

Children First Learning Partnership

GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

Scope of Responsibility

As Directors, we acknowledge we have overall responsibility for ensuring that the Children First Learning Partnership has an effective and appropriate system of control, financial and otherwise. However, such a system is designed to manage rather than eliminate the risk of failure to achieve business objectives, and can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss.

The board of Directors has delegated the day-to-day responsibility to the Chief Executive Officer as accounting officer, for ensuring financial controls conform with the requirements of both propriety and good financial management and in accordance with the requirements and responsibilities assigned to it in the funding agreement between the Children First Learning Partnership and the Secretary of State for Education. They are also responsible for reporting to the board of Directors any material weaknesses or breakdowns in internal control.

Governance

The information on governance included here supplements that described in the Directors' Report and in the Statement of Directors' Responsibilities. The board of Directors has formally met 6 times during the year. Attendance during the year at meetings of the board of Directors was as follows:

Director	Meetings attended	Out of a possible
Fiona Stagg	4	4
Nicola Chell	6	6
Wayne Holt	5	6
Abigail Rourke	6	6
Benetia Mounsey	5	6
Sarah Haydon	6	6
Tim Bainbridge	6	6
Sarah Tudor	5	6
Wayne Richings	6	6

The Finance, Audit and Resource Committee is a sub committee of the main board of Directors. Its purpose is to maintain an oversight of the Academy Trust's financial governance, financial arrangements, legislative compliance, internal control, risk management and value for money framework.

Particular issues dealt with this period is establishing financial procedures, achieving a workable cash flow level, improving the financial and administration governance and staffing structure, and management accounts analysis. Attendance at meetings in the year was as follows:

Director	Meetings attended	Out of a possible
Wayne Holt	5	6
Nicola Chell	6	6
Sarah Haydon	6	6
Abigail Rourke	6	6
Wayne Richings	4	6

The board of Directors have established a Local Advisory Board in each school and will appoint the chair. The local advisory board will:

- Seek to understand how the school is led and managed: the head of school will report termly on how the school is fulfilling the trust's ethos, vision and strategy
- Monitoring whether the schools are:
 - Working within agreed policies
 - Meeting the agreed targets
 - Managing their finances well
 - Engaging with stakeholders
 - Reporting to the board
- Act as the panel when reviewing the head's decisions on exclusions, and parents' complaints
- Be the consultative body for the school's stakeholders
- Represent the school's stakeholders
- Forge links with the community

Review of Value for Money

As Accounting Officer the Chief Executive Officer has responsibility for ensuring that the academy Trust delivers good value in the use of public resources. The accounting officer understands that value for money refers to the educational and wider societal outcomes achieved in return for the taxpayer resources received.

The Accounting Officer considers how the academy Trust's use of its resources has provided good value for money during each academic year, and reports to the board of Directors where value for money can be improved, including the use of benchmarking data where appropriate. The Accounting Officer for the academy Trust has delivered improved value for money during the year by:

- using economies of scale provided by the academy Trust to obtain price reductions in service level agreements for finance, property, legal, personnel, IT, attendance services, HR, legal, catering and waste collection.
- restructuring the finance and administration staffing structure to ensure quality and sustainability at a best cost to schools.
- promote fair competition through quotations and tenders to ensure that goods and services are secured in the most economic, efficient and effective way.
- implementation of integrated curriculum and financial planning to ensure the best curriculum for the pupils with the funding available.

The Purpose of the System of Internal Control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. It can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of academy Trust policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. The system of internal control has been in place in the Children First Learning Partnership for the period 1st September 2019 to 31st August 2020 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and financial statements. This process is regularly reviewed by the board of Directors.

Capacity to Handle Risk

The board of Directors has reviewed the key risks to which the academy Trust is exposed together with the operating, financial and compliance controls that have been implemented to mitigate those risks. The board of Directors is of the view that there is a formal on-going process for identifying, evaluating and managing the academy Trust's significant risks that has been in place for the period 1st September 2019 to 31st August 2020 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and financial statements. This process is regularly reviewed by the board of Directors.

The Risk and Control Framework

The academy Trust's system of internal control is based on a framework of regular management information and administrative procedures including the segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular it includes:

- Comprehensive budgeting and monitoring systems with an annual budget and periodic financial reports which are reviewed and agreed by the board of Directors.
- Regular reviews by the Finance, Audit and Resource Committee of reports which indicate financial performance against the forecasts and of major purchase plans, capital works and expenditure programmes.
- Setting targets to measure financial and other performance.
- Clearly defined purchasing (asset purchase or capital investment) guidelines.
- Delegation of authority and segregation of duties.
- Identification and management of risks.

The board of Directors has considered the need for a specific internal audit function and has decided to appoint an appropriately qualified and experienced external auditor who is a Local Advisory Board member as responsible officer for internal audit, approved an internal audit checklist, with Internal audit reports to be presented to Finance, Audit and Resource Committee.

- To appoint James Flowers as internal auditor to carry out a programme of internal checks.

The internal auditor's role includes giving advice on financial and other matters and performing a range of checks on the academy Trust's financial and other systems. In particular, the checks carried out in the current period included:

- Testing of payroll systems
- Testing of purchase systems
- Testing of control account/bank reconciliations

On a quarterly basis, James Flowers the internal auditor reports to the board of Directors, through the Finance, Audit and Resource Committee on the operation of the systems of control and on the discharge of the board of Directors' financial responsibilities. And annually prepares an annual summary report to the committee outlining the areas reviewed, key findings, recommendations and conclusions to help the committee consider actions and assess year on year progress.

Review of Effectiveness

As Accounting Officer the Chief Executive Officer has responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. During the year in question the review has been informed by:

- The work of the internal auditor.
- The work of the external auditor.
- The financial management and governance self-assessment process and the school resource management self-assessment tool.
- The work of the executive managers within the academy Trust who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework.

The Accounting Officer has been advised of the implications of the result of their review of the system of internal control by the Finance, Audit and Resource Committee and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system is in place.

Approved by order of the members of the board of Directors on 14th December 2020 and signed on its behalf by:

Nicola Chell
Chair of Board of Directors

Abigail Rourke
Accounting Officer