



VIRTUAL MEETING POLICY

Approved	
Signature of CEO	
Date:	
Signature of Chair of Board	
Date:	
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This policy is a mandatory policy for all BEST schools and must be implemented with no amendments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This policy is being enacted in response to the unprecedented national lockdown, caused by COVID-19. This is a specific example of exceptional circumstances referred to in this policy.

1.2 Despite exceptional circumstances, the Trustees' and Governors' responsibility for ensuring that there is effective and efficient governance in place for all of BEST's schools remains. In order to discharge this responsibility in exceptional circumstances, BEST will use video and telephone conferencing technology to conduct its governance meetings.

1.3 This Virtual Meeting Policy is based on guidance from the NGA¹.

2. BEST'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE AND MEETINGS

2.1 BEST's Articles of Association

Article 126 of BEST's Articles of Association states;

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.

2.2 Trust Board

Therefore, the Trust Board is authorised to conduct meetings where Trustees do not attend in person. This enables virtual Board meetings to be held where all Trustees access the meeting via video and/ or telephone conferencing.

2.3 Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) and School Improvement Boards (SIBs)

The proceedings of meetings of LGBs and SIBs are determined by the Trust Board (Article 100), therefore virtual attendance at face to face meetings and virtual meetings, as described in this policy is enabled by the Trust Board's approval of this policy.

3. IMPLEMENTATION FOR VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE AND MEETINGS

In relation to this, the BEST's Trust Board has determined the following arrangements will apply. These arrangements apply to meetings of the full Trust Board, LGBs, SIBs and to their committee meetings.

3.1 Virtual Attendance at Face to Face Meetings

- Where a Governor/Trustee wishes to attend a meeting of the LGB / SIB / Trust Board by either telephone or video link the Chair and Clerk must be notified at least 48 hours in

¹ <https://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Knowledge-Centre/Executive-leaders-and-the-governing-boards/The-Coronavirus-Information-for-governing-boards-M/Covid-19-Guidance-on-decisions-and-meetings-March-2020.pdf?lang=en-GB>

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 LGB / SIB / 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 to which the vote relates.
- 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.

3.2 Virtual Meetings

- It is expected that unless there are exceptional circumstances, the scheduled full Governing / Trust Board meetings (including the three statutory meetings per academic year) and all termly scheduled committee meetings will be face to face meetings. In exceptional circumstances, these meetings can be held as virtual meetings.
- 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 virtual meeting is taking place, every effort will be made to enable all Governors / Trustees to access the meeting.
- Where a virtual meeting is taking place, the usual statutory notice arrangements will apply. 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 face to face meetings, either by the Clerk being present virtually or by a Governor / Trustee, other than the Headteacher / CEO. These minutes will be presented for approval to the next meeting of the full LGB / SIB / Trust Board.
- Virtual meetings should not be recorded by any Governor / Trustee or the Clerk without prior approval of the LGB / SIB / Trust Board and for a specified purpose.

4. CONSIDERATIONS FOR A VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE OR MEETINGS

Virtual meetings have the following pros and cons:

4.1 Pros

- You can set up a meeting quickly.
- You don't all need to travel to a certain place to meet.
- Members of your LGB / SIB / Trust 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.

4.2 Cons

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

4.3 Mitigate the cons

In order to make virtual meetings as productive as possible; it is important to take steps, during the virtual meeting, to mitigate the cons:

- Have a clear process in place for what to do if and when these problems arise.
- If you intend to embed video / 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.

5. REVIEW

5.1 The Board will approve all major changes to this policy. The policy will be promoted and published throughout the Trust.

5.2 This policy will be reviewed annually, but any governor / trustee with any concerns about its operation can request that it is reviewed at any time.

5.3 This policy will be monitored regularly for any changes in legislation or directions from the DfE, which may have an impact.