

WEST MIDLANDS REGIONAL ADULT SAFEGUARDING LEADS

DEVELOPING POLICIES AND
PRACTICE ACROSS THE REGION

Top tips and hints for holding virtual adult safeguarding meetings

Background

Virtual meetings have become an essential part of how businesses maintain productivity and continuity. The Department of Health and Social Care ‘Care Act Easements Guidance’ recognises that it may not be possible or necessary for assessments themselves to be face-to-face therefore Local Authorities should consider whether assessments could be delivered through other means such as video calls.

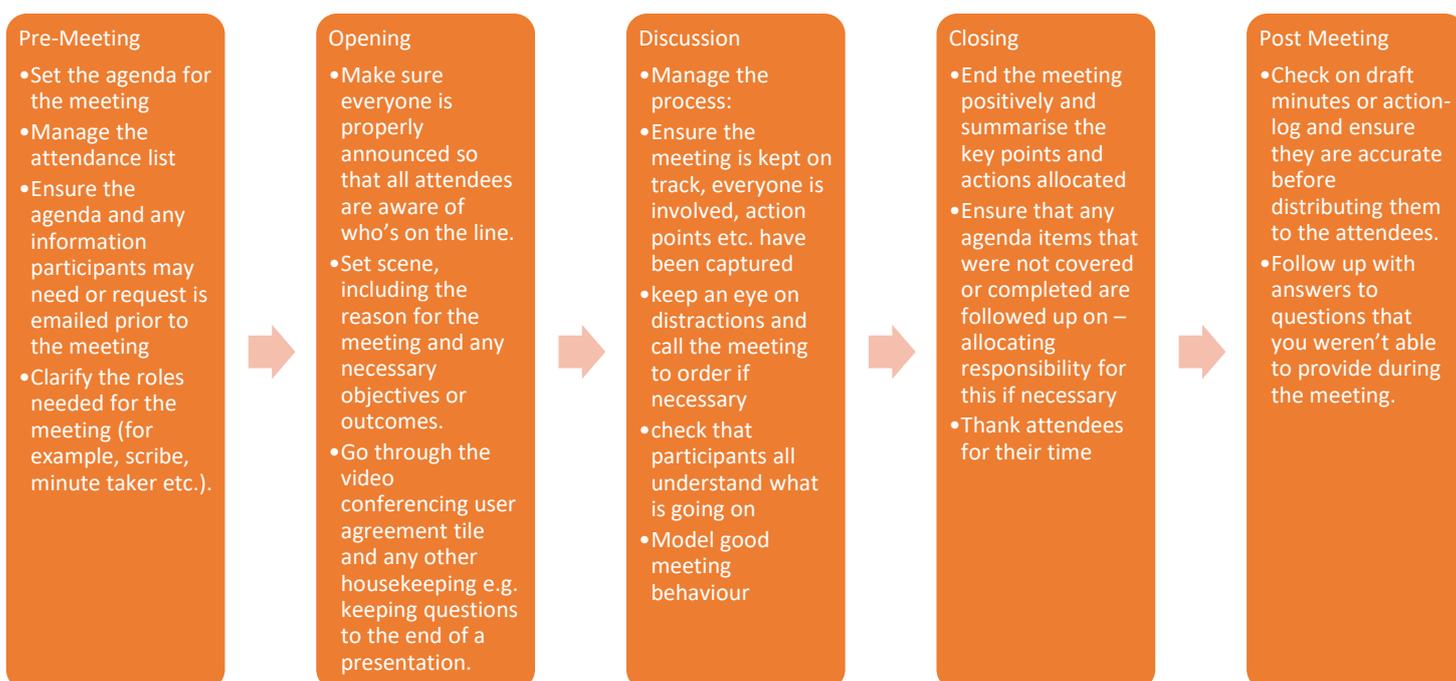
Virtual meetings are a cost-effective way to keep remote employees engaged, connect with people but also to support our work with clients, carers, families, and other professionals. They have been found to;

- Be much more accessible and well attended meetings
- Significantly reduce time associated with travel to and from a meeting
- Be more productive meetings enabling more focus and for work to be undertaken in a shorter space of time

It should be noted however, that virtual working 100% of the time may not be effective as it may mean that practitioners miss situational and non-verbal clues.

Leading and Chairing Meetings

In terms of the format of a virtual meeting it will have the same component parts of a face to face meeting;



For these meetings to work well there are 3 main considerations – technical, planning, and participation:

Technical

- Device (Either a laptop or smartphone with a camera) - It is recommended that devices are fully charged or are on charge during a call.
- Wi-Fi/4G connection - It's recommended the attendee sits as close as possible to their Wi-Fi hub or if a user does not have a good internet connection, they are recommended to join via the Teams app on their smart phone. If connection is poor asking people to turn their videos off if they are not speaking will help the connection.
- If the connection is poor, participants should turn their camera's off to improve the quality of the call.
- An Email address - There is no other way to invite someone to a virtual meeting. If an attendee is joining via a smartphone it is recommended that they have downloaded an email app beforehand.
- Other things to consider:
 - If you are planning to share your screen and present something, ensure your content is accessible and ready to go.
 - If you believe your attendees do not have a smartphone or Laptop they can still dial in. Attendees dialling in will be limited to audio only.
 - If you are recording the meeting, ensure you have asked everyone's permission beforehand. Please refer to your local policy for guidance in relation to how long recordings should be kept.

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) have produced a [useful technology checklist for video calling an adult or carer](#) which you may find useful

Planning

Online meetings and video conferences need preparation and processes to make them as effective as possible or they risk wasting participants' time without actually achieving anything of value. Whether in-person or virtual, preparation on the part of both the call's organiser and its attendees is the key to a successful online meeting.

If you're the meeting organiser

- Before the call, send a meeting request with any attached agenda describing the purpose of the call, who will be attending, and any expectations for any materials to be reviewed prior to the meeting and what needs to be achieved during the session including any decisions to be made.
- Use a calendar invite to schedule your meeting. This ensures that the dial-in information and meeting link will be correctly provided to your attendees.
- Test your video conferencing platform by double-checking your audio and visual settings before launching your meeting.
- Check before the meeting starts that attendees are in a room where they are able to talk freely and remind attendees of confidentiality policies.
- If attendees are dialling in using a mobile phone they may not have a hands up or chat function so it is vital that the Chair makes efforts to engage them in the meeting.

If you are a meeting participant

- Review in advance any materials sent to you. Be proactive and ask ahead of time about expectations if the organiser hasn't provided upfront information.
- Always be ready for a video conference, even if your meeting invite doesn't specify that video conferencing will be used in the meeting.
- Optimize your setup for video conferencing. Clean up your desk and turn your webcam on before your meeting to see your workspace appears in the background.
- Improve your lighting. Participating in a video conference from a dimly lit room makes it difficult for other participants to see you. Backlighting can be especially problematic. So, try to use natural light from the front or side when possible. Overhead lighting works as well.

Once the session begins, keep your eyes on your webcam – not on yourself. It may not feel natural at first but looking at your face on your computer screen while you're speaking limits eye contact and reduces feelings of engagement among other participants.

Participation

There are some etiquette examples for virtual meetings:

- Leave the keyboard alone - Opt for a headset or pick up your notebook and pen to take meeting notes instead.
- Dress appropriately - Getting ready while working remotely will put you in the right headspace to be productive.
- Be aware of your surroundings - Make sure your background is professional and work appropriate. You can always use the function to 'blur' the background or use a background image. Also, be mindful of background noise.
- Mute your microphone when you're not talking.
- Speak up - When you enter a small meeting, you may need to announce yourself and introduce yourself, making sure not to interrupt someone mid-sentence. Project your voice to avoid participants having to strain their ears or turn their volume all the way up.
- No food allowed - Try to eat a snack before your virtual meeting.
- Stay seated and stay present - You might miss out on key information or an opportunity to give input if you are checking your inbox or continuing a side conversation. If you're using your webcam, use attentive body language: sit up straight, don't make big extraneous movements, and don't let your eyes wander too much.

Supporting people to participate

As with a face to face meeting we need to make virtual meeting accessible. It is important to plan meetings well in advance to make sure they are accessible.

Before the meeting:

- Send people the meeting papers well before the meeting date and in a format, which is accessible to them. This could be in easy read, audio or film. Read more in making information acceptable and using the right words

During the meeting:

- Give everyone a chance to speak. Warm up activities and introductions can help
- Think about small groups meetings so everyone has a chance to talk
- Make sure only one person talks at once
- Make sure that the presenters know how to give an accessible presentation
- Do not give too much information as it can be confusing. For example, only give the background information that will help people have their say.

Communication cards are a good way to help people remember to talk simply in meetings: Red = Stop! I've got a question, Yellow = Slow down please and Green = To vote or agree on something. Emojis in the chat window can also be used for the same thing, for example: Thumbs-up = agree, Hand-up = ask a question and ? = clarify please

Virtual reviews and meetings still need to consider the requirements for advocacy and interpretation.

If for whatever reason you don't think a virtual meeting wouldn't work for the person because of communication issues and difficulties, a face to face would have to be considered taking into account safe visiting and social distancing measures.

Tips for Effective Virtual Meetings

- **Stick to a Schedule** - Start promptly, stick to a timetable in the agenda and be conscious of end times. Catch latecomers up after the meeting rather than repeating work already covered.
- **Minimise Distractions** - Turn off or silence your phone, do not work on other projects on your computer, close all other apps and browser windows to eliminate notifications, avoid rustling papers, eating noisy foods or making other distracting noises in the background.
- **Keep It Professional** - Whether you're participating in an audio or video conference, maintain a professional posture and appearance. Dress the way you would as if you were meeting in person.
- **Protect Sensitive Information** - If you are sharing your screen, make sure that only intended content is seen. Launching a fresh browser window and preparing ahead of time will help keep sensitive or potentially embarrassing information confidential.
- **Keep the Meeting Moving** - Limit meeting attendees to only those who are truly necessary to minimise disruptions stemming from over-talking and keep the meeting's agenda on track. Encourage participants to use the chat in the video conference for side conversations or questions or use 'raise your hand' if available.
- **Prioritize Security** - Some services aren't as secure as assumed or required. MS Teams has the full range of expected security features but ensure these are utilised.
- **Give Some Grace** - Be patient with participants and allow some grace for any miscommunications that occur.