Children's Services

Code of Conduct for Hybrid and Virtual Meetings

1. Purpose of this guidance

Many Children's Services meetings are now held using virtual or hybrid formats. This code has been developed to ensure we show respect to children, young people, and families at all times, and that those attending virtual, or hybrid meetings can participate and contribute constructively to meeting outcomes.

Specific instructions concerning hybrid and virtual core group meetings are given towards the end of this document.

A virtual meeting is where all those attending join online via Teams or a similar online platform. A hybrid meeting is where some of those attending are together in a meeting room, and others join in online.

2. Scheduling hybrid and virtual meetings

Virtual working can create a risk of colleagues logging into one meeting after another without any breaks. This is likely to increase stress, damage wellbeing and reduce performance. Those arranging and those attending hybrid and virtual meetings should build in breaks before the start and after the end of the meeting, so that they can clear their previous meeting from their mind and arrive prepared at their next meeting. If you are invited to successive online meetings, you could leave the first five minutes before it ends, and join the next five minutes after it begins, to give your mind time to settle.

For more information on breaks between meetings, see Tips to Manage Back-to-Back Meetings and Research Proves Your Brain Needs Breaks, a Microsoft research article.

3. Arrangements for hybrid and virtual meetings

Meetings work best when they are carefully planned, with consideration given to the needs of all those attending. Those arranging hybrid and virtual meetings should:

State the aims and objectives of the meeting in the invitation.

Where the meeting is hybrid, ensure wherever possible that all those invited can choose how they attend, and record their choices.

Ensure that those invited can state any access requirements they have, and that these are met.

Help anyone invited who may be unsure of how to join virtually.

Inform anyone who is not familiar with the online platform [how they can choose the name by which they will be identified at the meeting](#) (and so protect confidential details such as email addresses). Those dialling into a meeting (rather than joining via a link) should be made aware that their phone number will be displayed.

For any formal meeting, ensure that an agenda is shared with all those invited before the meeting. Any documents, files or records that will be discussed at the meeting should also be shared beforehand, in a way that complies with our requirements for data protection and confidentiality.

Schedule one or more breaks if the meeting will last more than one hour, or if it is likely to be intense or distressing for one or more of those attending.

4. Chairing hybrid and virtual meetings

Those chairing hybrid and virtual meetings will:

Acknowledge each attendee's arrival as they join

Whilst waiting for the remaining attendees to arrive, talk with those already present to create a positive atmosphere

Give guidance for the use of cameras; for smaller (up to 12 attending), cameras should normally be on unless a presentation is being shown, or unless an attendee has their camera off for personal safety reasons. For larger meetings, the Chair should indicate at the start of the meeting whether cameras should be on or off.

For training events, attendees should have their cameras on, unless the trainer has indicated otherwise.

Explain why a meeting is to be recorded (where relevant), how long the recording will be kept and who will have access to it.

Ask those attending to use the Raise Hand function if they wish to speak; to look at the camera when speaking and to speak clearly; and to mute their microphone when not speaking.

Explain use of the chat feature.

5. Attending hybrid and virtual meetings

Those attending hybrid and virtual meetings should:

If attending online, have their camera on unless directed otherwise by the Chair or trainer, and use an appropriate background to avoid distractions.

Where an employee is concerned that their personal safety may be at risk if their camera is on in a meeting or training session, they should discuss this with their manager beforehand, and agree a course of action.

If attending online, use the Raise Hand function if they wish to speak; look at the camera when speaking and speak clearly; and mute their microphone when not speaking.

If attending online, ensure that no personal information is visible when they share their screen.

If attending in person, avoid side conversations with others in the room that exclude virtual attendees.

Follow the requirements of the [Dorset Council Code of Conduct for Employees](#) and the [standard for personal appearance](#).

All those attending meetings should ensure that their phones (including notifications) are switched to silent.

6. Additional requirements for Core Group meetings

Any practitioner attending online a virtual or hybrid Child Protection Conference or Core Group meeting must have their camera turned on.

Where a practitioner attending a Child Protection Conference or Core Group meeting does not have their camera turned on, the meeting is inquorate. The Chair should suspend or terminate the meeting and notify the Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships of the exception.