**New Governor FAQs and the Answers you Need!**

Congratulations on your new role as a local governor with the Diocese of Gloucester Academies Trust (DGAT)! You have joined the largest group of volunteers in the UK and your contribution will influence the future of many young people. We thank you for your commitment to support the Trust and its family of schools.

We understand that new local governors will have many questions and may initially be reluctant or nervous to ask questions at a meeting.

We have tried to highlight the most common questions new local governors have and provide answers using clear terminology. If you have any questions which aren’t covered here then please contact your mentor, The Chair of Governors or Governance Lead at the DGAT central office.

The DGAT website is a useful place to learn more about the Trust and how we work. The school website is also a useful resource for you to explore the school, its vision and values and information shared with its community.

**What are my responsibilities?**

Local governing boards provide local strategic leadership for the DGAT family of schools and are responsible for providing accountability for safeguarding practice and processes, the overall performance of the school and the educational outcomes for all groups of pupils who attend the school. Local governing boards are also responsible for ensuring the school’s Christian distinctiveness is maintained and embedded in all aspects of school life.

The DfE ‘Governance handbook’ states that all governing boards have three core functions:

• Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.

• Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.

• Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

The Governance handbook further states that effective governance is based on six key features; strategic leadership, accountability, people, structures, compliance and evaluation. These features set out the way in which all governors undertake their role, guide their purpose, and direct how governance is organised, developed and improved. No one local governor is responsible for ensuring all features are present in the work of the governing board; governance is a collective responsibility and governors should contribute based on their individual skillset, knowledge and experience.

The DGAT Board delegate responsibilities to local governing boards through the scheme of delegation. The scheme of delegation provides a blueprint for accountability throughout the Trust and is an important reference point for all local governors.

All local governors should be prepared to question and challenge, this is a key aspect of holding school leaders to account. New local governors are a valuable resource for schools and governing boards; they can provide a fresh perspective, bring up-to-date information, and question embedded practices and the status quo.

A key responsibility of new governors is asking questions to ensure their understanding develops for them to get to the know the school, its strengths and development needs and what effective governance looks like. It is recommended that new governors are assigned a mentor to act as a point of contact for questions to be asked.

All local governors have a responsibility to prepare effectively for meetings by reading all paperwork distributed and planning any questions arising from their preparation. The DGATs Governor Meeting Planner Template can assist new governors to plan ahead of and following either a committee or local governing board meeting, this can be found in the Local Governor and Clerk to Governors member area of the DGAT website.

**What information will I have to provide?**

Everyone involved in the governance of schools, including local governing boards in academy trusts must provide information to the DfE to be listed on [Get information about schools](https://get-information-schools.service.gov.uk/) (GIAS).

The requirement for local governors, academy trust members and academy trustees to comply with the information requested is set out in section 538 of the Education Act 1996, which says: “The governing body or temporary governing body of a community, foundation or voluntary school or a community or foundation special school shall make such reports and returns, and give such information, to the Secretary of State as he may require for the purpose of the exercise of his functions in relation to education.”

The requirements for trustees and local governing board members to comply with the information required is set out in the ‘Academies financial handbook’ which says the trust must notify the Education, Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA) of the following:

• The appointment or vacating of the positions of Accounting Officer and Chief Financial Officer, including direct contact details

• The appointment or vacating of the position of Chair of Trustees and Chairs of Local Governing Bodies – including direct contact details – Members, Trustees and Local Governors within 14 days of that change.

Notification must be given through the governance section of DfE’s GIAS, accessed via Secure Access. All fields specified in GIAS for the named individuals must be completed. The trust must ensure its record on GIAS for the individuals remains up-to-date.”

The information governors and trustees are requested to provide includes the following:

• Full name (to include title)

• Postcode

• Date of birth

• Any previous names

• Nationality

• Direct email address for the Chair of the Board of Trustees and/or Chair of the Local Governing Board

Only Governors’ and Trustees’ personal names are published on GIAS and publicly available.

All new local governors are required to undertake an enhanced DBS check, within 21 days of appointment, and will be required to provide the following for the check to be completed:

• Full name (to include title)

• Address and previous address, if living at current address less than three years.

• Postcode

• Date of birth

• Any previous names

• Nationality

• Identity documents, e.g. photographic driving license, passport, utility bill, birth certificate

**What key documents should I read?**

There are a number of key documents which new local governors should familiarise themselves with to help them understand their role and be effective and compliant in governance. These documents are updated on a regular basis and governors should ensure they read the most up-to-date version available. New governors should take care not to overwhelm themselves with reading too much information too quickly.

[Governance Handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook): A guidance document from the DfE which sets out the overarching vision and priorities for effective governance.

[Academies Financial Handbook](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/academies-financial-handbook): The Academies Financial Handbook details the financial framework within which academy trusts must work in their capacity as companies, charities and public bodies. Academy trusts must be compliant with the handbook as required by their funding agreement with the Secretary of State for education.

**Articles of Association (AoA):** AoA are a requirement for all academy trusts. The AoA sets out the legal procedures within which the trustees must operate and provides the framework for the governance arrangements within the trust and individual academies. The DGAT AoA can be found on the DGAT website or can be obtained through your Clerk to Governors.

[A Competency Framework for Governance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook): A guidance document from the DfE setting out the knowledge, skills and behaviours needed for effective governance.

[Keeping Children Safe in Education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2): Statutory guidance for all school leaders which should be given full regard when carrying out child protection and safeguarding duties. All staff and governors should read part one as a minimum, but it is recommended that all governors read and refer to the whole guidance to ensure compliance and to commit due regard to the board’s safeguarding responsibilities.

**Terms of reference:** Terms of reference are, essentially, blueprints outlining the structure and purpose of a local governance panel, committee, or board. They evidence a framework that local governors can be held accountable to and increase efficiency and effectiveness of local governors by clarifying their roles and remits. In an academy the terms of reference should reflect the trust’s articles of association.

**School Development Plan (SDP**): New local governors should also familiarise themselves with the SDP. The SDP provides a strategic plan for school improvement and should collate the school’s priorities, the key outcomes it intends to achieve, and the main measures it will take to achieve the targets. Becoming familiar with this document will enable new local governors to get up-to-speed with the strength and developmental needs of the school.

**Local Governors’ Code of Conduct**: The local governing board code of conduct outlines the responsibilities of local governors, as well as what is expected of the local governing board in terms of behaviour and commitment to their roles.

**Minutes of previous board and committee meetings:** Reading previous minutes will help new governors gain context for future meetings and establish a view of the school at the present time.

**School Self-evaluation Form (SEF) Summary**: Becoming familiar with the SEF summary will assist new local governors to understand how school leaders evaluate the performance and effectiveness of the school in key areas, such as leadership and management, pupil behaviours and welfare and pupil outcomes. There is no standard format for an SEF to be written in, so they will vary from school- to-school.

**Latest Ofsted Inspection Report**: Whilst it is useful for new local governors to gain an external perspective of the school’s and governors’ performance from the latest Ofsted report, they should remain mindful that the school may have moved on or, in some circumstances, performance may have weakened. It is therefore important that new governors consider the report in collaboration with the current SDP and SEF.

**Latest SIAMS Inspection Report:** All Church of England dioceses and the Methodist Church use the Church of England Education Office's framework for the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005. The SIAMS Evaluation Schedule sets out the expectations for the conduct of the Statutory Inspection of Anglican, Methodist and ecumenical Schools under Section 48 of the Education Act 2005.SIAMS inspection focuses on the impact of the Church school's Christian vision on pupils and adults. This involves looking at the school’s Christian vision, the provision the school makes because of this vision and how effective this provision is in enabling all pupils to flourish.

**Scheme of Delegation:** The AFH requires the board of trustees of academy trusts to publish a scheme of delegation in the governance statement (published within its annual accounts) and also on the academy trust’s website. A scheme of delegation details clearly the levels of delegation for any decisions which need to be made. The Trust Board does not need to be responsible for all decisions – there are several decisions and responsibilities which can be delegated to individuals or committees.

**Policies:** There will be a number of key policies that you should read as a new local governor. The Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is a key policy to read early in your induction process. It is also important to read and become familiar with the school’s Financial Procedures Policy, Health and Safety Policy and Conflicts of Interest Policy. Ask the person faciliating your induction which other policies should be read and how you can access school and DGAT policies.

**What support should I expect?**

Schools should have in place a good quality induction process to follow, which will help new local governors in their role. Typically, new local governors may be invited into school to meet with the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors to discuss the local governor role in more depth, meet key members of staff and pupils, and be provided with information specifically relating to local governance at the school.

The Clerk to Governors should be key to the induction process and will be able to provide all the documents and information which new local governors will need to start their governance journey.

New local governors may also be assigned a mentor. This would be an existing, experienced local governor who can offer information, support and guidance to new local governors, and who would be available to answer any questions which you may have.

**What will the time commitment be?**

All local governors will be expected to attend full local governing board meetings. The number of meetings per academic year will vary school-to-school but this information should be shared prior to appointment.

Many local governing boards also delegate some of their function to committees, and local governors are usually asked to sit on at least one of the committees. DGAT local governing boards are required to have a Finance and Resources Committee and it is strongly recommended that a Standards and Ethos committee is established. Membership of committees will be based on the skills and expertise of local governors, and new local governors may be asked to complete a skills audit to establish where their skills would be best used. There may be between three and six committee meetings to attend per year as well as full board meetings.

**What will I be expected to do in addition to attending meetings?**

Some local governing boards also allocate link governor roles – these roles may be linked to specific classes, subjects or identified priority areas. If a local governor is allocated a link role, they will be expected to carry out monitoring visits throughout the course of the year. The purpose of these visits is to oversee what is being done in school in relation to the link area and the impact of any initiatives which have been implemented.

Local governors may also be asked to attend specific school events such as parents’ evenings or information evenings – they may also be invited to attend school social events and attending these will certainly help new local governors to get to know their school.

There is an expectation that local governors take responsibility for keeping themselves up-to-date with education, so there may be some reading, research or training to be undertaken outside of meetings.

**What should I do if I am unable to attend a meeting?**

Apologies for absence at a meeting should be sent as early as possible to the Clerk to Governors, Chair of Governors or Committee Chair. At the meeting, the local governing board will be asked to decide whether to accept the apologies, so it is important a reason for non-attendance is provided. The Chair will not necessarily share the reason with the board but will make a recommendation as to whether apologies are accepted.

Governors who have failed to attend any full governing board meetings within a six-month period, without permission or accepted apologies, may be disqualified. The six-month period starts on the date of the first meeting missed without permission.

Papers and documents for consideration will have been distributed in advance of the meeting and it is advantageous for governors to read and identify any questions arising from the information provided, regardless of whether they are attending the meeting. Questions prior to the meeting can be sent to the Clerk to Governors to ensure that all questions are asked at the meeting and responses are recorded accurately in the minutes.

**What training is available?**

New local governors have a responsibility to undertake any training or CPD needed to complete their role effectively and maintain compliance with governance regulations. As a minimum, new governors should attend new governor training and complete safeguarding training, including reading the most up-to-date version of Keeping Children Safe in Education.

DGAT provide a range of training opportunities for local governors, details of which can be found in the [DGAT CPD brochure](https://www.dgat.org.uk/cpd-and-events) on the DGAT website. This training is free to attend. The local authority also provides training for governors, details of which can be obtained from the Clerk to Governors.

**Am I able to claim expenses for my work as a governor?**

The role of a local governor is purely voluntary, but local governing boards can choose to offer allowances to governors for expenses which they may incur as a result of their governance duties. DGAT have a Governors and Trustees Expenses Policy in place and new local governors should expect a copy of the policy to be provided on commencement of their role. Allowances are typically offered to cover costs, such as the following:

• Childcare expenses

• Care arrangements for elderly or dependent relatives

• Extra costs incurred for governors who have special needs or because English is not their first language

• Telephone charges, photocopying, stationary etc.

• Some travel expenses and reimbursement for meals

**Am I entitled to time off from work to carry out my governor duties?**

Employers should allow reasonable time off for employees to carry out public duties such as being a school governor.

Employers can choose whether they pay their employees for time off for public duties; however, there is no legal requirement for them to do so. New local governors should instigate discussions around what constitutes reasonable time off to perform governor duties and focus on the transferable skills to employment from their governor duties.

**How long is my term of office?**

The usual term of office for all local governors is four years.

At the end of each local governors’ term of office, local governors may choose to stand for re-election or appointment to the local governing board for a further four-year term or may choose to stand down. Local governors seeking re-election may be asked to provide a short statement indicating why they wish to be re-appointed, the impact they have had and the impact they consider they can further bring to the governing board. Foundation governors seeking re-appointment must follow the process set by the Diocese of Gloucester Education Team.

In the event of their child leaving the school, local parent governors may continue to the end of their term of office.

Staff governors may continue to serve on the governing board for their full term, or until their employment with the school or Trust ends.

**Next steps**

The first recommended step is to identify who your mentor is and arrange a time to meet with them.

Secondly, enjoy your role. Stay curious, commit to your own CPD and remember to always ask yourself ‘what if we do/don’t do this or make this decision?’, ‘how will this benefit the pupils?’ and ‘how will this decision impact on the wellbeing and workload of the staff team?’