Board Etiquette

Purpose

This protocol supports positive Board and Committee behaviours by setting out the standards of conduct expected of Board Directors and attendees when participating in Board and Committee business. It promotes respectful, constructive and transparent working, and supports Board and Committee members to focus on maximising value and outcomes for the people of Wales in the short, medium and long term. It also clarifies the practical arrangements that support effective preparation, participation and follow-up.

Board Role and Governance Context

The Public Health Wales Board is the governing body of the organisation and acts as a full Board, or through its Committees. The Board is constituted as a 'Unitary' Board meaning that Executive and Non-Executive Directors are equal around the Board table and in the Board decision-making process.

Board directors:

- formulate strategy
- ensure accountability
- shape and evolve a positive tone and culture that aligns with organisational purpose
- set strategic risk appetite and provide governance and oversight of strategic risks
- oversee delivery against in-year plans
- build and sustain strategic partnerships
- maintain effective governance

The way Board directors behave towards each other and conduct Board and Committee business is central to effective stewardship, good decision making, public confidence and the culture the Board sets for the organisation. These behaviours support a constructive organisational culture and effective decisions that improve outcomes for the people of Wales.

This protocol supports Board directors and attendees to uphold the organisation's values and standards of conduct, contribute constructively, and promote transparent, well-informed and inclusive Board and Committee business.

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Core Behavioural Principles

The following principles set the expected standard for how Board Directors and attendees should behave, contribute and uphold Public Health Wales' values during Board and Committee business, supporting a culture that enables effective scrutiny, constructive discussion and better outcomes.

These principles do not replace existing standards, including the Nolan Principles, relevant Codes of Conduct and the Standards of Behaviour Policy. They describe how those standards should be applied in practice during Board and Committee business.

Core values, standards and responsibilities

- embody Public Health Wales' values, working together with trust and respect to make a difference;
- apply the Nolan Principles, relevant Codes of Conduct and the Standards of Behaviour Policy in Board and Committee business;
- consider potential conflicts of interest in advance of the agenda and declare any actual or potential conflicts transparently and as soon as they arise;
- handle confidential and sensitive information appropriately;

Constructive Board behaviour

- listen actively, challenge constructively and receive challenge with openness and respect;
- remain focused, prepared and present, managing competing commitments in a way that supports the effective conduct of business;
- seek clarification on papers or issues in advance of meetings where practical and helpful, recognising this may not always be feasible;
- work through differences constructively, seeking agreement where possible while respecting different views;
- show collective responsibility, support and mutual respect for other Board directors, demonstrating transparency and candour;

Speaking up, inclusion and quality of discussion

- support a Speak Up Safely culture by enabling concerns, questions and different perspectives to be raised openly, respectfully and without fear of detriment;
- remain alert to assumptions, bias and groupthink, encouraging a range of perspectives before reaching conclusions;

Evidence-informed and inclusive decision making

- use evidence, assurance and the strategic purpose of the item to inform contributions and decision making;

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- act in the greater public health good, keeping people, service users, diversity, inclusion, value and outcomes central to decision making in the short, medium and long term.
- recognise that inclusive, respectful and well-informed discussion supports better decisions and outcomes.

Governance responsibilities across the meeting cycle

The following tables summarise the key responsibilities before, during and after Board and Committee meetings.

Before Meetings

Chair / Chief Executive / Committee Chair / Lead Executive	Lead Executive	All Directors
•Agree workplans, agendas, decision tracking and assurance sources •Focus agendas on strategic, assurance and decision items •Review effectiveness and adjust future meetings	•Prepare papers on time and to agreed standards •Ensure each item sets out its purpose and the role of the Board / Committee. •Agree any deadline or paper exceptions in advance	•Read papers and seek clarification in advance •Prioritise attendance and agree deputies where needed

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During Meetings

Chair / Chief Executive / Committee Chair	Lead Executive	All Directors
• Set the tone for respectful, inclusive and focused discussion. • Support constructive challenge and balanced contributions • Ensure decisions reflect the discussion, evidence and agreed principles. • Ensure more junior staff or presenters feel able to contribute and raise questions during meetings	• Frame items clearly, including the purpose and key issues. • Support informed scrutiny through evidence, context and assurance.	• Act in line with the general principles. • Avoid duplication and contribute constructively. • Ensure their contribution supports culture, values, diversity and inclusion • Accept challenge constructively and respond with openness and respect.

After Meetings

Chair / Chief Executive / Committee Chair	Lead Executive	All Directors
• Promote reflection, learning and continuous improvement. • Ensure outcomes reflect agreed principles and ways of working. • Support escalation where wider governance attention is needed.	• Progress agreed actions. • Provide assurance on delivery, risks and timescales. • Escalate delivery concerns or changes in scope where needed.	• Engage in evaluation and learning. • Follow through on agreed actions. • Provide assurance or scrutiny as appropriate. • Share relevant outcomes, decisions and implications with their Directoates, ensuring teams are aware of matters that affect their work.

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Supporting effective and inclusive participation

This section sets out additional guidance to support effective and inclusive participation across different meeting circumstances.

Meeting formats should support the purpose of the meeting, effective governance, meaningful participation and good attendance, while reducing barriers to participation and maintaining the quality of discussion, scrutiny and engagement.

In-person Meetings

- Use in-person engagement where it best supports the meeting's purpose, effective governance and meaningful participation.
- Prioritise in-person engagement for Board and Board Development meetings where this strengthens Board cohesion, constructive challenge, learning and collective decision making.
- Attendees should use in-person meetings to contribute actively, listen well, engage with colleagues and support the Board's agreed culture and ways of working.

Hybrid and Committee meetings

- Agree Committee meeting formats in advance, generally including a hybrid option to maximise attendance and reduce unnecessary travel.
- Use hybrid arrangements where they support attendance and maintain the quality of discussion, scrutiny and engagement.
- Where a hybrid format has been agreed, virtual participation should be supported so that all attendees can contribute meaningfully to discussion, scrutiny and decision making.

Supporting Board members, staff, presenters and visitors

- Accessibility, language, digital or other support needs for Board members, staff, presenters and visitors will be identified in advance where possible, with suitable arrangements or reasonable adjustments made where required.
- Chairs, Executive Leads and the Board Secretary will ensure all participants are welcomed, briefed and supported to contribute inclusively and meaningfully.
- Support may include hearing loops, BSL support, Welsh language translation, accessible materials, papers shared in advance, or other arrangements appropriate to individual needs.
- All Directors and attendees will use plain, accessible language and avoid unnecessarily professionalised, technical or exclusionary terminology.

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- The Board will promote a welcoming environment where people can contribute openly, particularly when sharing lived experience, staff experience, professional expertise or community insight.

Site and facility visits

- Site and facility visits help Board directors understand local context, services, staff experience and issues relevant to the area being visited.
- Visits should be supported by appropriate context, including key issues, opportunities and relevant service, staff or community perspectives.
- Directors and attendees use visits to listen, ask questions and reflect on how local insight informs scrutiny, assurance and decision making.

Joining a meeting virtually

- Prepare in advance by following meeting specific joining guidance, using suitable equipment, checking connection, camera and microphone, and ensuring devices are charged or connected to power.
- Join from an appropriate setting, using headphones where needed, avoiding shared devices, reducing background noise and protecting confidential information.
- Manage camera, microphone and background in a way that supports effective participation and minimises disruption.

Use of meeting chat

- Meeting chat should be used for logistics only, such as technical difficulties, requests to speak where the raise-hand function is not available, or notifying the Chair if someone needs to leave.
- Discussion, debate, questions, comments or other substantive points relevant to Board or Committee business must not take place through Teams chat. These matters should be raised verbally in the formal meeting so they are visible to all attendees, can be managed by the Chair and can be properly captured in the minutes where required.
- Chat messages may be disclosable under information access legislation, including Freedom of Information requirements. Substantive discussion should therefore take place within the formal meeting so it can be appropriately managed and reflected in the meeting record.