

October 2020



Virtual Meeting Policy

Approved By: The Trust Board

Date Approved: 6 October 2020

Adopted by Trust Board on: 6 October 2020

Review Frequency: Annually

1. Introduction:

- 1.1. The Articles of Association of the Horncastle Education Trust (company number 08175402) set out in paragraph 126, page 37 that:
- 1.2. *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.*
- 1.3. In relation to this, the Trust Board has determined the following arrangements will apply to meetings of Trust Board Meetings, Trust Board Committee Meetings, Members' Meetings and meetings of Local Governing Bodies (including any sub-committees).
- 1.4. The Trust Board should ensure that any alternative arrangements are adequately secure to ensure confidentiality of any discussions.
- 1.5. The Trust Board will determine which software package or packages are used for the purpose of virtual meetings.

2. Virtual Attendance at Meetings:

- 2.1. A maximum of a third of the Members, trustees or local governors in post may attend their relevant meeting virtually at each meeting.
- 2.2. One of the meeting attendees who is present in person and fulfils the appropriate governance role (Member, trustee or local governor) will chair the Meeting. It is always preferable for a meeting to be chaired by the Chair or Vice Chair of the relevant group.
- 2.3. Where a Member, Trustee or Local Governor wishes to virtually attend their meeting by either telephone, video link or other agreed medium, the Chair and Clerk must be notified at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made. The Member, Trustee or Local Governor must provide the reason for wishing to attend remotely and the Chair will decide whether to approve the request, though this approval will not be withheld without good reason.
- 2.4. Requests made due to exceptional circumstances that fall outside the timeframe will be considered on an individual basis.
- 2.5. Virtual attendance at the meeting will be recorded as such in the minutes. Where approval has been withheld the reason for this will be minuted.
- 2.6. Members, Trustees or Local Governors attending their meeting virtually will be entitled to vote on any item discussed providing that they have participated (i.e. heard or engaged) for the whole agenda item which the vote relates to. Where a secret ballot is required, this will be facilitated, where possible by the Clerk utilising an agreed method (e.g. by taking the telephone call off speakerphone and the Member, Trustee or Local Governor sharing their vote verbally with the Clerk or via agreed online, anonymised voting platform).
- 2.7. Members, Trustees or Local Governors attending their 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**.

- 2.8. The Members, Trustees or Local Governors attending their meeting remotely must ensure that they meet the expectations and etiquette around confidentiality in line with the Trust's Code of Conduct. Members, Trustees or Local Governors **must not** participate in their meeting in a public place nor when occupied in other activities that require their attention such as when driving or in attendance at another meeting. The Chair will confirm this with the remote attendees at the start of the meeting.
- 2.9. Meetings should not be digitally recorded by any Member, Trustee or Local Governor or person present **by any means** without the express prior approval of the Chair of the meeting and for a specified purpose.
- 2.10. Where a Member, Trustee or Local Governor is attending their meeting remotely, and wish to share a document with the meeting through *screen sharing* technology. They should seek permission from the Chair prior to the start of the meeting and will be facilitated by the Clerk.

3. Virtual Meetings:

- 3.1. Fully virtual meetings will only be held in exceptional circumstance when face to face meetings are not possible. Exceptional circumstances include occasions when meeting face to face could pose a serious threat to health such as during a pandemic or when weather conditions make it impossible for participants to physically get to a meeting venue or when the government has instigated a lockdown such as during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.
- 3.2. The Trust Board will determine when governance meetings are fully virtual. In emergency circumstances, such as the sudden onset of an extreme weather event, the Chair of the affected meeting can agree to a fully virtual meeting.
- 3.3. Where a meeting is taking place fully virtually every effort will be made to enable all participants to access the meeting.
- 3.4. Where a meeting is taking place fully virtually, the usual statutory notice arrangements will apply and all papers to be considered will be circulated at least seven days in advance of the meeting, except where the Chair has exercised their right to waive the usual notice in an emergency situation.
- 3.5. Fully virtual meetings will be minuted in the same way as other meetings, either by the Clerk or by a Member, Trustee or Local Governor or staff member (other than the Headteacher or Chair) who is present virtually taking the minutes, and these will be presented to the next meeting.
- 3.6. Fully virtual meetings should not be digitally recorded by any persons present **by any means** without the express prior approval of the Chair and for a specified purpose.
- 3.7. The arrangements for sharing documents through *screen sharing* technology will be identical to that outlined in point 2.10.

4. The use of Fully Virtual Meetings for other purposes:

As outlined in Section 3, fully virtual meetings can be held in exceptional circumstances when face to face meetings are not possible. During these times, the Trust will mandate which other types of meetings may be held; fully virtually and policies will be adapted as required. Examples of Trust policies which may need to utilise fully virtual meetings are those relating to Exclusions, Staff Grievance, Staff Disciplinary, Staff Pay, Staff Appraisal and Complaints.

5. Review of this Policy:

The policy will be reviewed annually.

Appendix:

1. Virtual Meeting reminders & etiquette for participants:

- If you can, close down all other applications running on your computer or laptop or tablet or phone before you open the meeting software - this will maximise connectivity.
- Try to arrive at the meeting about 5 minutes before it starts; you will be admitted to a waiting room and the Clerk will let you into the meeting just prior to it starting.
- Have a plain background and try to avoid backlight/bright windows; it is worth considering what personal information could be gleaned from what is available to see over your shoulder!
- Try to look into the camera and not at the screen when addressing the meeting.
- Adjust your camera to be around eye level.
- Remember that everyone else at the meeting can see you all of the time - if you have the video camera function on.
- Try to stay still and be attentive (or appear actively attentive!) as even small movements (like taking a drink) will be a bigger source of distraction on screen than in a normal meeting room - you may wish to turn-off your camera when not speaking.
- As a default be *muted* (have the mute button on) to prevent ambient background noise - just remember to 'unmute' if you want to say something in the meeting.
- If you are working from home, shut the door to your workspace to maintain confidentiality and minimise any disruption or noise.
- Bear in mind that the meeting can see you and if your meeting is in the evening and you are working from home, normal activities like eating a meal or snack, drinking a glass of alcohol etc. are not appropriate when in a virtual meeting.

2. Making a Contribution to the meeting:

- *Chat* function - allows you to make a statement or ask a question to 'everyone' or to a single participant - make sure you check who you are sending it to when using the *Chat* function.
- The Chair or the Clerk might ask for comments via the *Chat* function during the meeting.
- *Chat* feedback/statements will form part of the meeting record so only use the function for meeting business.
- If your question has been missed or you would like to make a comment in the meeting, you could use the *thumbs up* or *hands-up* (depending on which software package you are using) icons to attract attention.
- You might find using headphones helpful with sound, audibility etc.