



GOVERNWELL

A ONE STOP TRAINING RESOURCE FOR NHS GOVERNORS

EFFECTIVE
CHAIRING
OF GOVERNOR
COMMITTEES

INTRODUCTION

Councils of governors (CoGs) often form committees to focus on a particular project on behalf of the full CoG. Having agreed their terms of reference and objectives with the full CoG, the committees will meet as required and then report back to the full CoG on a regular basis.

The CoG has no powers of delegation, so committees can make recommendations to and advise the full council but cannot make decisions on its behalf.

Creating an effective governor committee requires good chairing and working relationships. Through our observations of governor committees we believe that there are some guiding principles for chairs of those committees which can help secure the best meeting outcomes. This guidance document is aimed at chairs of governor committees.

CoG COMMITTEES

Key points

- **Governor committees are formed for a number of reasons including creating space for governors to examine complex issues in more detail as well as allow them to formulate action plans**
- **Committees should have written terms of reference which clearly define the objectives of the committee, specify its membership and outlines the quorum for meetings (the minimum number of attendees required for decisions to be able to be made)**

Most governor committees are dependent on the specific requirements of individual trusts. Some examples of common governor committees include (but are not limited to):

- membership development
- quality and safety
- strategy
- patient experience.

Governors may also be asked to join a working group or task and finish group as a practical way of dealing with specific issues. These may include governors, as well as directors and other members of staff. A task and finish group could be set up, for example, to review the development and training needs of the CoG.

EFFECTIVE CHAIRING OF GOVERNOR COMMITTEES

Key points

- **Chairs should cover housekeeping and establish ground rules to allow for productive discussion**
- **Chairs should ensure that meeting outcomes and actions are captured**
- **Chairs are responsible for facilitating the meeting as opposed to directing it**

Chairs of governor committees are appointed by the CoG and it is important that the individual has good chairing skills to ensure that the committee remains focused on achieving its objectives.

Any housekeeping messages, for example, health and safety briefings and venue orientation, are typically covered at the beginning of meetings. Punctuality is very important, and chairs should remind attendees to keep this in mind. Some chairs formulate and agree some ground rules the group will follow in working together, such as respecting each others' thinking and valuing contribution.

A chair should assume that all members have come prepared to discuss agenda items having read through supporting papers, this removes the need to take up valuable time discussing the content of papers.

A successful chair should be able to engage willingly and naturally with participants, bring insight and clarity of purpose to steer a path through the noise of meetings, and summarise agenda items effectively to ensure clear outcomes and actions are captured.

As well as the above it is imperative that a chair facilitates the meeting as opposed to directing it. The best chairs are comfortable with allowing a free ranging debate and using their facilitation skills to steer discussions while at the same time not overly influencing the outcome of the debate.

Good facilitation also unleashes creativity and knowledge and engenders team motivation. One of the benefits of a CoG is in its diversity of perspectives, so it is important that all committee members feel that they have had the opportunity to input into discussions. Equally, it is important for the chair to recognise when less vocal members of the group are being crowded out of discussions and to be able to naturally include them by overtly asking their opinion and ensuring that their voice is heard.

The need for constructive challenge is necessary at times, as is the need to be supportive, and a good chair will recognise when each is appropriate. In challenging situations a chair must respond calmly, keep to the facts and focus the group on solutions.

MEETING LOGISTICS

Chairs of governor committees should plan their meetings around annual work plans, such as NHS Improvement reporting deadlines, to ensure that sufficient time is given to produce reports and for decisions to be made by the CoG and the trust. The chair of a governor committee should be prepared to give written and verbal reports to the trust chair and CoG to keep them updated on the committee's progress and activities.

Being responsible for committee logistics, chairs should ensure meeting rooms are booked well in advance and venue details are circulated in a timely manner to all committee members. Trust secretaries or membership managers may be able to support this process. Meeting papers should be circulated prior to the meeting in a timeframe outlined in the trust standing orders (a document which details meeting procedures) so that everyone has adequate time to be prepared and contribute to the discussions. Provision should be made for participants with hearing or visual impairments or disabilities.

GOVERNOR COMMITTEE AGENDAS AND PAPERS

As meetings will tend to be shorter than CoG meetings, full minutes may not need to be taken but instead a note of the points of discussion and key actions should be recorded.

Agenda content should be subject to regular scrutiny to ensure it continues to reflect the objectives which are outlined in the committee's terms of reference. The chair should not set the agenda in isolation without due regard for the needs of the organisation and wishes of CoG members, and should also ensure that all carry forward items from the preceding meeting are included in the agenda for the next committee meeting. Agendas should also ensure an appropriate balance between presentations, debate and time for questions.

Committee chairs and members should be mindful of the length of the agenda and consequent impact on duration of meetings and therefore effectiveness. Generally, committee meetings should not be longer than two hours and start and finish times should be specified. It helps for any meeting agenda to cover difficult subjects first, as people are often able to process information more easily at the start of a meeting, saving time as a result.

Indicative timings on agendas should be considered with caution. They are a great aid in planning the agenda to ensure there is sufficient time to cover the items listed but often published timings are used as a blunt instrument to curtail discussion. They can apply undue pressure on a chair to keep to the timings as to not do so might indicate poor facilitation.



POST-COMMITTEE MEETINGS

It is important that members of committees have the immediate opportunity for reflection and comment regarding the meeting. A post-meeting reflection should help form the committee update at the next CoG meeting.

Things to reflect upon following a committee meeting include:

- What key outcomes did we arrive at today?
- What recommendations will we be bringing to the next CoG meeting?
- Have our discussions met the objectives set for the committee?
- Is there anything that requires escalating as a result of today's discussions?
- Was the quality of the papers sufficient?
- What worked well and not so well from today's meeting?
- Was the time taken on each agenda item sufficient?
- Is there anything else you wish to raise as a result of today's meeting?

SUMMARY

An effective committee meeting:

- meets the objectives set out in its terms of reference
- is focused on outcomes for patients and service users
- is well organised and has a structured agenda
- has papers circulated well in advance to allow participants to be prepared
- is one where the chair presides and plays an important role in managing the meeting
- allows a free discussion of agenda items, where every member of the committee is encouraged to make a contribution
- ensures the CoG recommendations arising from meetings are clearly understood by all those present and are taken forward
- has a record of discussion points and actions which allow non-attenders of the meeting to understand what has taken place.



NHS Providers is the membership organisation and trade association for the NHS acute, ambulance, community and mental health services that treat patients and service users in the NHS. We help those NHS foundation trusts and trusts to deliver high quality, patient focused care by enabling them to learn from each other, acting as their public voice and helping shape the system in which they operate.

NHS Providers has 95 per cent of all NHS foundation trusts and aspirant trusts in membership, collectively accounting for £65 billion of annual expenditure and employing more than 928,000 staff.

EFFECTIVE CHAIRING OF GOVERNOR COMMITTEES



One Birdcage Walk, London SW1H 9JJ
020 7304 6977
enquiries@nhsproviders.org
www.nhsproviders.org
@NHSProviders

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Registered charity 1140900
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Registered Office
One Birdcage Walk, London SW1H 9JJ

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