

Regulatory & Audit Committee

Title: Buckinghamshire Learning Trust Progress Report Feb 2016

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Author: Nick Wilson

Contact officer: Nick Wilson Interim Director for Education – Children’s Social Care and Learning

Summary

During August 2015 Internal Audit and Risk Management conducted an audit of Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (BLT); the final report was issued in September 2015. The overall conclusion on the system of internal control of BLT was that BLT provided a limited level of assurance.

The Learning Trust is an educational charity that delivers on behalf of Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) a range of education support services to schools and early years’ settings. It is governed by a Board of Trustees. BLT works with BCC to enable it to discharge its statutory duties. The Committee last received a progress report on BLT on the 18th November 2015.

To address the findings of the audit a project plan was initiated, supported by a cross Council team of officers from legal, procurement and commissioning and services managers from Children’s Social Care & Learning.

Status Update

A new interim Director for Education came into post on 4th January 2016, taking responsibility for leading on improvements relating to the BCC - BLT relationship.

In summary

1. New Key Performance Indicators are being developed for the new Annual Activity Plan to cover the academic year 2016/17, these new performance measures will be incorporated into the updated Education Duties and Responsibilities document.
2. A new Risk Management Register has been created and existing and new risks recorded and mitigating factors identified.



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3. Whilst financial management procedures between BLT and BCC have been improved they remain an area for further clarification and development. Escalation processes to senior managers at BCC to address areas of non-compliance are to be formally drafted, in the meantime a pattern of regular reviews and monitoring meetings are in place and future meetings timetabled.
4. Work is underway to convene a new Board of Trustees. The Council has received nominations expressing interest in representing BCC on the Board of BLT. Suitable candidates will be recommended by the Cabinet Member for Education & Skills.
5. BLT has provided a contract manager; the role is being undertaken by the Finance and Governance Director of BLT.
6. The two plans requested by the audit report, an exit plan and a business continuity plan have been actioned. The exit plan is complete, the business continuity plan requires updating and this is in progress.
7. The annual Section 11 safeguarding tool has been completed.
8. A new BCC-BLT governance structure has been agreed and actions under the Council's Platinum Plus procurement arrangements have been agreed. The first meeting under the new governance arrangements will take place on the 11th February 2016.

The initial focus of the Project Team was to address the matters raised in the audit report (published September 2015). The Project Team is continuing to work with BLT to address change to national education policy and planned financial reduction.

Legal implications

Within the Improvement Plan there is a workstream dedicated to the project work requiring legal involvement. Legal Services have been instructed and form part of the Project Team.



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