Link Academy Trust
Flourishing Schools for All

Audit Committee

Meeting minutes

5th March 2026

10 am

Held online via Microsoft TEAMS

Attended: Dominic Course (Chair)
Max Thomas (MT)
Christine Cottle (CC)
Jill Larcombe (JL)
Charlotte Roe (GP)

In Attendance:
Rachael Sharpe (CEO)
Matt Matthew (DCEO)

Minutes: Nicol Bush- Clerk to the Trust

No	Item	ACTION
1.	**Welcome and Apologies** The Chair opened the meeting with a welcome to Trustees, and the new Audit Trustee Jill Larcombe. **Reflection –** Vision and Values *"Flourishing schools for all at the heart of our communities"* The Chair reminded Trustees that discussions and decisions were made in the best interests of the children in their schools, guided by their shared vision and values. He noted that anything confidential raised in the meeting should remain so as a formality.	
2.	**Declarations of Business Interests** Jill Larcombe is an employee of the Devon Association of Governance. There were no new declarations brought to the meeting.	
3.	**Any Other Business** There was no business brought forward.	
4.	**Minutes of the previous meeting** • The part I minutes of the meeting were **approved** as a true record and were signed accordingly.	
5.	**Matters Arising from the minutes of 4th December 2025 (not included on the agenda)** There were no matters arising.	
6.	**Risk Register** The Chair noted three areas of risk that would be discussed later in the meeting: cyber security, ICT, and regulations and compliance. Cyber security and ICT were both rated as amber. It was confirmed that these issues would be addressed in the digital strategy section.	
7.	**Digital Strategy (Report circulated before the meeting)**	

	The DCEO gave a summary of the digital strategy report and invited Trustees to ask any questions, the following questions were raised: • *The Chair asked about the expected lifespan of the Chrome Flexbooks.* The DCEO explained that some devices were being replaced and the Trust was exploring whether they could be repurposed as Chrome Flexbooks. This approach also helped address Windows 11 compliance issues. He noted that while the devices met current needs, they might not remain suitable in five years as technology continued to develop. He said the aim was to build a strong and consistent IT foundation across the Trust. Several schools had already benefited from the support of their PTFAs, which had funded classroom sets of devices and even IT suites. Ditford, Harbertonford and Widecombe had already done so, with Broadhempston and Ilsington expected to follow. Matt also reported that a parent at Widecombe, who worked for an IT recycling company, was able to secure refurbished Chromebooks with a one-year guarantee and a lifespan of around three years for £60 each, which offered a cost-effective option given limited capital. In addition, the Trust had received a large number of recycled devices through a parent in one school, providing a full classroom set and more. The DCEO described this as the next phase of development for the coming year and praised the PTFAs for their ongoing support. • *The Trustees asked whether, given that the schools were small and rural, there were any funding sources available beyond parents and community support, and whether the government provided any additional funding for small rural primary schools.* The DCEO explained that the Trust tried to pursue any available funding, but charitable grants had become increasingly limited and were now very difficult to secure, even in priority areas such as sustainability. He added that some schools had been assessed as not needing government funding for rural gigabit connections, but he had challenged this because postcode-based assessments were unreliable in rural areas where a single postcode could cover very different locations. He said the Trust had a good relationship with the relevant authorities, and he was in regular contact with them about improving the trust's infrastructure. • *The Chair commented on the recent audit of internet connectivity across the schools and asked whether such a review had been carried out before.* The DCEO explained that connectivity had been extremely limited in some locations and, in one case, the only viable option had been to install Starlink. The DCEO confirmed that another school, Landscove, also had Starlink, but this had been funded by the government. He added that the Trust had been selected as a pilot for the Starlink programme, so it had not incurred any cost, and the service had been running for approximately two years without any further requirements from the government. • *A Trustee asked whether all Trustees had two factor authentication and whether it had been fully rolled out.* The DCEO confirmed that all staff were still required to complete annual cyber security training. He added that he believed two factor authentication was in place for everyone, as he used it himself, but he requested an action to check this across the Trust. The DCEO noted that, although it could not be undertaken immediately due to capacity, the Trust would need to carry out a desktop exercise in the future to test the cyber response plan. This would involve running a scenario and working through it to assess how the plan operated in practice. **<u>ACTION- DCEO to check staff and Trustees across the Trust had two-factor authentication.</u>**	
8.	**Internal Audit** The internal audit schedule had been raised at the previous Trustees' meeting and approved by the internal auditors. The two areas selected for review were capital expenditure processes and financial stability. These had been chosen appropriately, as	

	they were driven by the Trust wide Risk Register, demonstrating that the programme was focused on the right priorities. *The dates for the work had been confirmed for the summer term, the Chair asked whether there had been any particular reasoning behind scheduling it for that period.* The DCEO suggested planning the next internal audit cycle earlier, proposing that the committee identify three possible audit areas at the next meeting. The Chair agreed and noted that delays this year were partly due to waiting for the CEO to settle into her role. The meeting agreed that future audits should continue to be guided by the risk register and **agreed** to add audit planning to the next meeting agenda. **ACTION- Clerk to add Audit planning onto the next Audit agenda.**	
9.	**Benchmarking (Report circulated before the meeting)** The DCEO summarised the benchmarking report and invited any questions from the Trustees. • *The Chair raised that one figure in the data stood out: and said although the Trust received more income per child than average and paid teachers slightly less than average, finances were still tight because of the very high pupil to teacher ratio. He noted that this was largely a consequence of having many small schools with low pupil numbers, making it a difficult issue to address.* The DCEO noted that staff costs were higher than ideal at around 82% of the budget. He explained that Trusts should aim for the low to mid 70, with 75% or below as the target for future budgeting. He said the benchmarking data was useful and that he hoped to monitor these metrics monthly going forward. **PART II was taken**	
10.	**Academies Trust Handbook** The Chair said that the latest Academy Trust Handbook had been reviewed, which set out the annual requirements for Trustees. He explained that most of the new expectations, particularly around developing a digital strategy and meeting the required standards, had already been addressed. He noted that the key target date was 2030, so while they were making steady progress, it was not an immediate deadline for September. The CEO added that the handbook could be updated again in September, especially following the white paper, but he believed the Trust was compliant at present.	
11.	**Health & Safety** There were no new updates available for the meeting.	
12.	**Data Protection** There were no new updates available for the meeting.	
13.	**Safeguarding** The CEO said that the teacher version of CPOMS had been rolled out in January and that the DoS had provided training. She explained that access was restricted to key staff and that the next step was to review how effectively the system was working. She added that suspensions had reduced since her arrival in September, largely because staff now understood her expectations around fixed term and permanent exclusions. She was taking the updated exclusion policy to headteachers that afternoon, as it returned decision making to them. There were no significant safeguarding issues to report to the meeting.	
14.	**Policies** **14.1 DBS Policy –** The Trustees reviewed the DBS policy and **agreed** that some wording needed to be amended and following that, approval would be accepted via email. **14.2 Data Protection Policy-** The GP said that this policy would be brought back to the next meeting alongside the updated device policy for consideration in summer 2026. The GP confirmed that the two policies would remain separate, but neither would be approved at this stage. **14.3 Premises Management Documents-** The meeting **agreed** this policy was more relevant to the F&GP committee and approved the policy at this time.	
15.	**Review of Risk Register RAG ratings**	

	The Chair said there was nothing in the meetings discussion to suggest that the cybersecurity risk rating should change. Trustees reviewed the position and agreed that the risk should remain Amber, as the audit was still underway and the risk continued to be real, but it was being actively managed and was not at an emergency level. They noted that actions were already in place to address the risks and ensure compliance. Trustees commented that elements of ICT and cybersecurity were progressing well and might move to Green in future, but for now they agreed the current risk ratings were appropriate.	
16.	**Self-Evaluation of Governance Impact** The Chair said that the meeting had covered all necessary matters and had maintained a clear focus on pupils' best interests. Trustees agreed that the discussion had stayed within the committee's remit.	

The meeting ended at 11.25am

Signed by the Chair of the Committee……………………………………………………………on 3rd July 2026