

# Coronavirus/Covid-19

## Governing Board Meetings

### Context

The increasing threat presented to the UK by the Covid-19 virus, and the evolving advice from central government, has resulted in the Governance Services team receiving many queries from governing boards. These questions, in the main relate to what governing boards should do now that continuing to hold face-to-face meetings conflicts with *social distancing* advice. We have put this factsheet together to offer advice on how boards can ensure schools continue to function effectively, with appropriate decision making.

This advice has been created to assist governing boards.

### Considerations:

Some of the key considerations are:

1. The health and well-being of school staff (including Headteachers and staff governors).
2. The health and well-being of governors, taking account of age, health, maternity and governors' families' health.
3. The need to protect school communities as far as possible.
4. Do governors have access to technology that will facilitate virtual meetings/alternative participation?
5. Are Chair's Actions understood by all?

### Our advice:

All governing boards in academy trusts and maintained schools should question if meetings need to go ahead: if the decision is that a meeting is required, as decisions need to be made, boards should then reflect on:

- Is it sensible/does the board need to meet face-to-face?
- Can a quorate, virtual meeting be held as an alternative?
- Is it possible to conduct business off-line/remotely?
- Can *Chair's Actions* be used as an alternative to meeting?

Even if your board has previously decided *not* to permit alternative participation in meetings, given the seriousness of the current situation, we believe moving to virtual meetings in the short term is a responsible, sensible and reasonable response. You may wish to refer to the Strictly Education 4S exemplar *Alternative Participation Protocol* for assistance conducting meetings this way.

**Please bear in mind that the protocol may need adapting to reflect current considerations e.g. a fully virtual meeting rather than just two governors participating using technology and adapt accordingly.**

Whilst some governors may have no access to technology, provided a virtual meeting is quorate, it can proceed.

*Chair's Actions* should only be used to make decisions in situations where failure to do so could result in detriment to the school, pupils, staff or the wider community. If the chair takes any actions, on behalf of the governing board, these *must* be recorded and reported back to the governing board at its next full meeting.

## Q & A

- 1. Who can decide to cancel/postpone a meeting?** In the circumstances common sense should prevail and if there is any risk, by proceeding with a meeting, this falls under Chair's Actions. It would, of course, be sensible for chair, headteacher and clerk to work closely on the decision and ensure all governors receive notification to cancel or postpone a meeting.
- 2. What issues/matters could be agreed under Chair's Actions?** There are many examples but the general rule relates to urgency e.g. school closure as a result of emergency relating to Covid-19, emergency expenditure on IT infrastructure to meet a deadline for the start of term and approval of documents prior to submission in order to meet statutory dates.
- 3. What governance business can be conducted offline?** Whilst it is not ideal for business to be conducted off-line, reviewing of policies, approval of School Development Plan, Self-Evaluation documents etc are all examples. Good practice would always be to circulate draft documents via secure e-mail, Google docs etc. or a governor portal, ask for questions and comments, redraft where appropriate and request e-mail approval. Sensitive documents containing personal data should *not* be shared this way. Schools and governors should continue to exercise caution and circumspection with all documents shared electronically or in hard copy, that they do *not* contain personal data or any sensitive information.

If you have any questions or would like further guidance and support on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us. Our helpdesk line is understandably dealing with extra volume at present, so please use [governance.services@strictlyeducation4s.co.uk](mailto:governance.services@strictlyeducation4s.co.uk) to contact us, rather than the phone line, if you can.