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INTRODUCTION

The guidance in this booklet is intended to support Part VII of the Scheme of Management for Controlled Schools – Board of Governors and Committee thereof. It is vital that Chairpersons and members of Boards of Governors understand thoroughly the Sections contained in Part VII of the Scheme of Management:

Page 24  Section 34  FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS
Page 24  Section 35  CONVENING OF MEETINGS
Page 25  Section 36  RIGHT TO ATTEND MEETINGS
Page 26-27  Section 37-39  STATED ITEMS ON THE AGENDA
Page 27  Section 40  COMMENCEMENT OF BUSINESS
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Page 27  Section 42  ORDER OF BUSINESS
Page 28  Section 43-44  ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON
Page 28-29  Section 45  APPOINTMENT OF SECRETARY
Page 29-30  Section 46-47  DECLARATION OF FAMILY INTERESTS
Page 30  Section 48  DECLARATION OF KNOWLEDGE OF CANVASSING
Page 30  Section 49  DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS
Page 31  Section 50  WITHDRAWAL OF PRINCIPAL OR TEACHER MEMBER
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Page 33  Section 53-54  BUSINESS NOT REQUIRING NOTICE
Page 34  Section 55  RULES AND DEBATE
Page 35  Section 56  VOTING
Page 35  Section 58  DISORDERLY CONDUCT
Page 35-36  Section 59  ADJOURNMENT OF MEETINGS
Page 36  Section 60  MINUTES
Page 36-37  Section 61  CONTENT OF MINUTES
Page 37  Section 62  DISCUSSION OF MINUTES
Page 38  Section 63  DISTRIBUTION OF MINUTES
Effective governance of schools is based on the twin ideas of consultation and shared decision-making. This guidance is aimed primarily at Chairpersons of Boards of Governors but is also applicable to Chairpersons of the various sub-committees of Boards of Governors. For all these meetings, whatever their size and purpose, the role of Chairperson is vital. Her/His skill at handling a meeting will make or break it.

Some skills are common to all committees and some are very particular to certain tasks. This guidance concentrates mostly on what is common to all. Different types of committees do, however, require different styles of leadership so this must always be kept in mind.

If the reader is new to the role of Chairperson she/he may be better at first to stick fairly closely to the methods outlined here. As the experience of success builds confidence, one can then adapt the suggestions and develop a personal style better suited to one’s own personality, skills and preference.

To the experienced Chairperson – keep an open mind as you read; remember, 20 meetings ‘under your belt’ can be 19 repeats of the first meeting’s mistakes

**Strong Leadership**;

**An Appropriate Level of Formality; and**

**Adequate Preparation**

**Are key to successfully leading a group.**
Committees have implications for the style and structure of the management of the Board of Governors, for the way various people should perceive and operate their roles, for the handling of information and for the use of time.
1 PREPARATION FOR CHAIRING THE MEETING

PLAN AHEAD

Meetings of Board of Governors need to be convened in line with the guidance given in Part VII, Page 21, Section 33 of the Scheme of Management, which states that:

CONVENING OF MEETINGS

1 Seven full days at least before a meeting of the Board of Governors or of a committee thereof, written notice of the time and place of the meeting, together with the agenda for the meeting, shall be sent –

(a) as appropriate, to each member of the Board of Governors or committee thereof, and to the Chief Executive; and

(b) in the case of a meeting of a committee, to the Secretary of the Board of Governors.

2 Subject to paragraph (3), and Article 60(1) and (3) of this scheme a copy of each written report or paper unless the Board of Governors agree otherwise, to be considered by members at the meeting shall be sent to each of those members seven full days at least before the meeting and, on request, to the Chief Executive.

3 The Chairperson, unless the Board of Governors determines otherwise, may withhold any report or paper relating to a matter specified on the agenda from a member who would be required under this scheme to withdraw from the meeting during discussion and consideration of the subject matter of the report or paper in question.

TASK

Have a clear idea of the purpose of the meeting of the Board of Governors or one of its committees.

“What should we have achieved by the end of this meeting?”

READING

It may be necessary to do some background reading, thinking and talking about the issues which are to arise.

STRUCTURE

Map out a possible route for the discussion and possible decisions. Try to anticipate problems. Give some thought to, and write down as your personal notes, possible starting points and ways of presenting each item on the agenda. You don’t have to introduce all the items yourself although you may wish to do so for key or controversial items. If using someone else for this task ensure that they are organised to do so. Plan questions to get all members involved early in the meetings.

TIMING

Agree suitable starting and finishing times and stick to them. Do a rough time-plan on your own copy of the agenda to help you pace the meeting.
PAPERS

If background papers, draft proposals, etc will assist discussion, have them prepared and circulated in advance. Arrange for spare copies to be available at the meeting. If a particular tabled paper is vital to the meeting and not too long, give reading time at the meeting itself. Alternatively a short verbal summary may be a useful reminder.

AGENDA

The agenda should be drawn up in line with the guidance given in Part VII, Page 2627, Sections 37-39 of the Scheme of Management. This gives structure to the meeting and enables all to know its purpose and progress. Word each item so as to make clear exactly what is expected. Place priorities on top of the agenda, otherwise time might run out before they are discussed or decided upon. Administrative trivia can swamp a meeting which has no clear priorities.

DETAILS

Arrive early and attend to:
- Suitable seating arrangements (See pages 12 & 13)
- Heating
- Refreshments (They may be inappropriate. They are troublesome and can take up valuable time but help members to relax).
- Personally welcoming members. A friendly welcome by the Chairperson to each member as she/he arrives can create a positive climate for the meeting. You might be glad of it later if the meeting ‘hots up’ and you have to intervene.

2 PUNCTUALITY/COMMENCEMENT OF BUSINESS

Start the meeting on time. If you await latecomers those who have arrived on time may well decide that there is no point being on time for the next meeting, so the actual starting time for subsequent meetings gets pushed back later and later. The slight embarrassment to latecomers will contain its own message.

The business of any meeting should proceed immediately when a quorum being formed and the chair being taken once the appointed starting time for the meeting has been reached or passed. (Part VII, Page 23-24, Section 38-39).

3 OPENING THE MEETING

A short opening statement about the purpose of the meeting and possible routes may prove helpful to ‘opening minds’. Avoid over-long monologue. Encourage the widest participation as soon as possible.

4 ADVICE OR DECISION; THE AUTHORITY OF THE MEETING

Both the tasks and authority of meetings of Boards of Governors, or their committees, need to be understood at the outset by all members. This may avoid later confusion or anger on this point. Members may think they are meeting ‘to discuss’ but to find it is ‘to be told’, may leave thinking they
have ‘decided’ but find they have only ‘advised’. The onus is on the Chairperson to ensure that members are clear on the point.

5 CONTROL OF THE MEETING

Stamp your authority on the meeting at the outset. This is crucial. If you don’t it may be too late to do it later when the meeting begins to get out of hand. A well controlled meeting is one which facilitates discussion by all who want to speak and agrees decisions which have to be made.

Do not allow any one person or group to ‘take over’ the meeting. This can happen when weak leadership leaves a vacuum which someone else then fills. If a member continually does this, you will have to discuss it with her/him (tactfully) outside the meeting. Do not tolerate private conversations, discussions or arguments (a surreptitious tap on the shoulder or finger to pursed lips may do the trick).

At the first meeting of the Boards of Governors explain how that members speak ‘through the Chairperson’ (ie, when they ‘catch your eye’ and you invite them to contribute). For very small committees this is usually too formal and hence unnecessary. It can, though, restore order to a meeting which has ‘got out of hand’. A way to encourage it is to quickly intervene;

‘Hold for a minute John. Elizabeth has been indicating her wish to speak for some time so I’ll bring her in now and you can follow. If everyone can speak through the Chairperson, and not all at once, we can then hear the important points being put forward!’

Be alert to spot when members want to speak by continually scanning the group with your eyes and ears. Some will indicate by taking a deep breath, by raising their eyebrows or with a finger. Acknowledge that you have seen them by a nod of your head. If there are quite a few wanting to contribute jot down their names and bring them in to speak in an orderly manner. Control is not domination. Be firm but gentle.

6 INTERVENTION

With experience you will learn when to intervene and when not to. You must intervene when a meeting is not fulfilling its purpose so await the opportune moment (the speaker is taking a breath) and jump in!

‘At this point can I remind members that our task is to discuss…… so can we go back there and share some thoughts on …….’

The Chairperson should deal kindly but firmly with:

- the person who rambles on and on or is excessively anecdotal; and

- the person who continually sways the group in a negative/destructive direction. (Acknowledge their point but invite comment on the more positive aspect of ……).
7 CHAOS/RESTORING ORDER TO THE MEETING

When an issue gets confused and members seem to be talking at cross purposes, or arguing at once over several suggestions, intervene, identify the different issues, put them in a logical or priority sequence and then tackle them systematically. If this is not possible, you may be able to stop the meeting for a refreshment break while you work at the problem or defer it to the next meeting or to a sub-committee. Large meetings are not a suitable means for thinking through complex or controversial issues. Similarly, if disagreement is seriously hindering progress defer the matter to the next meeting or to a sub-committee. Once sides have been firmly taken further discussion is likely futile. ‘Thinking space’ may tempt some out of their corners and enable progress to be made at a later meeting.

8 TRUST

If people are to share ideas and to feel free to express contrary views you must create a feeling of security and trust within the group. Don’t ‘jump down the throat’ of someone opposing your favourite idea or criticising something you are responsible for. Do not allow other members to do this either.

9 INVOLVEMENT

Aim at the early involvement in the discussion of all Board members but remember that a sudden request to contribute can be threatening so …………… be tactful. Encourage her/him to speak when you know she/he has something to offer on the topic under discussion.

“I wonder if William would care to comment, after this next point, from his experience in this area.”

(Note the sensitivity of the early warning to quiet, shy William to allow him to ‘collect his thoughts …….. or wake up!) Be alert for signs of anger, frustration or boredom. A quiet, tactful and friendly chat with a member who rarely contributes or is frequently awkward may reveal the reasons or provide sufficient encouragement to change their stance. The same approach can be used with the over-talkative, aggressive or domineering member.

10 ENCOURAGEMENT

Make each member feel that her/his contribution is valued. Good eye contact, by the Chairperson while a member is speaking are ‘non-verbal’ signs of encouragement. Your head buried in notes or writing is off-putting.

11 LISTENING

Be a good listener. A Chairperson who listens carefully can usually spot where the real problem lies and identify possible solutions.

12 SUMMARY

Every now and then, and especially after several detailed or complicated contributions, draw together the thinking of the group by summarising the main points being put forward; separate the ‘wood from the trees’ so to speak.
13 MANIPULATION

Avoid over-selling your own point of view but equally, it may be inappropriate for you to adopt a neutral stance. It is better to get a member to argue your point than do it yourself while ‘in the Chair’. Members will soon spot if the discussion or committee is being manipulated unduly to a particular point of view.

14 PROGRESS

Ask open-ended questions to extend and deepen the debate and to invite consideration of the consequences of proposals (the ‘economic’ cost). This is were your preparations will pay off.

“What would that mean for the management of the school Mary?”

“What are the various possibilities here?”

“What evidence do we need to look at?”

15 SENSITIVITY

A Chairperson needs to be able to ‘read the signs’ and know which stage the Board of Governors or sub-committee is at. She/He needs to be aware of the feelings and ‘hidden agenda’ and to be patient while the feelings settle. The ‘hidden agenda’ is the fears, frustrations, anger, disappointments, failures, threats or ambitions etc, which members may be experiencing but about which they will not talk or admit to having. They surface as symptoms in a variety of ways; the unspoken reason for supporting or opposing an idea, for blocking or encouraging a development, for affirming or undermining the leadership, for refusing to see the logic or reasonableness of an argument.

All members need to feel that they have an important part to play and are valued as individuals.

16 PACE

Pace the meeting. This is where your previously prepared draft time plan will help. There is nothing more frustrating than having to end a meeting without the main items having been discussed. Having identified priority items beforehand and having put them on top of the agenda, make sure that you allow time for each to be adequately covered. This prevents organisational matters and relatively unimportant items growing to occupy the whole meeting.

17 COMMON OBJECTIVES TO GETTING INVOLVED

Learn to cope with ‘the paralysis syndrome’ or the ‘We can’t do this because ……. syndrome’, by having your answers ready. The most common forms of this syndrome are:

• Because there is no time!
• Because parents won’t allow us!
• Because exams force us to do the opposite!

Nobody has absolute amounts of time. Time is not something you are given but rather something you create for your own priorities. The question really is;

“Is this sufficiently important for us to make time for it?”
18 EXPERTISE

The Chairperson does not have to be, and in fact could never be, ‘an expert’ on every topic being discussed in a meeting. Avoid this unrealistic expectation arising in the group. Experts can be invited to serve on a working party or co-opted on to a committee while their expertise is needed. On the other hand, it is still necessary for the Chairperson to do some homework by way of background reading, talking to others, visits etc. Ignorance leaves a Chairperson open to being manipulated or to have the meeting taken out of her/his hands because people tend to be swayed more by knowledge and expertise than by role. The Chairperson’s role is to facilitate discussion and the solving of problems, to plan, organise and control, to encourage every member to contribute and to gain consensus for the best course of action. Knowledge is only one of the ingredients in this daunting task.

19 CONSENT

Be careful about presuming that silence means agreement. It can mean a reluctance to express disagreement or ignorance of the item under debate. Taking a vote may, at times, be necessary. Its absence can permit a few vociferous members to give the impression that their views are the feeling of the meeting or a few awkward members to veto progress. It may however be inappropriate, especially when consensus is more important than a majority decision. Problems can also be caused by some items being subjected to a vote and others not.

Sensitivity to ‘body language’, under-currents, hidden agendas, and power relationships will indicate if a vote is advisable.

20 DECISION

Judge the right moment to draw a discussion to an end. If necessary, pull the various threads together and suggest a decision.

“From what you have all been saying it seems that we must 
………. by the next meeting. Agreed?”

Before leaving any agenda item recap on all decisions. The Board of Governors/Sub-committees and secretary should be clear as to:

What has been decided;
Who is to do it; and
When it is to be done.

Guidance on the minutes, their content, discussion and distribution, is found in Paragraphs 57-60, page 31-33, of the Scheme of Management. The secretary should highlight decisions in bold in the minutes. Meetings should start by checking under matters arising, that the decisions made at the last meeting have been carried out. This prevents the accusation of meetings being ‘a mere talking shop’.

See Appendices 1, 2 and 3 for proformas for notice of meeting, the agenda and the minutes.

21 DEMOCRACY

Professional autonomy and democracy should not be confused with leaderless confusion and non-decision-taking. Chairing entails exercising authority. While ‘in the Chair’ the Chairperson must allow no one to usurp that authority, but with the authority comes the responsibility to achieve the task.
Seating arrangement is a very important aspect of group dynamics. It can, and usually does, convey hidden messages to group members, particularly about the authority structure and how they are expected to relate to the Chairperson and to each other.

1. **Chairperson**

   ![Diagram](image1)

   Very authoritarian and very inappropriate for the sharing and discussion of ideas. Very poor eye-to-eye contact among members. The ‘hidden message’ is about control and being told, rather than about co-operation and sharing.

2. **Chairperson**

   ![Diagram](image2)

   Fairly authoritarian but more appropriate for the discussion of ideas. Poor eye-to-eye contact among some members.
3

Chairperson

Table(s)

GROUP MEMBERS

GROUP MEMBERS

GROUP MEMBERS

GROUP MEMBERS

Non-authoritarian and appropriate for group work. Poor eye-to-eye contact amongst some members.

4

Chairperson

Table(s)

GROUP MEMBERS

GROUP MEMBERS

GROUP MEMBERS

GROUP MEMBERS

Ideal arrangement if everyone’s contribution is to be valued and co-operation stressed. Excellent eye-to-eye contact for everyone.
GROUP DYNAMICS

Boards of Governors and their sub-committees are like people themselves. They have to grow to maturity. In doing this they often go through various stages of development. Each stage has characteristic behaviour and an understanding of this behaviour can prevent the Chairperson and members losing heart, particularly in the early stages of formation. This ‘growing to maturity’ requires:

- Patience;
- Sensitivity; and
- Understanding.

A stage rushed through may not be problems avoided, but problems made to fester under the surface for longer than is necessary.

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<th>STAGES OF GROWTH</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTIC BEHAVIOUR</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Forming</td>
<td>Anxiety about the task and one’s own expertise; dependence on others (“Tell us what to do!”) Checking out of impressions. Little work done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Storming</td>
<td>Rebellious – “….. if only I’d known that was involved I’d never have agreed …..” conflict, disruption, blaming other people, sub-groups, bids for leadership – “I could do the job better myself ……..” Negative reaction to new ideas. Little work done. If involvement in discussion/decision-making is new to some members they may want to use the meeting to air their own grievances and to have them solved before tackling the main task.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Settling</td>
<td>‘Fog’ begins to clear and structure of the group develops; business is talked about in more positive terms. The group begins to ‘gel’ and gets down to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Working</td>
<td>Co-operation, task performance, personal satisfaction and members enjoying the work; Chairperson and members feel secure in contributing and being constructively critical.</td>
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PEOPLE AT MEETINGS

NOTES FOR THE CHAIRPERSON!

HIPPOPOTAMUS – not interested in anything and makes no attempt to hide the fact. Incapable of adopting someone else’s ideas. Try to get hippopotamus to talk about something to do with their own work.

HORSE – keen enthusiastic and knows what they are doing, intelligent, but may talk too much. A skilful way of interrupting is by taking up one of their statements. If a horse comes too much to the fore, others may become jealous. Make it clear that everyone will have their chance to speak.

MONKEY – artful and a ‘know-all’ but one who can be useful. Through monkey, ideas can be presented that everyone should understand. From time to time, act as if monkey were not there. When monkey interrupts, ask then what they mean and let them get out of their depth, with the others doing the questioning.

GAZELLE – timid and retiring. Make the gazelle appear important in eyes of the others. Ask direct questions which you know gazelle will be able to answer. Give encouragement: gazelle may be valuable.

HEDGEHOG – has ability but is sceptical of everything new. Despises all the others; is not inclined to be helpful. Show hedgehog that it would be of benefit to put their experience knowledge to the service of the others. Having ideas accepted will make it possible for hedgehog to listen to the ideas of others.

FOX – crafty and capable of slipping banana skins in the path of everyone, including you. Red herrings are a speciality. Best not to tackle fox: foxes always find a way of escape. Keep your head. It is better to ask the group what it thinks of fox’s contributions, giving fox the opportunity of looking foolish.

FROG – a blabbermouth who talks too much and often of the point. Say ‘This is interesting but could we discuss it another time’ and start questioning someone else.

GIRAFFE – ‘Stiff neck’ who watches the others talking and feels superior. Say, ‘yes, it is right for your department, but should not apply here’. Treat giraffe with respect and show you are grateful. Giraffe is sensitive and easily offended.

MONKEY – artful and a ‘know-all’ but one who can be useful. Through monkey, ideas can be presented that everyone should understand. From time to time, act as if monkey were not there. When monkey interrupts, ask then what they mean and let them get out of their depth, with the others doing the questioning.

BULLDOG – aggressive and always wants to win. Does not always understand the point. Needs to be brought round using the other members of the group. If bulldog remains persistent or is looking for a fight, it is better not to encourage their involvement. Put them in the ‘dead corner’ on your left and pretend not to hear. Keep cool. If bulldog says something constructive, then bring them in.
Dear Sir/Madam

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Board of Governors of __________________________
School.

Venue: ______________________________________
Date: ______________________________________
Time: ______________________________________

Yours faithfully

Hon Secretary

STATED ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

The agenda for every Board of Governors must be drawn up in line with the guidance given in Part VII, Page 22-24, Sections 35-37 of the Scheme of Management.

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of previous meeting held on
   (accuracy/agreed)
3. Matters arising
4. Business raised by members (if applicable)
5.
6. Written report of a committee of the Board of Governors (if applicable)
7.
8. Any other business
A meeting of the Board of Governors NAME School was held on DATE at TIME in VENUE.

PRESENT

02/06/01 APOLOGIES
02/06/02 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING
02/06/03 MATTERS ARISING
02/06/04 ?
02/06/05 ?
02/06/06 ?
02/06/07 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The meeting ended at TIME.

SIGNED _______________________________________
(Chairperson)

DATED _______________________________________

See Scheme of Management Part VII, Page 38, Section 63 regarding the timescale for distribution of minutes to the Chief Executive (within 14 days) and each Member (7 full days before next meeting).

Note: 02/06/01 –

02 represents the year (2002)
06 represents the month (June)
01 represents the agenda item number