

## Virtual Attendance at School Governor Meetings

During the perfect Governor Meeting all members are present and fully engaged in a structured and robust debate of the issues on the agenda. However, this is not always possible. In this document we will explore the benefits and potential disadvantages of virtual meeting attendance and provide some tips to make it a viable option for your Governing Board.

### Maintained Schools

As a Governing Board you can approve alternative arrangements for Governors to participate and vote at meetings, including, but not limited to telephone or video conference. If you choose to run your meetings in this way the technology must be accessible to all. This process can apply to both Full Governing Board and Committee Meetings.

You will need to decide the arrangements for the meetings that will use telephone/video conferencing, these must be approved by the Full Governing Board\*. This is set out in regulation 14 of [The School Governance \(Roles, Procedures and Allowances\) \(England\) Regulations 2013](#).

It is highly recommended that the Governing Board creates and agrees a virtual meeting attendance policy in order to support any requests. A template for this can be found in [Appendix A](#).

All Governors present at a meeting, including those attending virtually, count towards the quorum of the meeting. If the technological link is lost, those contributing virtually will no longer count towards the quorum. The meeting can only continue if it remains quorate without those who are contributing virtually.

This does not mean that votes can be made via email. The regulations are very clear that every question to be decided at a meeting of the Governing Board is to be determined by a majority of the votes of Governors **present and voting**. An agenda has to be set and papers sent 7 clear days ahead of the meeting date.

There are a number of online providers who have free versions of their systems, simply go online and search for a provider. Make sure you check what is included in any system that you chose to use, some providers may put limits on the number of callers you can have or the length of the meeting. You must also consider the security of any platform that you chose to use. Read through the terms and conditions and ensure that you enable security features.

There may be some unprecedented circumstances when the Full Governing Board or all Committee members will need to meet virtually. It is good practice to set up all of your Governors to access meetings virtually and test this on a regular basis. All Governors will need to agree to any new arrangements.

### Benefits of virtual meetings

- You can set up a meeting quickly if everyone is able to access the meeting virtually;
- You don't all have to travel to a certain place to meet; and
- Members of the Governing Board who work away will be more likely to meet at short notice. This could be particularly helpful if you have to set up an extraordinary meeting to approve an item.

\*not relevant during COVID-19 school closures 2020

## Potential disadvantages of virtual meetings

- If you are using teleconferencing it is harder to convey tone which could lead to poor quality conversations;
- It could be hard for the Clerk to work out who is talking;
- It may be more difficult to maintain confidentiality; and
- There may be a time delay, which could disrupt the flow of discussions, making meetings longer.

## Overcoming the disadvantages

- Have clear processes in place for what to do if and when technical problems arise;
- Get individuals contributing virtually to say their name before they contribute; and
- Clarify that the Governor(s) attending virtually still need to meet all expectations in your Governing Board's Code of Conduct (including confidentiality).

## Tips for running virtual meetings

- Make sure all Governors who plan to attend a meeting virtually have a good internet connection, run a test prior to the actual meeting;
- Make sure everyone joins the meeting on time;
- Encourage everyone to participate with webcams switched on. It's easier to participate and manage participation if everyone can see each other;
- Make sure that your Clerk records who is present and that they are participating in the meeting virtually;
- If you will be discussing confidential matters, make sure everyone is in an appropriate location;
- If Governors are attending via a telephone link ask them to state their name prior to their contribution so the Clerk is clear who is speaking;
- Keep to the agenda;
- When you are more practiced use the 'mute' button to minimise background noise. Don't forget to switch mute off when you want to contribute;
- Ensure that every Governor knows how the Chair will run the meeting, so that all voices can be heard and the Clerk can effectively minute the meeting; and
- Make sure your Clerk is able to keep a record of contributions from those participating virtually, it can be more challenging to take accurate minutes with time delays and variable sound quality.

## Contact details

Governor Services  
**Integra Schools**

Email: [governor.services@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:governor.services@southglos.gov.uk)

Tel: 01454 863182

Web: [www.integra.co.uk](http://www.integra.co.uk)

# Appendix A – Virtual Meeting Attendance Policy Template

All items in red are to be edited as appropriate.

## Legislation

*The School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) 2013* make provision for Governing Boards of maintained schools in England to approve alternative arrangements for Governors to participate and vote at meetings of the Governing Board including but not limited to by telephone or video conference.

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The following arrangements were approved by XXXX School Governing Board on DD/MM/YYYY.
- 1.2 These arrangements apply to meetings of the board and delegated committees. Any statutory panels of the board such as staff grievance / appeals, staff discipline / appeals, exclusion and complaint panels are excluded from these arrangements.
- 1.3 The board shall monitor each individual's virtual attendance to ensure that they do not become isolated.

## 2.0 Virtual attendance protocols

- 2.1 All Governors should make every effort to attend all meetings in person in the first instance.
- 2.2 Where a Governor is unable to attend a meeting in person, but is able to attend through agreed virtual arrangement, the Governor must inform the Chair and Clerk at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. The Governor must state their reasons for not attending the meeting in person and the Clerk will notify all other members of the Board.
- 2.3 Virtual attendance at the meeting will be for the entire meeting, not for specific agenda items.
- 2.4 If the technological link is lost during the meeting, the Clerk will minute the time that the Governor left the meeting.

## 3.0 Etiquette

- 3.1 If an individual is attending a meeting virtually via telephone, each Governor will state their name prior to their comments.
- 3.2 The Governor attending the meeting virtually shall devote their full attention to the meeting for the entire duration, will not multi-task, eat noisy foods, rattle food wrappings or excessively shuffle papers.
- 3.3 The individual attending the meeting virtually will adhere to the Code of Conduct and observe confidentiality. They will not participate virtually from a setting where their conversation can be overheard or interrupted.

## 4.0 Quorum

- 4.1 An individual attending the meeting virtually will contribute the quorum for the meeting. If the technological link is lost, the individual will cease to contribute to quorum. This will not prevent the meeting continuing but may prevent any further decision or vote if the meeting is no longer quorate.
- 4.2 In the event of a vote taking place, the individual attending the meeting virtually will be entitled to vote on any issue providing they are eligible to do so.
- 4.3 Where a secret ballot takes place, the Governor / trustee / director participating virtually will not be able to use their vote unless arrangements have been made for the individual to communicate their vote directly to the Clerk (an email vote is not sufficient).
- 4.4 If the quorum of a meeting is affected by either 2.3, 4.1, 4.2 or 4.3 above, the agenda item shall be deferred to the following meeting, or if the item is urgent, an additional meeting will be convened within 7 school days.

## 5.0 Review of this policy

- 5.1 This policy will be reviewed **XXXX (frequency to be determined by Board)**.