

JOINT BOARD OF EDUCATION

Governing Board Meetings – How to be more virtual

With the need for us to all take more care about social contact and in many instances to self-isolate, Governing Boards need to consider how they can continue to function effectively as a board but not engaging in face – to face meetings.

Below I have added some guidance on virtual meetings.

In maintained Schools, governing board meetings can be entirely virtual. Governing Boards have the power to approve '*alternative arrangements for governors to participate in and vote in meetings of the governing board*'. The first thing that needs to happen is a policy needs to be put into place to allow governors to do this that clearly sets out how you will work. (See model policy) This is set out in regulation 14 of *The School Governance (Roles, Procedures and allowances) (England) Regulations 2013*, and also applies to committee meetings.

Remote or virtual meetings can be carried out by telephone or video conferencing facilities such using FaceTime or Skype to join meetings.

All governors present at a meeting, including those participating remotely by telephone, video etc contribute as quorum.

You should plan when drafting a virtual meeting policy. Think about calls cutting out and the need for confidentiality. Those joining a call via telephone must be in a room on their own for confidentiality purposes.

You will need to decide on the arrangements for these meetings and must all agree how they will be conducted. There are a number of providers that offer free conferencing facilities. This list is not exhaustive and other than Skype, I have not tried any of them, but they all have free versions of their systems –

- Google Hangout Meet
- CyberLink U Meeting
- Zoom Meetings
- Lifesize
- Skype
- BlueJeans

There are many others so you may want to investigate, but these all have free telephone conferencing facilities.

Here are some of the pros and cons of virtual meetings

Pros

- You can set up a meeting quickly and at different times.
- No need to travel or be in contact with others – suitable for those in self isolation
- Can ensure that meetings continue as scheduled in the best interests of the school and that all governors are still able to take part

Cons

- Tone can be harder to convey so be aware of the meaning behind what you say.
- The conversation flow may need to be managed, the Chair or Clerk may need to step in to keep the meeting on track.
- Its easy to forget who is in the room – I would suggest that each individual makes a note of everybody in the virtual meeting and keeps the list as a visual in front of them.
- Ensure confidentiality. If people are at home, they must make sure that others are not listening to the discussion. All normal confidentiality and code of conduct rules apply.

Virtual meetings must be minuted in the same way as a face to face meeting. It can be noted as virtual, but attendance and decisions and actions should all be minuted in the same way. Agendas and paperwork should all be sent out 7 calendar days prior to a meeting and minutes within 14 days following a meeting in the normal way.

To ensure it runs smoothly:

- Make sure all governors have internet access. If you are in an area with poor connection, keep this in mind. (Think about peak times for broadband usage.)
- Encourage people to call in with their video / webcam on, it is much easier to see people.

- Test the link before the meeting to see that everyone can connect.
- Be clear with your agenda. You should find the meetings are shorter as you tend to find that they are more to the point.
- Ensure the clerk records who is present and if anyone ends their call, then they have left the meeting.
- If you are discussing a confidential issue, check that everyone that is in the virtual room should be there. If anyone needs to leave because of a conflict of interest, ensure the call is ended but don't forget to call them back for the rest of the agenda.
- Think about what is on your agenda. There may be a number of things that can be circulated and discussed via email, message board prior to the meeting. Eg – policies. If there are policies being reviewed, these can be circulated by email prior to the meeting and comments can be shared. You can also approve these by email.

Virtual Decisions

If a decision needs to be voted on by the board, this can be done electronically. All necessary information and papers must be circulated 7 days before the vote and the opportunity for questions and discussion via email / noticeboard.

The clerk must then send an email which outline the following –

*The governing board is being asked to vote on **XXXXXXXXXX***

*Paper A sets out **XXXXXXX** and the governors have discussed **XXXXXX***

*Governors are now being asked to vote on the decision. Can governors please vote option A, B or C in reply to this email to the clerk only by **INSERT DATE AND TIME.***

*A) I vote in favour of **XXXXXX***

*B) I vote against **XXXXXX***

C) I am choosing to not vote

The clerk should collate responses and once they are all returned, will email out the decision. An e-set of minutes should be produced just for this item which outlines the topic / decision being voted on, that governors were given 3 ways to respond and the final outcome – eg – Governors voted in favour / against XXXXX. This should be dated the day that the final decision was made (the deadline day or day that the decision was circulated to governors.) These minutes will then be signed off in the normal way at the next governors meeting.

This way of voting can be useful for policies and decisions that are straightforward or have already been discussed and can also be a way of freeing up some time in a virtual meeting. It can also be used for a range of other things, provided they have all had the opportunity to be discussed via email, message board, notice board etc.

Meetings can also be a mixture of face to face and isolation. If some governors can get together and others cannot, then it is acceptable for those that can not attend to use telephone / video conferencing facilities to join a meeting in the same way as outlined here.

Using email /notice board effectively

We will now be much more reliant on messaging in various formats. Please consider how this is carried out in your governing board. We advise against the use of personal emails as these are not secure. School email address are safer. Consider the use of a cloud area such as GoogleDrive or GovernorHub. Governor Hub provides a secure area to secure documents and provides a noticeboard that governors can use to share ideas, comments, questions and thoughts. This is a good way of being able to discuss things prior to decisions being made. The questions asked can also be documented in the minutes. For more information on GovernorHub, please [contact Hampshire Governor Services](#) if you are a Hampshire School or contact me if you come under another local authority. Shared areas provide an excellent way of governors being able to discuss documents and ask questions in a secure environment.

[GovernorHub](#)

The Chairs Power to act in cases of urgency

Regulation 8 of the *School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013* sets out the Chairs power to act on behalf of the governing board in cases of urgency.

It states that the chair has the power to exercise any function of the governing board that can be delegated to an individual when, in their opinion, a delay in exercising that function would belikely to be seriously detrimental to the interests of

- The school
- Any pupil at the school or their parent
- A person who works at the school

Regulation 20 states whenever a chair has acted in this way, it must be reported as soon as possible to the governing board.

The chair cannot use this power for the following –

- The discontinuation of a maintained school
- The approval of the budget
- Suspension of governors
- Exclusion (except in case of emergency)
- Admission of a pupil – this comes under the admissions code.

Over the coming months, where meetings may not be possible, the Chair may been to exercise this function. If this is the case, please ensure that the Chair has shared all the information possible with the Governing Board prior to the decision being made and that if time permits, responses and discussion has been sought. If this has happened then the board can make decisions virtually, meaning the Chair may noty necessarily need to exercise this right.