



Thought Piece: Does the 7 Day Deadline Really Matter?



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It is a fact universally accepted that a meeting call out must take place 7 days in advance but what constitutes a call out? In this short article we look at some of the issues that affect meeting deadlines and identify a few simple strategies to overcome them.

Whose deadline is it?

It is the role of the clerk to undertake what is known as the meeting call out which usually comprises the agenda (including date, time and location), minutes of the last meeting and any accompanying reports and policies. The clerk will work with the Headteacher/CEO and the Chair to collate the necessary documents and ensure that these are available for governors and trustees. There is a different deadline for Academy Trust AGMs.

Are deadlines flexible?

The 7 day deadline is clearly identified in the Maintained School Regulations and in an academy, trustees must be given 7 clear days' notice of a meeting together with a copy of the agenda. Check your articles to see if any other specific documentation is listed. It is common practice that the agenda is accompanied by all the documents, but we do need to apply a degree of pragmatism.

Can a chair refuse to accept late papers?

Yes, in theory; however this is rare. Many chairs will not accept papers 'tabled' at the meeting i.e. those that are handed round at the meeting. This is because governors and trustees will not have had time to read and digest.

What can I do if papers are routinely submitted late?

This can be very frustrating for both clerks and governors. We do need to be aware of the competing priorities faced by school leaders on a daily basis and sometimes deadlines are missed. Some boards are more understanding about late papers than others. A long and detailed report submitted 24 hours before the meeting does not give people enough time; but a report submitted 24 late (that is 6 days before the meeting) is not likely to cause too much concern. If you clerk a board where papers are routinely late – try to raise this with the chair. Sometimes we slip into practices and norms without asking if this is appropriate.

Why are deadlines important?

Having a clearly agreed deadline whether it is for a meeting, submitting a report or undertaking an agreed action is important for a number of reasons;

- It highlights what is required by participants and when. If your annual agenda planner includes dates for the submission of papers to the clerk then this may help focus attention!
- Help ensure meetings are quorate by giving advance notice – do you think you could start thinking about what you might be required to do to support the meeting as soon as you know about it (when the date is set) or when you receive the meeting papers?
- Deadlines can help those writing reports focus on what they need to do. Remember though that we all need to be a little flexible sometimes – things do happen!