



Welcome to our governance news update

Hello and welcome to our last governance newsletter of the spring term.

This week we are focusing on the long-awaited replacement of the Governance Handbook, which has been split into separate guides for maintained schools and academies.

We will summarise the key points and any changes to be aware of.



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Contact us

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email: governorservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk
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DfE and national updates



Replacements for the Governance Handbook

The Department for Education (DfE) has released two new governance guides, tailored specifically for [maintained schools](#) and [academy trusts](#). They replace the DfE Governance Handbook last revised in October 2020.

Importantly the new guides **do not include any new governance expectations**.

Maintained Schools Guide

Who should read this guide?

Whilst governors need to be aware of the contents of the guide, this should be balanced with the workload being asked of volunteers. However, these guides are far shorter than the Governance Handbook was.

We agree with the recommendation by the NGA that, as a minimum, the Maintained Schools Governance Guide is read in full by:

- governing board chairs and vice chairs
- committee chairs
- governance professionals
- headteachers

All governors should be made aware of the guide during their induction and be confident referring to it when needed.

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Key Changes for Maintained Schools

(as compiled by the NGA)

The guide is much more concise when compared to the Governance Handbook but retains much of the same information and best practice advice.

Notable changes include:

- Separate guides are now available for trusts and maintained schools.
- The Governance Competency Framework and Governance Structures and Roles guidance have been archived.
- The DfE's list of statutory policies has now been incorporated into the guides. Procedural and 'live documents' have been removed from the list, meaning that it now provides a concise summary of key policies. The DfE has prompted boards to consider delegating policy approval where possible and clarified their position on policy review cycles.
- Requirements for headteachers to report information to the board, including matters relating to delegated duties, operational advice and compliance with reasonable directions.
- An added section on chair's action provides clarity on the circumstances in which a chair may take decisions on behalf of the governing body.
- Setting expectations on the performance management of the governance professional.
- Further clarification on the governing board's estate management responsibilities, specifically relating to asbestos

The overall message is very simple: no need to worry, very little has actually changed – there are no new, big asks. If you are confident your governance practice is working, carry on.

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Academy Trust Guide

The **Academy Trust Governance guide** is structured around the new Trust Quality Descriptions and now better aligns with the Academy Trust Handbook

Who should read this guide?

As with maintained schools, boards need to balance the importance of making trustees, local governors, executives and governance professionals aware of the content of the guide with the workload implications of expecting volunteers to read a document cover-to-cover.

We expect that, as a minimum, the Academy Trust Governance Guide is read in full by:

- the trust board chair and vice chair
- committee chairs, including local tier chairs
- all trust governance professionals – trust governance manager and local tier clerks
- the accounting officer (CEO) and the other members of the central leadership team
- all academy headteachers

All of those governing in trusts – both trustees and local governors – should be made aware of the guide during their induction and be confident referring to it when needed.

Key Changes for academy trusts

(as compiled by the NGA)

The guide is much more concise when compared to the Governance Handbook, but retains much of the same information and best practice advice.

Notable changes include:

- Separate guides are now available for trusts and maintained schools, reflecting the divergence of the two school systems. The trust guide is explicitly structured around the fifth 'pillar' of the DfE's trust quality descriptions: governance and leadership.
- The Governance Competency Framework and Governance Structures and Roles guidance have been archived. NGA has a wealth of alternative resources, including role descriptions and our career pathway for governance professionals.

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- The DfE's list of statutory policies has now been incorporated into the guides. Procedural and 'live documents' have been removed from the list, meaning that it now provides a concise summary of key policies. The DfE has prompted boards to consider delegating policy approval where possible and clarified their position on policy review cycles.
- Reference to 'diocesan strategy' has been added. This is a publicly available summary of a diocese's approach to academisation and trust governance, first mentioned in the recently updated Church of England model articles and memorandum of understanding.
- References to the core functions of governance have been removed, and replaced by the new definition of the purpose of trust governance, as defined in the Academy Trust Handbook: - strategic leadership - accountability and assurance - strategic engagement
- Local governing boards are now referred to as local committees, reflecting the fact that they are committees of the trust board. There is also a clearer statement of the value that the local tier can add to trust governance.
- An error in the previous handbook has been corrected. The definition of LAAPs has been amended to reflect the fact that only local authority members still qualify as LAAPs for four years after leaving office – other individuals cease to qualify immediately after leaving the relevant role.

Oxfordshire updates

Buyback of traded services to schools (including Governor Services) opens next week

The school's buyback of traded services for 2024/25 opens on Monday.

Your board can sign up for a year of Governor Services training, express an interest in the Clerking Service and subscribe to GovernorHub and OGA.

We will be covering the cost of providing GovernorHub to maintained schools as in previous years.



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We are pleased to offer membership of the National Governance Association (NGA) at a reduced rate to schools in Oxfordshire for the next academic year.

The Oxfordshire Governor Services advice line and resources on the Schools website remain free to access.

Please ensure that your board discusses the available options and informs the school business manager once the decisions have been reached.

Governor Services Training

Summer term training programme now available

The Governor Services training programme for the summer term is now available and open for booking on GovernorHub. You will note that we have included clerking sessions within the main programme.

[Find out more](#)

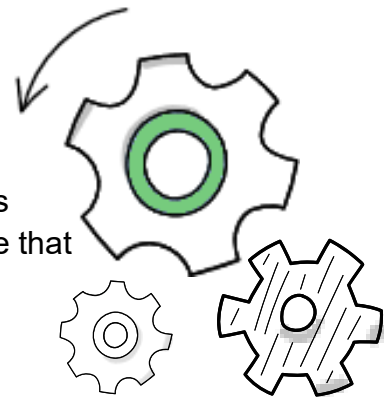
How to book

Training can be booked directly through [GovernorHub](#) for all maintained schools in Oxfordshire. Log into your account and click on the 'Oxfordshire Governor Services Training' tab.

If your school subscribes to training, there will be no additional charge for this training. All other bookings will be charged on a [pay as you use](#) basis.

For schools with no access to GovernorHub, bookings can be made by email to governortraining@oxfordshire.gov.uk

You must provide a **name** and **email address** so we can add your booking to our system and send you the joining link.



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Charging for training

Please do check whether your board has subscribed to the training package before booking. Those who govern at schools that subscribe can register for as much training as they like at no additional cost.

For those who govern at schools that do not currently subscribe, there is a charge to attend and schools will be invoiced after the event. Here are our current [Pay as You Go rates](#)

Any briefings or events that are free for anyone to attend are clearly marked as such.



...for everything you do for children in Oxfordshire

Our next news update will be published on Friday 12th April 2024.

We hope you enjoy a restful break over the Easter holidays.

With very best wishes from

The Oxfordshire Governor Services Team - Tim, Helen and Ruth

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