



An Daras Trust
Igniting Curiosity Growing Capabilities

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6/12/2023

Confidential Minutes
Audit Committee Autumn 2023
Wednesday 6th December 2023 at 9.30am at central office

1. Welcome and Apologies

Present: Graeme Barriball, Peter Hague, Steve Tavener, Ian Wilkinson, Jon Sharpe, Margaret Savage

Apologies: Emma Gilbert (CFO)

In attendance: Will Hermon (CEO), Toni Martin (Governance Officer), Jo Callow (Ex-Officio)

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

None.

3. External Audit

External auditor from Francis Clark briefed the committee on the audit completion report. The auditor thanked the An Daras team for their hard work and co-operation during the audit. Headline good news; all reports are 'clean' with no major issues.

Approach to fraud is seen to be a significant risk so this is always checked; no issues found. All monies are being spent appropriately and as the public would expect. Looking at the trust as a going concern; the budgets this year have been analysed and while a deficit cannot continue, the reasons are very clear and the auditors are content that the trust remains a going concern going forward. The auditor discussed various financial matters in the budget and were satisfied that everything is accounted for appropriately. There was nothing material in the internal findings that would impact on the overall report. Going forward a formal review of journals will need to be implemented (this is across all trusts and not specific to our trust), leases were discussed, internal review of pensions will be required and a few other minor issues were raised. It was noted that business continuity has been tested in one school but not more widely across the trust. The point that the Chair of the Board is also a Member remains but the trust is compliant with our articles of association so this will remain so going forward until and if the articles are changed. The auditor gave the necessary assurances of the external auditor's independence.

The committee discussed briefly, but given the straight-forward nature of the minimal number of findings, there were no further questions at that time. The auditor was thanked and left the meeting.

4. Confirm minutes of Audit Summer Meeting (5th July 2023) and Matters Arising

No actions from minutes or confidential minutes. Committee to agree minutes and Chair to sign a copy.

5. Confidential Matters

WH updated the committee on expansion matters. Item 11 is also covered under confidential minutes.

6. Review Risks

a. MAT Risk Register

Risk register has been updated with a light touch only as there will be a number of risks to add when the due diligence from the transfer is completed. Hence the risk register will be reviewed and amended in more detail next term.

b. Oversight of risks at each school

Top 3 risks from each LGB was provided to the committee. Standards is a common theme; staffing and retention is coming through as a theme; falling rolls at specific schools will continue to be a risk and finance will always be a risk.

Do we have a system for training and retaining staff internally to fill positions going forward?

Yes and future initiatives were discussed, and there is also succession planning in place which needs to be reviewed constantly. **What is the minimum number on roll we can expect before numbers become untenable?** This was discussed including specific small schools where this is always a risk.

c. Cyber Security Audit

WH updated the committee on progress regarding the action points on the cyber security audit from Secure schools. The issue is the risks keep changing so we can never get on top of them all; work remains ongoing. **It was agreed though that we are doing everything we can and will be aware of any glaring holes should they appear which is what is important.** The committee discussed the process and although it is important, there is an ongoing cost associated with it and this needs to be remembered. WH also noted some issues with the training but noted there are work arounds for these.

7. SEF

The trust quality descriptors against which the trust benchmarks itself were noted and it was agreed that this is positive and reassuring. WH then discussed the SEF, a draft of which was discussed at the LSS on 27 Sep 23. He noted that his document is very detailed and a summary can be produced to aid directors in monitoring it. **The committee, however, questioned the need for a summary as it is a fairly straight forward document and easy to follow.** It was agreed that a simple colour coded table on the front would suffice. **Action: colour coded one page summary (WH)**

While it is promising to see everything is green, it does beg the question of whether we are being critical enough and challenging things appropriately? The committee were reassured that this has been scrutinised and there is evidence to back it up; what can be done now is to look where some of this criteria can be pushed further to make them outstanding rather than good. WH noted how this feeds into the improvement plan and the termly programme of school improvement work. **It was noted that this is an awful lot of work and does all this paperwork need to be done?** This was discussed and if plans and targets are to be followed in an auditable way, we do need a detailed plan. Document will be reviewed twice a year in Autumn and Spring terms. **Action: Add to cyclical plan (TM)**

8. MAT Improvement Plan

Ongoing work and will be discussed at full Board.

9. Review Debt Report

This was considered, no issues to report.

10. An Daras Trust as a ‘Going Concern’

Discussed briefly as covered under external audit. The trust is a going concern.

11. Three-Five Year MAT Strategic Growth Plan

JC left the meeting. This discussion was recorded under confidential minutes then JC returned to the meeting.

12. Internal Audit

Three quotes requested, but only one received. For continuity purposes the committee agreed recommend to the full Board to re-appoint Griffin for next year’s internal audit (2024).

13. Prevention of Fraud and Theft

Risk of fraud, theft and irregularity and appropriate controls and policies were considered. All policies up to date and in place. Nothing detected on external audit and no issues to report.

14. Visible Learning

The quantity of work on this matter was noted and commended by the committee. WH noted that the next step is to achieve certified school status. This would make An Daras the only trust in the country with this status, noting this is a world-wide initiative. It has helped the schools achieve good Ofsted outcomes because it makes sure that we do basic things really well. Application has gone in and will be considered over in America. **If DS was to leave in future, do we have someone who can continue this work?** At school level we have VL leads so yes, but at the strategic level we would need to allow someone else to get up to speed.

15. Policy Review

- Best Value Statement (MB). *No changes. Approved.*
- Teachers Pay (WH). *Follows national terms and conditions, and pay scales; teachers on M1 have 7.2%, other grades have 6.5%. Schools have to fund 3% of that and the rest is funded by government. Approved.*
- Support Staff Pay (WH). *As above. Living wage increased to 11.45 per hour. Approved.*
- Data Protection (SC). *No changes. Approved.*

16. AOB

None.

17. DONM

Next meeting – Wednesday 13th March 2024 at 9.30 at central office

Meeting closed at 11.20am

TJH Martin
Governance Officer

Distribution List:

W. Hermon – CEO / Director	I. Wilkinson – Director
G. Barriball (Committee Chair)	J. Sharpe - Director
P. Hague – Director (Committee Vice Chair)	E. Gilbert – CFO
S. Tavener – Director	J. Callow – Ex Officio Observer