

Policy on Governor/Trustee Virtual Meeting Attendance

Introduction

Maintained schools

The School Governance (England) (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) Regulations 2013 make provision for governing boards 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”.

Academy trusts

Article 126 of the model articles of association state;

126. Any Trustee shall be able to participate in meetings of the Trustees by telephone or video conference provided that:

- a. he has given notice of his intention to do so detailing the telephone number on which he can be reached and/or appropriate details of the video conference suite from which he shall be taking part at the time of the meeting at least 48 hours before the meeting; and
- b. the Trustees have access to the appropriate equipment if after all reasonable efforts it does not prove possible for the person to participate by telephone or video conference the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate.

Local governing bodies (LGBs)

The proceedings of meetings of LGBs are determined by the trust board (article 100) therefore virtual attendance at face to face meetings and virtual meetings as described in this policy can be enabled by the trust board on adoption of this policy.

In relation to this the governing/trust board of [school/trust] has determined the following arrangements will apply. These arrangements apply to meetings of the full governing/trust board and to committee meetings.

Virtual Attendance at Face to Face Meetings

- Where a governor/trustee wishes to attend a meeting of the governing/trust board by either telephone or video link the chair and clerk must be notified at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made where possible.

- The governor/trustee will be asked their reasons for not attending the meeting in person and their attendance virtually will be subject to the approval of the governing/trust board at the beginning of the meeting, though this approval will not be withheld without good reason. Where approval is withheld the reason for this will be minuted, and the governor/trustee informed immediately.
- Governors/trustees attending the meeting either by telephone or video conference will be 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 where possible (e.g. by taking a telephone call off speaker phone and the governor/trustee sharing their vote verbally with the clerk). Where this is not possible the governor/trustee will be required either to vote publicly or abstain.
- Governors/trustees attending the meeting virtually will contribute to the quorum for the meeting. If the technological link is lost, they will cease to contribute to the quorum, but this will not prevent the meeting continuing in their absence unless it has become inquorate.
- The meeting will be chaired by a governor/trustee who is present in person.
- If, after all reasonable efforts, it does not prove possible for a governor/trustee to participate by telephone or video conference the meeting may still proceed with its business provided it is otherwise quorate.

Virtual Meetings

- It is expected that unless there are exceptional circumstances the three statutory full governing /trust board meetings and termly scheduled committee meetings will be face to face meetings. However additional and extraordinary meetings can take place via telephone or video conference call as long as the usual quorum of governors/trustees is 'present' on the call.
- Where a meeting is taking place virtually every effort will be made to enable all governors /trustees to access the meeting.
- Where a meeting is taking place virtually the usual statutory notice arrangements will apply and all papers to be considered will be circulated at least seven days in advance of the meeting, except where the chair has exercised his/her right to waive the usual notice in an emergency situation.
- Virtual meetings will be minuted in the same way as other meetings, either by the clerk being present virtually or by a governor /trustee, other than the headteacher / principal / CEO, and these will be presented for approval to the next meeting of the full governing/trust board.
- Virtual meetings should not be recorded by any governor/trustee or the clerk without the approval of the governing/ trust board and for a specified purpose.

Review of this Policy The policy will be reviewed at least annually, but any governor /trustee with any concerns about its operation can request that it is reviewed at any time.

Policy approved by the Governing Body / Trust Board on

Review date

Pros and cons to consider during the review:

Pros and cons

Pros

- You can set up a meeting quickly
- You don't all need to travel to a certain place to meet
- Members of your board in different regions and countries can meet at short notice. This could be particularly helpful when you're meeting to approve something quickly, such as a tender

Cons

- Tone is harder to convey leading to poorer quality conversations between governors
- Chairs struggle to manage the flow of the conversation owing to time delays
- Your board could overlook someone if they're not physically in the room, leading to the remote attendee not having a say
- The remote attendee can unwittingly disrupt the meeting due to delays
- It could be hard to make sure the conversation is confidential

Mitigate the cons

- Have a clear process in place for what to do if and when these problems arise
- If you intend to embed teleconferencing into your processes, invest in reliable teleconferencing services or equipment
- Clarify that the governor/trustee attending remotely still needs to meet the expectations around confidentiality