FOXHILLS FEDERATION BOARD OF GOVERNORS

PROTOCOL FOR VIRTUAL/HYBRID MEETINGS

Status	Current	Approval	Board of Governors
Review frequency	Annual	Author (role)	Chair of Governors
Date first written	April 2023	Date approved	October 2026
Date of next review	October 2027	Date withdrawn	N/A

1. Background

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 means that as many governors as possible must attend the meeting, and any governors who are unable to attend may take part by telephone or video conferencing, given the Board's agreement. A meeting in which all participants attend virtually is permitted. The usual rules regarding quorum apply.

Whole governing body meetings and committee meetings may be conducted in this way. 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 - "every question to be decided at a meeting of the governing body is to be determined by a majority of the governors present and voting on the question".

2. Purpose of Protocol

The standard expectation for attending any meeting of the Board, or its committees is that governors will attend in person. This protocol will be used on an exception basis when a situation arises that prevents a Governor/Governors from attending a physical meeting at the school and will provide a framework for conducting such meetings.

3. Circumstances in which an intended face to face full Governing Body or committee meeting will be replaced by a virtual meeting.

- School closure for any reason
- An extraordinary or urgent meeting with a one item agenda

4. Circumstances in which an individual governor may apply to attend a scheduled face to face meeting virtually.

- Inability to attend the meeting in person due to illness, domestic or work circumstances.

4.1. Where a governor wishes to attend a meeting of the Governing Board virtually the Chair and Clerk must be notified at least 48 hours in advance to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made. Governors 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 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 recorded, and the governor informed immediately.

5. Convening a Virtual Meeting

5.1. The Chair of Governors in consultation with the Headteacher and Clerk to the Governors will make the decision on whether a meeting may have either partial or full virtual attendance.

5.2. The Headteacher, Chair or Clerk will set up the virtual meeting on whatever platform has been chosen and circulate the link to board members.

5.3. All participants must have access to a reliable internet connection and should connect with the camera switched on. The camera must remain switched on throughout the meeting, it is much harder for everyone to participate, and for the Chair to moderate the meeting, if they cannot see everyone.

6. Conduct of virtual meetings

6.1. Governors attending the meeting virtually will be entitled to vote on any issue providing they have been 'present' for the whole agenda item to which the vote relates. Where a secret ballot is required, this will be facilitated where possible, e.g., by the governor sharing their vote by phone with the clerk, or via a direct message service. Where this is not possible the governor will be required either to vote publicly or abstain., If, after all reasonable efforts, it does not prove possible for a governor to participate by telephone or video conference the meeting may still proceed provided it is quorate.

6.2. Governors attending the meeting virtually will contribute to the quorum for the meeting. If the technical 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.

6.3. The meeting will be chaired by a governor who is present in person. The clerk and headteacher must attend in person.

6.4. Meetings should be shorter than the usual two hours and focussed on the key issues at that time as remote meetings are harder to manage, so shorter is better.

7. The chair's role. At the start of the meeting, the chair will:

7.1.. Be first online, so they can welcome participants, ensure all participants introduce themselves and declare they are maintaining confidentiality.

7.2. Agree a protocol for participants to signal that they want to contribute to a discussion – e.g., raising a hand or using the message function.

8. During the meeting, the chair/clerk will:

8.1. Manage the attendance record i.e., who was present in person and who was present virtually, and whether they were in attendance throughout.

8.2. Ensure there are no interruptions, questions and comments will be at the end of an item/presentation.

8.3. Chair will check with the clerk regularly throughout the meeting, as time delays and sound quality can make it difficult to take accurate minutes.

8.4. If confidential items are to be discussed all participants should confirm they are in an appropriate location where they cannot be overheard.

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Appendix to Governors' Virtual Meeting Protocol

Meeting Guidance for effective virtual meetings

1. 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 questions must be submitted in advance by the date given, as is current practice.

2. Equipment

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

3. Confidentiality

Ensure conversations cannot be overheard, and documents shared on screen cannot be seen by a third party.

4. Code of Conduct

Governors must always conform with the Board's Code of Conduct.

5. Quorum

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

6. Meeting participation

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.

7. Practicalities

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