



Northumberland County Council

Good Practice Guidance for Virtual Meetings

Reason for Guidance

Following the COVID 19 pandemic, Children's Services have adjusted to new ways of working. Some areas of practice have benefited from the new ways of working. Due to this, a hybrid model of working will be embedded in to future working practice across Northumberland Children's Services.

One key area has been the use of virtual meetings and visits. This guidance will set out expectations and good practice for all Children's Services employees to consider and adhere to in ensuring professional standards are maintained.

As a member of Children's Services you are responsible for ensuring time in virtual meetings is used as effectively as possible to:

- make best use of time and resources
- promote the best possible outcomes for the communities we serve.

Remember to present and behave as if this meeting was face to face and you must adapt to the formality of the meeting.

Things to consider

Before the meeting:

- Prepare your space
- If possible be somewhere quiet with few distractions including, for example, pets and family members
- Use the Teams background function if in a "busy" environment such as a kitchen or bedroom, being mindful of your audience ensuring personalised items are not in view, for example, family photos
- If you share your work-space use headphones to maintain confidentiality.

Preparation: know the technology

You should have a good understanding of how Teams works and have the skills to support any attendees with any issues they are have in accessing the virtual meeting.

You need to ensure that the meeting is inclusive for all attendees and that they have the basic skills to work with the technology, for example, how to join the meeting, how to mute and unmute, how to have the camera on or off.

Training is available for the Teams App at

<https://northumberland365.sharepoint.com/sites/onlinelearning>

Prepare and be mindful of other users technology and what access they have, for example, are they using a mobile phone, do they have wifi, can they see and hear everyone, do they know how to use Teams?

Look the part

Working from home is not always ideal and colleagues have needed to find the best place they can to work from. This is often out of people's control, but in terms of presentation, what is in your control is:

- dress appropriately for a work meeting
- lighting – don't sit in front of a bright window - if this is unavoidable consider using a lamp to light yourself from the front as well
- use your webcam well – don't sit too close or too far from it, and ideally find a way to elevate your laptop so it isn't looking up at you
- even though you are in your own home it looks unprofessional to smoke or vape during meetings.

Remove distractions

- set phones to silent
- turn off laptop notifications, e.g. email notifications, so you are not distracted by them or tempted to respond
- close documents not relevant to the meeting.

During the meeting

Unless it is a small meeting, mute when not speaking; be aware that all sounds are amplified equally by microphones, including typing

In larger meetings with many participants, it is appropriate for just the speakers to put videos on. In smaller meetings it is better to have videos on for the following reasons:

- communication is more effective when you have non-verbal cues
- facial expressions humanise a meeting
- seeing people helps to forge relationships
- it reduces temptation to multi-task

As the chair of the meeting being considerate for the need to have a break, include 10 minute comfort breaks during meetings that are 1 hour or more.

Use the raised hand facility if you want to say something - and remember to undo it afterwards.

Use the chat appropriately and for the purpose of the meeting. It is not for example, for jokes, banter.

Participate

- It can be easy to fall into silence when you are in a room on your own - stay alert, ask questions or make comments
- If you don't want to interrupt, you can comment or ask questions using the chat.

Concentrate on the meeting

Resist the temptation to do other things during the meeting such as checking emails or doing other work. It is usually obvious to others that you are doing so and not paying attention would be considered unprofessional.

Do not turn off your video in order to do other things unseen or nip out of the room - you wouldn't do those things in a face-to-face meeting.

If you do need to leave e.g. to receive a delivery, attend to a child, just say so, in the chat window if you don't want to interrupt.

Take care during hybrid/blended meetings

If you are in a meeting where some people are together in the workplace and others are at home, it can be easy for the attendees at home to be left out. So, if you are in the workplace, make an effort to ensure those at home feel involved:

- avoid behaviours that might make those who are remote feel excluded – don't talk amongst yourselves (or share a joke) that other attendees can't hear
- log into the meeting on a separate laptop so everyone can be seen
- guard against dominating a discussion - it is not so easy to join in a discussion when remote.

Be aware of data security

If you share your screen:

- close any unnecessary tabs from your browser window and anything you have been working on before the meeting
- avoid sharing your full desktop
- if you share your work-space use headphones to maintain confidentiality.

Make good use of Teams functionality

Teams has a host of features you could explore to improve quality of meetings. This includes:

- sharing your screen
- using the Whiteboard and Polls
- using chat – this is useful for people to feed in questions and comments to avoid interrupting the flow of the meeting
- Breakout room facility