**Virtual Meeting Protocol**

**General Guidance for Governing Boards**

*This document is intended to provide a protocol for Governors attending Virtual Governing Board Meetings. The principal activities outlined in this protocol have been based on the National Governors Association template and best practice of Governing Board Meetings held on virtual platforms.*

**Introduction**

The protocol for virtual meetings of the governing board provides a simple set of ground rules to cover virtual meeting practices. The protocol acknowledges that the governing board must abide by the existing policies relating to Data Protection, appropriate use of ICT and maintaining confidentiality. The protocol applies to the governing board when using alternative arrangements to hold their meetings.

Maintained Schools

This protocol applies to Governors using alternative arrangements to participate and vote in meetings within maintained school governance procedures regulations.

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 Board including but not limited to by telephone or video conference.

In relation to this, the Governing Board of **Bollington St John’s Church of England Primary School** has determined the following arrangements will apply.”

These arrangements apply to meetings of the Full Governing Board and to committee meetings.

**Virtual Attendance**

Virtual Attendance at a meeting is where a Governor is not physically present at the meeting but participates or votes at a meeting through virtual means including but not limited to telephone or video conference.

Virtual Meetings are meetings where the majority of Governors are not present at the same physical location and participate or vote at a meeting through Virtual Attendance.

**Virtual Meetings**

Where the Governing Board decides that a meeting should take place using alternative arrangements (e.g. by telephone or video conference) that have been previously agreed, the following will apply:

Governors must:

* restrict themselves to using the arrangements agreed by the Governing Board;
* inform the Clerk to Governors of their intention to hold a virtual meeting as soon as possible, but no later than 72 hours before the meeting is due to take place (subject to the meeting being convened giving the normal notice period);
* communicate and co-operate with the Clerk to the governing board, school or trust as necessary to ensure that the alternative arrangements can be put in place and work well for all concerned, and
* abide by the normal rules and procedures, the Governing Board’s Code of Conduct and give regard to the duty to maintain confidentiality;
* ensure that their behaviour and conduct at the meeting is the same as the board’s face to face meetings.

All Governing Board meetings and termly scheduled committee meetings will be held virtually.

When a Virtual Meeting is taking place, the usual statutory notice arrangements will apply and all papers to be considered must be circulated at least seven clear days in advance of the meeting, except where the Chair has exercised their right to waive the usual notice in an emergency situation.

Minutes of the meeting will be taken in the same way as other meetings with either the Clerk or another Governor (other than the headteacher) attending through Virtual Attendance taking the minutes which will be provided for approval at the next meeting of the full governing board.

The meeting should not be video or audio recorded by any Governor, Trustee or Clerk without the approval of the Governing Board and for a specified purpose. The record of the meeting can be requested and meeting “chat” and messaging subject to a Freedom of Information Request (FOI).

All participants will receive clear instructions regarding how to access the meeting including where they can access support if they experience difficulty.

All participants will note and follow any instructions given on how to manage their participation at the meeting. For example, confirming attendance, speaking through the Chair of the meeting, voting on matters.

Governors/trustees will contribute towards a safe and secure environment for the meeting by giving due regard to the school’s policies relating to data protection and the appropriate use of ICT.

**Quorum**

Governors attending through Virtual Attendance 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.

If, after all reasonable efforts, it does not prove possible for a Governor to participate through Virtual Attendance, the Governing Board Meeting may still proceed with its business, provided it is otherwise quorate.

**Voting**

Where a *secret ballot* is required, this will be facilitated by the Clerk.

For example, by taking a telephone call off speaker phone and the Governor sharing their vote verbally with the Clerk.

For any *general voting*, the chat box can be used to cast a vote.

For example, **Y** in order to vote in favour of the motion, **N** to vote against the motion and **A** to abstain from the vote. Alternatively, a Governor may click the button to **raise your hand** and request that their individual vote is communicated verbally to the Clerk.

In all cases, the Clerk and Chair will tally the votes to ensure that all eligible participants have voted.

The Clerk will state the outcome of the vote: X For, X Against and X Abstain.

The Chair will then confirm whether the motion has been passed or not.

**Virtual Attendance at Face to Face Meetings**

Face to face meetings are where Governors are physically present at the location listed on the meeting agenda. Where a Governor(s) wishes to attend a face to face meeting of the Governing Board through Virtual Attendance, the Chair and Clerk must be notified at least 2 working days in advance of the meeting to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made, where possible. This Virtual Meeting Protocol applies to Governor(s) attending by virtual attendance.

**Appendix**

Appendix 1 outlines the instructions that must be followed by an individual or Full Governing Board, when a Virtual Meeting has been convened.

**Appendix 1**

**Prior to the Meeting:**

* All participants are to receive clear instructions regarding how to access the meeting including where they can access support if they experience difficulties or lose connectivity during the meeting.
* Participants will have the opportunity to test the meeting platform with the Clerk to Governors in advance of the meeting.
* An email or notification containing a link to the meeting including a dial in telephone number/option to join the meeting will be sent to all participants.
* Close all other applications prior to the meeting to prevent accidental sharing of information.
* Participants should join the meeting 10 minutes in advance of the meeting time to ensure a prompt start.
* Participants will be taken to a lobby area where they will be admitted in due course.
* The meeting should be joined from a quiet room, where no members of the household can disturb the meeting.
* Participants are advised to use a headset or headphones (if possible) to help with background noise and to keep conversations private.
* Participants should blur the background or ensure that the background is plain on their device with no identifiable information.
* Participants should ensure they are dressed appropriately for a Governing Board Meeting.
* Participants should not drink alcohol or smoke during the meeting.
* Review all documents made available before the meeting and, if possible, submit questions in advance to the Clerk to Governors.
* The Clerk to Governors will ensure only verified people have joined and monitor attendance throughout the meeting.
* The Clerk will ensure accurate attendance is recorded.

**During the Meeting:**

* All participants will note and follow any instructions given on how to manage their participation at the meeting. For example, saying their name before speaking, speaking through the Chair of the meeting, use the mute button for minimising background noise and feedback.
* For each item (or group of items) the Chair will provide a brief overview of the information being presented to the governing board. This will be followed by each Governor, in turn, being given the opportunity to ask questions or confirm that they are content. Once all Governors have been given the opportunity to speak the meeting will move to the next item.
* Where questions have been submitted in advance, the lead can provide answers during their brief overview (and identify that a question was asked in advance). This will make the process more efficient.
* At the end of the meeting all Governors will be asked to confirm they are content.
* The Chair will sum up the actions or conclusion after each item.
* If anyone must leave during the meeting please make this clear at the end of an agenda item when it is you turn to speak and ensure it is acknowledged so the Clerk can record it in the minutes
* The Chair may decide that only urgent items are to be considered and the agenda and meeting papers will reflect this.
* The chat box will be used to alert the Chair that a Governor wishes to speak; the chat box facility can also be used for voting.
* Abide by their normal rules, procedures and code of conduct adopted by the Governing Board and give particular regard to the duty to maintain confidentiality.

**After the Meeting:**

* The minutes and action log of the Governing Board Meeting will be circulated in the usual arrangements for all meeting papers.

**Review of this Protocol**

The protocol will be reviewed at least annually, but any Governor with any concerns about its operation can request that it is reviewed at any time.

This protocol was adopted by **Bollington St John’s Church of England Primary School** on 11th November 2020.

Date: November 2024