Waltham Forest College

THE CORPORATION OF WALTHAM FOREST COLLEGE

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 MARCH 2026

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Renatta Nzomono (Chair)	present	Member
Simon Deschenes (Vice Chair)	present	Member
Gbeminiyi Soyinka	present	Member
Paul Clarke	present	Member.

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Naomi Shoffman	Director of Governance (DoGov)

IN ATTENDANCE

Janet Gardner	Principal & CEO
Abena Rodman-Tay	Deputy CEO (DCEO)
Karl Bentley	Auditor – DfE Funding review
Conor McGinley	Internal Auditors-WBG
Gabrielle West	External Auditors – MHA
Richard Harris	Governor observing
Jackie Chapman	Strategic Project Lead (SPL)- for items 1704-1708 only
Melanie Price	Director of HR (DoHR)- for items 1704-1709 only
Rajnesh Malhans	Head of Finance observing

1704. ATTENDANCE OF THE PRINCIPAL AND OTHER COLLEGE MANAGERS AT THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE
The Committee agreed that the Principal and Deputy CEO (DCEO) be invited to attend the meeting.

1705.WELCOME AND APOLOGIES
The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. There were no apologies.

1706. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
No new declarations of interest were made.

1707.APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING
The minutes of 27 November 2025were approved.
Members noted that all actions arising from the previous meeting had been completed.

1708. DFE FUNDING AUDIT REPORT

The audit partner who led the audit provided a detailed overview of the audit conducted by the Department of Education for the 24-25 academic year, focusing on the pre-R14 funding assurance review. The auditor highlighted a number of issues relating primarily to:

- **Additional Learning Support (ALS)**
- **Apprenticeship documentation weaknesses**, .

The auditor advised the recommendations made to the college to ensure compliance with funding rules in the future. The college had acknowledged these problems early on and worked diligently to rectify them. The overall opinion was satisfactory, with the college demonstrating significant effort to address the problems.

Committee members asked questions about the funding errors, comparison with other institutions, and potential system and control issues. The auditor clarified that the identified errors were not extrapolated but reviewed 100%, and the college's error rate was relatively low compared to others. The DCEO provided additional context, acknowledging the college's proactive approach in addressing apprenticeship issues. The SPL and the Principal elaborated on the steps taken to improve apprenticeship documentation and proactive measures to ensure compliance.

The discussion concluded with acknowledgements of the hard work by the college team and external support, particularly from the SPL, in improving systems and processes.

The Committee noted the report.

1709.Policy Review – Whistleblowing Policy

The Committee considered the revised Whistleblowing Policy presented by the Director of HR. The policy has been revised to ensure it provides appropriate protections for staff and encourages the reporting of concerns without fear of retaliation. Members discussed and suggested some minor amendments to strengthen clarity around response timelines and confidentiality arrangements.

The Committee Agreed to Recommend To The Corporation approval of the Whistleblowing Policy subject to the agreed amendments.

1710.INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

The Internal Auditor

The Internal Auditor provided a general update from WBG on their internal audit service, reporting a successful external quality assessment against the new global internal audit standards. The assessment resulted in a clean bill of health with no formal recommendations. The Internal Auditor highlighted the minor recommendations made by the assessor, which will be incorporated over the next six months. He then presented the following three Internal Audit Reports:

i. Room Utilisation

The purpose of this assignment was to undertake a review of the controls in place for room utilisation, in order to provide assurance that the rooms are being used to their capacity . The audit concluded with a strong level of assurance driven by one low-grade recommendation and several good practice points raised. The recommendation focused on documenting the robust process for room utilisation and timetabling to prevent knowledge loss in case of staff turnover. This recommendation was accepted by management, with new documentation being created for the 26-27 timetable and process. Additionally, the initial timetable for 26-27 will be produced at Easter rather than in the summer, allowing more time for monitoring utilisation and ensuring optimal use of facilities. The committee members expressed their satisfaction with the review and commended the senior management team for their preparation and information provision.

ii. Fixed Assets Review

The purpose of this assignment was to review the processes in place at Waltham Forest College (the College) for recording fixed assets. The audit concluded with a strong level of assurance. The review identified three low-grade recommendations. Management accepted these recommendations and committed to implementing processes to address the issues.

The Vice Chair raised questions regarding the threshold for capitalisation, the tracking of iPads, and in the documentation process. The DCEO clarified that the threshold is a sector norm and explained the inventory system used to track assets. She also addressed the documentation issue by stating that the college has documented processes, but the recommendation was to enhance these documents with introductory overviews.

The Internal Auditor confirmed that the proposed action plan by management covers the identified risks. The Chair and The Vice Chair further discussed the importance of having the right system to manage assets and the need for enhancements in the current system.

iii. Bursary And Free Meals

The bursary and free meals in further education audit was designed to assess whether the College has complied with the 2025/26 funding rules issued by the Department for Education (DfE) and therefore whether those funds have been used for the purposes intended., The audit concluded with a substantial level of assurance with one medium-grade and two low grade recommendations.

A member enquired about examples of high-grade recommendations, to which The Internal Auditor provided context of when this could happen.

The committee expressed overall satisfaction with the internal audit reports, recognising the importance of continuous improvement and adherence to best practices.

The Committee received the Internal Audit Reports.

1711.UPDATE ON INTERNAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deputy CEO presented an update on the implementation of audit recommendations across internal and external audits. Members noted that all recommendations currently due for implementation had been completed.

The Committee reviewed the comprehensive recommendation tracking spreadsheet used by management and discussed ways to ensure the document remained manageable.
The DCEO proposed that older recommendations be archived once completed, while maintaining a log of archived items. Members suggested highlighting recommendations closed since the previous meeting.

The DCEO clarified that recommendations are only officially closed after the internal auditors provides assurance that they have seen the evidence and confirmed the implementation. For external audits, there is an annual review cycle, and for funding audits, which happen every three years, different auditors may be appointed by the DfE.

The Committee Agreed:

- **That older recommendations be archived where appropriate.**
- **That a log of archived recommendations be maintained.**

1712.RISK MANAGEMENT

I. Risk Management Strategy

The Chair reported that she, the Vice Chair, and the Deputy CEO had met the previous week to review the risk tolerance levels. She and the DCEO introduced the discussion on risk appetite and the current risk management approach, highlighting areas on the risk register that fall outside the college's agreed risk appetite. The DCEO advised that the Chair and Vice Chair having reviewed these risks had proposed the introduction of risk acceptance forms to formally manage risks that sit outside tolerance levels. These forms would be reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee before submission to the Corporation for approval. A member asked how the review of such risks would be undertaken. The Chair clarified that the committee would determine whether reviews should be event-based or periodic. Committee members were reminded that the risk register is regularly updated, ensuring current information is available for oversight and that the risk register is reviewed at every committee meeting, not solely by the Audit and Risk Committee.

The Cybersecurity Risk was recorded under part two.

Estates Risk

The DCEO then introduced the estates risk, focusing on estate capacity and sustainability objectives, including the ambition to achieve net zero. The Principal advised that the government's net zero target may now align with 2050, which could influence the college's future investment planning. She highlighted the progress already made, including investments in solar panels and LED lighting, as evidence of the College's commitment to sustainability. The internal auditor provided additional context regarding sustainability funding, noting that the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding had ceased and future funding arrangements were likely to change. He advised the college to align its sustainability planning with the legislative net zero target of 2050 and offered support in developing a sustainability strategy.

The committee also discussed ongoing efforts to address estate capacity constraints, including exploring opportunities to acquire additional buildings. The Principal outlined the complexity of negotiations with councils and other stakeholders, noting the college's proactive approach in pursuing solutions.

The Vice Chair suggested that the estates risk could potentially be temporarily accepted, given the clear plans and ongoing work to address the issue.

A member recommended documenting the trajectory of the estates risk, identifying it as a reducing risk due to the visibility of planned mitigation actions and strategic estate development plans. The committee agreed that the discussion and mitigation plan should be clearly documented rather than completing a formal risk acceptance form at this stage.

The Principal suggested separating sustainability risks from estate capacity risks in future discussions for clarity. The Committee agreed.

The DCEO thanked committee members for their contributions and support in reviewing the risks and recognising the extensive work undertaken to manage them.

The Committee noted the report.

ii. Risk Register Update
The DCEO presented an update on the college's risk register and updated the Committee on residual risks exceeding risk appetite levels, most of which had just been discussed.

The Committee noted the updated College Risk Register.

1713. PROCUREMENT WAIVERS REPORT
The Deputy CEO presented the procurement waivers report, explaining the context and justification for using waivers, which are exemptions from the standard financial regulation procurement routes due to business needs or health and safety reasons. She detailed the process of obtaining waivers, which involves approval from finance management and publishing transparency notices as required by procurement law.

The Chair asked whether these waivers are published on the college's website, to which the DCEO clarified those meeting the threshold for transparency notices are published on a procurement portal managed by the college's procurement company.

A member raised concerns about the risk of challenge associated with publishing waivers, noting differences in approach between colleges and councils. The Principal reassured the committee that the college has a strong track record of responding robustly to challenges due to evidence and compliance with processes.

The Committee noted the report.

1714. ECCTA – ANTI-FRAUD UPDATE
The Deputy CEO provided an update on the Economic Crime and Corporate Crime Act (ECCTA) action plan, detailing the progress made and the steps remaining. She mentioned that training has been delivered to committee members and emphasised the importance of continuing to monitor and implement the action plan. Further updates will be provided to the Committee at future meetings.

The Committee noted the update.

1715. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ANNUAL REPORT
The DoGov presented the annual report on Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, noting that the report includes an explanation of the internal controls around responding to these requests. The report highlighted that 10 FOI requests were made, which is slightly fewer than the previous year. The DoGov provided details on the nature of the requests, the responses, and the outcomes, with most requests being complied with and explanations provided for those that were not.

The Vice Chair raised concerns about the sensitivity of some information requested. The Principal reassured the committee that commercially sensitive information is carefully managed, often resulting in partial or refused responses.

A member asked about the ease of responding to FOI requests within the 20-day limit, with the Principal acknowledging the challenges and resource intensity involved. The discussion also touched on repeat offenders, primarily organisations rather than individuals, and the difficulty in managing multiple requests from the same entities.

The Committee noted the report.

1716. PIDA / WHISTLE BLOWING INCIDENTS

The DoGov reported that there have been no whistleblowing incidents since the last report. She mentioned that some complaints had been misidentified as whistleblowing but were correctly categorised upon review.

The Committee noted the verbal report.

1717. - DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date for the next Audit and Risk Committee meeting was confirmed as Tuesday, 16 June 2026. The Chair mentioned that the Vice Chair would be chairing the meeting as she would be away.

1718 - ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The agenda items for future meetings, include monitoring statements, internal audits, audit report reviews, and risk register updates.

Minutes 1719-1721 were recorded under part two.

20.12 Finish

These minutes have been approved by the Audit and Risk Committee and signed by the Chair as a correct record

……………Simon Deschenes……………………………………………………9 June 2026……………………..

Signed Date