

Governors' Virtual Meeting Policy

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Introduction

The [School Governance \(England\) \(Roles, Procedures and Allowances\) Regulations 2013](#) make provision for governing bodies of maintained schools in England to: 'approve alternative arrangements for governors to participate or vote at meetings of the governing body including but not limited to by telephone or video conference' (see Section 14). This can be the case for both full governing body meetings and committee meetings.

Governing bodies are corporate boards and they are expected to operate in a culture of transparency, in which they are accountable to their stakeholders. Decisions are most likely to be effective when they result from engaged discussion where people are enabled to ask questions, give their view and listen to the views of others.

Any form of virtual participation needs to ensure that the principles of good decision making are not undermined and that the corporate view is shaped by robust discussion and engagement of the full board.

Purpose of Policy

This policy will be used on an exception basis when a situation arises that prevents Governors from attending a physical meeting at the school. It enables Governors to continue to support the school during exceptional circumstances. It has been introduced in response to spread of the Covid 19 virus to enable all Governors to attend Full Governing Body or committee meetings during a period of advised social distancing.

Convening a Virtual Meeting

The Chair of Governors in consultation with the School Leadership Team and other Governors will make the decision on whether a meeting will have virtual attendance, this may be either partial or full. The Clerk to Governors will advise all Governors if any meeting is to be full or partial virtual attendance and set up a meeting on a virtual platform.

- The chair or clerk should set up the virtual meeting on whatever platform has been chosen and circulate the link to everyone else.
- All participants will need to have access to a decent internet connection. Most people's connections at home are good enough, but if they are in an area with poor connectivity additional arrangements may need to be made.
- Everyone should be encouraged to connect with their webcam/video switched on, if possible. It's much harder for everyone to participate, and for the Chair to moderate the meeting, if he/she can't see everyone.
- If possible, the platform should be tested before the meeting.

The chair's role

Before the meeting, the chair will work with the clerk to:

- Ensure the security of the platform being used, with due regard to the school's policies relating to data protection and the appropriate use of ICT
- Ensure all participants receive joining instructions – a one-to-one meeting will be offered on the platform for those who are anxious about using this method
- Plan to make the virtual meetings shorter if possible, as they can be harder to manage (but can be more focussed)

At the meeting, the chair will:

- Be first online, so they can welcome participants
- Ensure all participants introduce themselves and declare they are maintaining confidentiality
- Agree a protocol for participants to signal that they want to contribute to a discussion – eg raising a hand or using the message function
- Ensure there are no interruptions – questions and comments will be at the end of an item/presentation
- Check that all participants have had a chance to speak before moving on from each item
- Check in with the clerk regularly throughout the meeting, as time delays and sound quality can make it difficult to take accurate minutes

During the meeting

- Meetings should be shorter than the usual two hours and focussed on the key issues at that time – remote meetings are harder to manage, so shorter is better.
- Time delays can happen, so everyone should be given the opportunity to contribute and ask questions
- The attendance record at the start of a meeting will be managed in a digital format. The clerk will record who was present (and indicating that they were remote).
- If confidential items are to be discussed all participants should be in an appropriate location (to avoid other people overhearing confidential details).
- If a participant is in a location with lots of background noise, they should mute their microphone when not speaking – this improves call quality for everyone.

Appendix to Governors' Virtual Meeting Policy

Meeting Guidance for effective virtual meetings

a) Be prepared – papers

Normal meeting rules and procedures will apply, with the agenda and associated papers being circulated at least seven days in advance of the meeting. All governors must read the papers and come prepared with notes and questions, so they can participate fully.

b) Be prepared – equipment

Test the equipment – eg internet connection, microphone, camera. Set up the camera to look directly at you and limit any distractions in the background. There should be no distractions; devices that are not being used should be turned off. Log in at least a few minutes before the meeting is due to start.

c) Confidentiality

Be aware of your surroundings; conversations must not be overheard. If documents are being shared on screen, make sure sensitive information cannot be viewed by those who are not part of the meeting.

d) Code of Conduct

Participants will have regard to the governing body's Code of Conduct.

e) Quorum

Remote participants will contribute to the quorum for the meeting. If the technological link is lost, they will no longer contribute to the quorum, but this will not prevent the meeting continuing in their absence unless it has become inquorate. If visual communication is lost but the governor is still able to hear the meeting, they will remain part of the quorum.

f) Participating fully

Due attention must be given to all matters discussed, as with face-to-face meetings. Participants should attend for the whole meeting, unless there is good reason not to.

g) Voting

Participants are entitled to vote on any issue providing they have been present for the whole agenda item which the vote relates to. Where a secret ballot is required, this will be facilitated by the clerk (eg by telephone call off speaker). Where this is not possible the governor will be required to vote publicly or abstain.

h) Practicalities

Keep body movements to a minimum, as can be distracting. Mute your microphone when you're not speaking – this cuts out background noise and improves the call quality for everyone.