to launch a new website so close to the Christmas break, due to the impact this could have on the applications system and the fact that staff may be unavailable or difficult to contact to resolve any issues. Therefore, leaders have decided to delay the launch to Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> January, which is the day after the college reopens.

The decision to delay the launch until January completely de-risks any related potential impact on applications, but it does mean that the shutdown of other college systems will still be necessary.

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The chair questioned whether it would be better to delay by an extra week to let people settle back in after the break, but the vice principal indicated that her team was confident that everything will have been sufficiently tested and ready to go on 6<sup>th</sup> January.

**11**      **DATE AND TIME OF THE NEXT MEETING**

This was confirmed to have been scheduled for 17:00 on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026 via Microsoft Teams.

It was agreed that confidential items would be recorded separately.

The auditor left the meeting at 16:15.

The meeting closed at 16:30.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  \_\_\_\_\_ Chair

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> February 2026