



**RICHARD HUISH TRUST
AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE MEETING**

7th May 2025 at 5:00pm

Virtual via MS Teams

Committee Members present: Dan Maycock (Chair)
Jade Renville
Olivia Salaman
Pat Flaherty

In attendance: John Abbott (CEO)
Paul Lonsdale (CFO)
Richard Anderson (IT & Facilities Director)
Jessica Doyle (Finance Manager)
Roz Abbott (MIS Manager)
Heidi Screech (Director of Nurseries)

Clerk: Helen Wells (Governance Specialist)

MINUTES

AUD 24/117	1. MEETING FORMALITIES	Action
	1.1 Welcome and apologies for absence	
	The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, there were no apologies.	

AUD 24/118	1.2 Declaration of interests	
	None of the committee members present had declarations to make in relation to items on the agenda.	

AUD 24/119	1.3 Minutes of the previous meeting	
	Directors agreed the minutes of the previous meetings were accurate and the Chair consented for his electronic signature to be used to formally sign them off.	

AUD 24/120	1.4 Matters arising	
	There were no matters arising.	

2. STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

AUD 24/121	2.1 Overview of risk across the Nursery provision	
	The Director of Nurseries gave an overview of the challenges, opportunities and risk associated with the nursery provision. The long-term sustainability of the nursery provision is the main driver, of which achieving financial sustainability is critical. She described the work being done to engage the nursery managers in taking full ownership of their nursery's finances, with the support of the finance team. She highlighted that occupancy has increased across the nurseries but where this has not been the case additional work is being undertaken to address the reasons for this. Retaining high quality staff is key to achieving sustainability of the provision, work therefore on training and CPD has been put in place and seems to be well received. Understanding the local competition and reviewing fees and the quality of presentation at the nurseries is important in creating a good impression on potential families.	

AUD 24/122	The CFO added that there were a number of audit recommendations made by the internal auditor around processes related to funding and grant claims and why there were discrepancies between the systems and the actual grants. This has been a significant focus	
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Signed:...*Dan Maycock*..... Date:...30/06/2025.....

but there is confidence that this is now resolved with high levels of accuracy now being consistent.

AUD 24/123 **What are the ongoing or incoming challenges for the nursery provision?**
Finance is likely to remain a high priority and challenge to ensure that the Huish nurseries are the preferred choice in the area. Reinvestment will be key to achieving this profile to creating an impact on those who are interested in joining. Normal funding streams are not reliable or consistent year to year, and this will remain a significant challenge, therefore looking at how there are other ways to ensure that the provision remains financially sustainable for the future is critical.

AUD 24/124 **Are the nursery managers supportive of the changes?**
The managers are working well collaboratively with the practitioners to ensure they are all bought into the vision and values they have developed.

AUD 24/125 **Is the ongoing investment that is needed available to keep the provision at the forefront of the local offer?**
This is part of a dialogue with the headteachers, to ensure they know it needs to be considered as an essential part of the budget setting process year on year. The finances are available to support larger investments in facilities, but the continued investment in consumables that the nurseries need have not been maintained as readily which in turn can impact on the quality of their presentation.

AUD 24/126 **Will the harder to impact nurseries also be making progress similar to the others?**
For some it is a significant cultural change about what it means to be a nursery manager. Teaching and learning remain important, but it has to be in partnership with the business side of effectively managing the provision. Improvements are being made, but for some at a slower pace than others. Support is in place and the work is being monitored closely.

AUD 24/127 Directors reflected on the importance that first impressions make on potential families, from how happy the children seem and the quality of the environment, including outdoor space. The Director of Nurseries concurred that it is important that first impressions are always good and that the provision is invested in to achieve this.

AUD 24/128 **What are the key selling points for the nurseries?**
There are some real selling points for families to join and for their child(ren) stay on to the primary provision. With Nerrols, for example, there is more opportunity for further nursery places as the second form entry is now in place for the reception class, making this more appealing for families to join early and be more certain of getting a place at primary level.

AUD 24/129 **Is there consistency of education and learning to achieve a natural flow from the pre-school setting into the primary setting at Huish? Is there a clear plan and pathway to ensure a good transition? Or is this a potential risk for Huish with Ofsted?**
It is an important focus to ensure that there is continuity; there are plans in place to ensure that the curriculum development is articulated fully.

AUD 24/130 The Director of Nurseries highlighted that the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support from the local authority (LA) has diminished with the removal of their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo). Instead, nursery settings are having to guide parents to refer to their GP for SEND support. There are plans to ensure that existing knowledge and skills within Huish are drawn upon to help address this gap.

ACTION: Provide an update to the committee on the development of SEND knowledge and the impact within the nursery provision.

HSC via Clerk

The Chair thanked The Director of Nurseries for her input.

The Director of Nurseries left the meeting.

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AUD
24/131

2.2 Cases of fraud and whistleblowing

The CFO confirmed there were no cases to report.

3. AUDIT ARRANGEMENTS

AUD
24/132

3.1 Apprenticeship audit outcomes update report

The MIS Manager gave an update of the actions to address the findings from the apprenticeship audit of September 2024.

AUD
24/133

What are the assurances are there that the findings will not re-emerge in a future audit?

Procedure and written documentation are now all in one place for ease of access and consistency. There is now a RAG rated shared document that all stakeholders can report on and all can understand what needs attention and where. There are also funding and finance spreadsheets that are updated regularly with apprenticeship leads so they are on top of all key aspects.

AUD
24/134

Is the validation in place to ensure there are appropriate and effective quality assurance mechanisms established?

The structure has changed within the apprenticeship teams to build in a first step review of reporting; it then goes to the MIS team who further review for compliance and log the compliance or non-compliance on the shared spreadsheet which enables transparency and tracking. After this the leader of the apprenticeship team validates on a fortnightly basis with the apprenticeship managers.

AUD
24/135

In the update report for March there were a couple of question marks around End Point Assessments, is there an update?

This was in relation to a minor action that has now been completed.

AUD
24/136

Has learning taken place that has informed approaches to the rest of the organisation?

There has been a significant amount of work across the other funding streams to look at the common findings of related audits. Regular reviews of budgets now look at the top-level risk factors across each of the funding streams, to identify what actions are needed to provide evidence or whether tighter controls are needed to avoid any issues in the future.

AUD
24/137

Is there any indication of when another audit might happen?

As the apprenticeship audit was passed this means Huish is not in scope for a follow up audit. As the audit selection is otherwise random it is therefore impossible to predict when the next audit may occur across any of the funding streams.

The Chair thanked the MIS Manager for giving an update and for her work in improving approaches to coordinating and managing the provision.

The MIS Manager left the meeting.

AUD
24/138

3.2 Internal audit report

There were no significant issues raised within the internal audit. Directors noted that it gives a good degree of assurance with only minor areas for improvements noted.

AUD
24/139

Directors discussed the assurance mapping recommendations made. Directors agreed that the audit document is clear, but the assurance mapping is less helpful in indicating how the map relates specifically to Huish's strategic risk register how those areas are benchmarked to the broader strategic risks that exist within the sector. Directors reflected it is important to

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have a good understanding of the strategic risks and mitigations to the overarching strategic direction.

AUD
24/140

What was the scope of work?

The scope of work was to look at the strategic risk register and comments made about the internal control framework, the three strategic lines of defence and what could be done to improve this approach further.

AUD
24/141

Directors discussed the options around seeking further assurance mapping insight and the need to have more depth to the mapping to help guide them on how to make a real impact in mitigating risks to achieving strategic objectives, over and above existing controls and established business practices.

ACTION: Approach another organisation to seek further input into the assurance mapping to help give a more detailed level of confidence and insight for directors. To report back at the next meeting in July.

CFO

AUD
24/142

3.3 School Food and Catering Services report

The report is a summary of the more detailed reports for each academy. Directors noted and discussed points from the report. The report highlighted that not all food preparation settings have the same levels of hygiene that the formal kitchens have as well-established practice. Directors discussed how there are risks if sanitisation levels are not being adhered to. Work is in progress to ensure there is consistency across all food production services across Huish.

AUD
24/143

Is work in place urgently to address all the areas for improvement identified in the report?

The CFO confirmed work is underway.

AUD
24/144

Will there be re-inspection to provide assurance on this?

There will be a follow up inspection, and it is anticipated that identified inconsistencies will have been fully addressed by that time.

AUD
24/145

What is the time scale for re-inspection?

This is a biannual process. Directors discussed that this feels like too long in between given the level of risk and directors recommended this should be in the new school year at the latest.

AUD
24/146

The CFO noted that there was an environmental health inspection today at the college where they achieved a 5* review, following a very thorough inspection, but there were some areas for improvement noted, even with a high quality level of review.

ACTION: Update to be reported to the committee on how the wraparound food production is being addressed across Huish to ensure there is consistency and that all issues raised in the report are fully addressed.

CFO

ACTION: Share the full reports from the school food and catering services inspection with the committee members.

CFO

AUD
24/147

ACTION: Confirm the timescales around re-inspection and advise the committee.

CFO

The CFO noted that the insight into the level of food wastage is frustrating; it has an impact on cost and that potentially that some children may not be able to access the food that should be available to them. There is, contrastingly, some good practice in one of the

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**AUD
24/148**

settings where the adults eat with the children to model positive approaches to consuming food, but this is not as effective in some settings. This has been followed up with headteachers to challenge them around the morality of food wastage and the impact on the children.

Directors concluded that having these specific reports are helpful to give a line of sight into risks across Huish. They considered that having continued assurance on this topic is necessary for them to be assured that shortcomings are being addressed in a timely way. Directors noted that they are confident in the ability of the executive team to seek additional levels of assurance across key areas on a regular basis.

4. POLICIES/KEY DOCUMENTS

**AUD
24/149**

4.1 Gifts and Hospitality Register

Directors noted the register and that they are comfortable with the level of gifts and hospitality recorded; they noted confidence in the gifts that have been accepted are low level and appropriate. Directors discussed that it is useful to see the register on a periodic basis to ensure it is tracked through and is proportionate.

**AUD
24/150**

Directors considered that it's important that the public perception of items on the register is considered and noted that this needs to be in line with the agreed policy.

**AUD
24/151**

Is the limit on values of gifts being made set by Huish, or are they guided by the Academy Trust Handbook (ATH)?

The Governance Specialist confirmed that there are no specific limits or guidance within the ATH around the financial amount or equivalent of the gifts being received.

**AUD
24/152**

Directors discussed the possible external perception of receiving gifts made by suppliers and the types of gifts received, specifically in relation to gift vouchers.

ACTION: Consider the wording of accepting gifts from suppliers and whether it is appropriate to accept gift vouchers.

**CPO/
CFO**

5. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

**AUD
24/153**

5.1 Agenda for next meeting

Directors noted the agenda.

**AUD
24/154**

5.2 Confidential items

There were no confidential items for the minutes.

**AUD
24/155**

5.3 Any other business

There was no further business.

**AUD
24/156**

5.4 Date of next meeting

The chair noted that the next meeting is currently scheduled for 2nd July but that the date needs to be changed and will be confirmed as soon as possible.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 6.45pm

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