



Northern Arch

LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

Finance, Audit and Risk Committee
 held at 5.00 pm, Monday 8th December 2025, at Longfield Academy, Longfield Road,
 Darlington DL3 0HT

MINUTES

Directors present:	Tim Fisher (CEO), Geoff Liddle, Mavis Lord and Tarryn Lloyd Payne.
In attendance	Glen Hart: Chief Financial Officer Nikki Wade: Head of Operations Laura Hawksby: Trust Governance and Policy Officer Chris Beaumont: External Auditor Clive Owen Accountants LLP

Item	Description of discussion	Action
	PART A: Procedural items	
1.	<p><u>Election of Chair</u></p> <p>The Governance and Policy Officer sought nominations for the position of Chair of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee for the ensuing Academic Year.</p> <p>Governors RESOLVED that Director Mavis Lord be appointed Chair of the Finance, Audit & Risk for the ensuing Academic Year.</p> <p><i>(Note: Director Mavis Lord in the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.)</i></p>	Governance & Policy Officer
2.	<p><u>Election of Vice Chair</u></p> <p>Nominations were sought and received for the position of Vice Chair of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee for the ensuing Academic Year.</p> <p>Governors RESOLVED that Director Geoff Liddle be appointed Vice Chair of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee.</p>	Governance & Policy Officer
3.	<p><u>Welcome, Introductions and confirmation quorum present</u></p> <p>The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting.</p> <p>It was confirmed that a quorum was present</p>	

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denotes support and challenge provided by Governors

4.	<p><u>Apologies for absence and their acceptance</u></p> <p>There were no apologies for absence.</p>	
5.	<p><u>Notification of items of urgent other business</u></p> <p>None</p>	
6.	<p><u>Declaration of Personal and Pecuniary Interests</u></p> <p>None</p>	
7.	<p><u>Approval of minutes/review of actions/matters arising – Finance, Audit and Risk Committee 24th June 2025</u></p> <p>Draft Minutes of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee held on the 24th June 2025 had been shared with Directors prior to the meeting, a copy of which is held on file.</p> <p>All actions had been completed.</p> <p>Directors asked about when the Estates Strategy would be brought back to Directors? The Head of Operations advised that it would be brought back to the Autumn Term Board meeting and the strategy would also be reviewed by the People & Environment Committee.</p> <p>Directors RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee held on the 24th June 2025 were confirmed as an accurate record and should be signed by the Chair.</p>	<p>Chair/ Governance & Policy Officer</p>
PART B: Annual Report and Financial Statements		
8.	<p>(Note: with the permission of the Chair the following item was brought forward on the Agenda.)</p> <p>Presentation of Northern Arch Learning Partnership Annual Report and Financial Statements for the period ending 31st August 2025</p> <p>a) External Auditor’s Annual Report - period ending 31 August 2025:</p> <p>The External Auditor presented his external audit report for the period ending 31st August 2025.</p> <p>Directors were pleased to note that it was a clean audit, with no amber or red control issues. All previous recommendations have also been implemented. He confirmed that Northern Arch Learning Partnership remained a going concern.</p> <p>On behalf of the Directors and the Partnership, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) passed on thanks and acknowledgement of all the hard work undertaken by the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and his team for the successful audit.</p>	

b) Annual Report and Financial Statements - period ending 31 August 2025

The External Auditor presented the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the period ending 31st August 2025.

Directors questioned whether the delay in the name change for both Rydal and Mowden at the Land Registry would affect the Partnership's insurance? The External Auditor confirmed it would not and that all forms had been duly submitted and the delay was with the Land Registry.

Directors requested that projections of pupil numbers for the schools and College within the Partnership be brought back to the next meeting of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee in the Spring Term.

CFO

c) External Audit Oversight and Findings - Report of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee 2024/25 for submission to the Board of Directors and Members

The Head of Operations (HOO) presented the external audit oversight and findings report of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee 2024/25, which would be submitted to the full Board of Directors.

After careful consideration the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee requested the following conclusions to be forwarded to the December 2025 Board meeting:

- The Committee reviewed the External Auditor's plan for 2024-25 in Summer 2024.
- The Committee **recommends** the Annual Report & Financial Statements 2024-25 to the Board of Directors and Members for approval.
- The Committee **confirms** that there are no recommended actions for the Partnership's executives to complete in response to the 2024-25 External Audit.
- The Committee is **satisfied** that the External Auditor continues to be effective and has the resources to provide a basis for decisions by the Partnership's Members.
- The Committee **recommends the reappointment** of the External Auditor for 2025-26. (Note: Retendering of the External Auditor is due August 2028.)

	Finance	
9.	<p>Money ADEMSS Report:</p> <p>a) Management Accounts:</p> <p>The Chief Financial Officer (CFO) presented the management accounts summary as of the 31st October 2025. This forecast showed that the academies are forecast to make a collective surplus at year-end. This was in line with the budget expectations. The year-end forecast predicted a surplus of £188k and predicted reserves on 31st August 2026 of £5.775m. The committee noted the current and year- end forecast.</p> <p>The CFO advised that the DfE (Department for Education) income is in line with the budget. The favorable increase in Non DfE/LA grant money increase is due to higher than budgeted SEN (Special Educational Needs) income from the Local Authority.</p> <p>The favorable increase in lettings/other income was due to the additional investment income through bank interest and an insurance claim for Hurworth school, the expenditure for this claim sits within non pay expenditure.</p> <p>Pay expenditure is lower than budgeted in September and October, owing to the delay in College staff being awarded the 4% pay increase. The pay award had now been applied to all College staff, therefore the year end outturn is in line with budget.</p> <p>The adverse variance regarding non pay expenditure was due to the purchase of resources to ensure that the academies were prepared for September 2025. The Partnership have also paid £45k for insurance repairs, which offsets the additional income in other income.</p> <p>With the continued growth of the Partnership and the merger of The Federation of Mowden Schools, the trust will now receive an annual allocation of capital funding. It is expected that in January 2026 the allocation will be known. A project is currently underway to collate all academies' estates investment requirements to enable the Partnership to prioritise projects so that the first round of capital improvement can commence at Easter 2026.</p> <p>Directors asked if there would be engagement with the academies regarding this allocation? The Chief Executive Office (CEO) confirmed that this was correct. Directors asked if there were restrictions on what this money could be spent on? The CEO confirmed that there were restrictions. The priority would be to add value to the education of the young people within the Partnership's academies.</p> <p>The CFO advised that regarding the Local Government Pension Scheme Contribution, notification had been received of the reduction in employers National Insurance contributions from 19.1% to 14.9%. The reduction would be applicable from the 1st April 2026 until the 31st March 2029. The Directors requested further information regarding what the monthly savings would be, and the CFO advised that he would email this information to the Directors.</p> <p>Directors RESOLVED that the management accounts be received by the Board of Directors at their meeting in December 2025.</p>	CFO

	<p>b) School Resource Management Advisor – Progress Update</p> <p>The CFO reported upon and the Committee reviewed the progress that the Partnership were making against the SRMA (School Resource Management Advisor) report of October 2024. Following review of the progress update the Committee confirmed that progress is heading in the right direction. <i>Directors asked where are the benchmarks sources from. The CFO advised that they are taken from the Kreston Financial Board and the Institute of School Business Leaders.</i></p> <p>c) Notice of Future Capital Project Requiring Committee Approval</p> <p>The CFO advised that Committee approval would be sought in the future to toilet refurbishments at Hurworth.</p>	
10.	<p><u>Policies:</u></p> <p>The following policies were reviewed by the Committee:</p> <p>a) Reserves Policy: Directors RESOLVED that the Reserves Policy be approved.</p> <p>b) Finance Policy: Directors RESOLVED that the Finance Policy be approved.</p>	
Audit & Risk		
11.	<p><u>Partnership Operational Risk Register</u></p> <p>The Head of Operations reported upon the Partnership Operational Risk Register. She advised that the following two new risks had been added:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. P01 has been split into two risks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PO1a - Failure to ensure academies achieve positive OFSTED outcomes PO1b (new) - Failure to respond effectively to SEND reform 2. PO10 (new) - Failure to recruit, retain and develop sufficiently skilled individuals – includes succession planning for key staff <p>In addition it was noted that several former 'future controls' have been completed and now sit in 'existing controls', including for the following risks:</p> <p>This had therefore led to a reduction of the following risks:</p> <p><i>PO3 - Failure to address the fall in pupil/student roll across the Partnership</i></p> <p><i>PO9 - Failure to maximise potential income and reputational opportunities to be gained from the letting of Partnership's facilities</i></p> <p><i>Directors asked if consideration could be given in the future to assign different risks to different Committees? The Head of Operations confirmed that this would be done.</i></p>	HOO

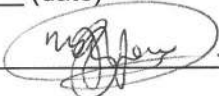
	Directors RESOLVED to approve the Partnership Operational Risk Register and additions as detailed above.											
12.	<p><u>Academy Operational Risk Registers</u></p> <p>The Head of Operations (HOO) reported upon a consolidated view of the top risks across the five academy's operational Risk Registers. The Trust Executive Team had also reviewed this summary.</p> <p>It was agreed that the Partnership are making good progress in mitigating against the highest risks.</p> <p>Directors noted that the Heads/Principal felt that risks regarding SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) reform/increasing SEND needs; increasing safeguarding needs and curriculum reform should now feature more highly on academy Risk Registers.</p> <p>The HOO advised that feedback received from the Local Governing Bodies indicated that they liked the new format and found it helpful in tracking the risks and progress being made.</p>											
13.	<p><u>Internal Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25</u></p> <p>The Committee reviewed the internal scrutiny annual report 2024-25, which had been taken in draft form to the 24th June 2025 Finance, Audit & Risk Committee. The overall opinion of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee is that the Partnership's internal control framework, including financial and non-financial controls and management of risks, is adequate and effective.</p> <p>Directors RESOLVED that the Internal Scrutiny Annual Report 2024-25 be approved.</p>											
14.	<p><u>Internal Scrutiny Programme 2025-26</u></p> <p>The Committee reviewed the Internal Scrutiny Programme 2025-26, which had been taken in draft form to the 24th June 2025 Finance, Audit & Risk Committee. It was noted that the areas selected for internal scrutiny are in line with mitigations on the Partnership's operational risk register. The programme for 2025-26 will be as follows:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>• Information Governance</td> <td>Carried out by Veritau (Internal Auditor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Business continuity, inc. cyber recovery</td> <td>Carried out by Veritau (Internal Auditor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Procurement</td> <td>Carried out by Veritau (Internal Auditor)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Catering Review (follow up audit)</td> <td>Carried out by Durham County Council</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• VAT Check (follow up audit)</td> <td>Carried out by S3TAX (part of Dains Group)</td> </tr> </table> <p>Directors RESOLVED that the Internal Scrutiny Programme 2025-26 be approved.</p>	• Information Governance	Carried out by Veritau (Internal Auditor)	• Business continuity, inc. cyber recovery	Carried out by Veritau (Internal Auditor)	• Procurement	Carried out by Veritau (Internal Auditor)	• Catering Review (follow up audit)	Carried out by Durham County Council	• VAT Check (follow up audit)	Carried out by S3TAX (part of Dains Group)	
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15.	<p><u>Fraud Statements/Data Breaches</u></p> <p>Directors were advised that there had been 1 small data breach which had been duly logged and investigated since last reported to the Committee. The corresponding conclusion and further action were noted.</p>											

Part D: Concluding Items		
16.	<u>Approval of documents for inspection</u> Directors RESOLVED that the agenda, approved minutes and supporting documents be made available for public inspection with the exception of information concerning identifiable pupils and/or teachers/staff and Minute 8a) audit findings report in accordance with Article 125 c.) as the report had been prepared solely for the use of Trustees, management and others within the Trust.	Governance & Policy Officer
17.	<u>Dates and times of future meetings:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuesday 24th March 2026 • Monday 22nd June 2026 	
The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm		

Action Log

1.	Appointment of Chair	Governance & Policy Officer
2.	Appointment of Vice Chair	Governance & Policy Officer
7.	Signed minutes – Minutes of the 24 th June 2025	Chair/Governance & Policy Officer
8 b)	Projections of pupil numbers for the Schools and College within the Partnership be brought back to at the next meeting of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee in the Spring Term	CFO
8 c)	External Audit Oversight and Findings – Conclusions and recommendations of the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee 2024/25 be taken to the Board of Directors and Members meeting in the Autumn Term.	HOO
9 a)	Local Government Pension Scheme Contribution - further information regarding the reduction in employers National Insurance contributions be forwarded to Directors regarding what the monthly savings would be. This would be forwarded via email.	CFO
11.	Consideration be given in the future to assign different risks to different Committees.	HOO
16.	Exclusion of Documents for Public Inspection.	Governance & Policy Officer

These Minutes were approved by the Finance, Audit & Risk Committee of Northern Arch Learning Partnership as follows:

24/3/26 (date)
signature (chair): 
name: Mavis Lord

