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Bolton Governance Services

Providing comprehensive support for Clerking, Training and Development

To: **All Head Teachers / Principals and Chairs of
Governors / Trustees of all Bolton Schools and
Academies**

Governance Services Team
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Dear Colleague

Governance Services – Autumn Term 2020

I think we can all agree that the latter end of the 2019/20 academic year was somewhat turbulent with the pandemic and subsequent closure of schools. This has and continues to be unprecedented times affecting many parts of our daily lives, not least for our schools and academies.

The past few months have shown the real commitment that our schools and academies have towards the children and young people in Bolton. Schools that were able, remained open for vulnerable and key worker children, and school leaders and governors worked tirelessly to provide safe and secure environments for children as they started to return back slowly in the summer with the aim of full return from September.

As with many other Local Authority Services, we at Governance Services quickly looked to adapt to new ways of working in the summer term. Whilst some schools and academies had held the odd virtual meeting, it was very much an exception, not the rule, for the majority. Following Government advice to stay at home, many boards embraced the need to use technology to continue with their important governance roles to the extent that the Clerking and Support Service clerked over 150 virtual meetings.

We were really pleased to find that the pre-recorded virtual training and development sessions were well 'attended' with over 300 delegates accessing the reduced summer term programme. Feedback has been positive with further requests to provide future online sessions.

Moving into the autumn term it is important that the practices put into place by boards continue to operate to ensure the safety of our school environments. The Local Authority are continuing to advise all officers to work from home wherever possible and all Council, Departmental Leadership and Officer meetings will continue to meet using virtual platforms.

At the time of writing this letter, Bolton, along with other Greater Manchester and East Lancashire boroughs have additional local measures in place to restrict contact and help reduce the spread of the virus.

Director of People **Bernie Brown**



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National guidance states that schools should minimise visitors to essential persons only and therefore consideration should be given in the first instance as to whether interactions can take place over virtual platforms, including Governing and Trust Board meetings. Many Boards have already indicated their wish to continue in the autumn term to work virtually to ensure the safety of their school environments and of course the safety of governor and trustee volunteers.

There may be occasions however, where a virtual meeting might prove difficult due to the sensitive/personal nature of the meetings and/or the required attendees i.e. Staffing Discipline / Appeals, Pupil Discipline and Complaints. Where it is not possible to host meetings virtually, numbers should be kept to a minimum and the appropriate social distancing and risk assessment measures should be followed. Please ensure that your Clerk to the Board is kept up to date with any arrangements in advance.

In respect of the Training and Development service, whilst social distancing measures continue to operate, and to ensure the safety of all service users and staff, all face to face training in the autumn term will be suspended and a blend of live virtual and pre-recorded sessions will be held in their place. The exception to this will be the accredited safer recruitment sessions; Module 3 and Refresher. These sessions will be held at the Bolton Science and Technology Centre under strict government guidelines to ensure the safety of delegates and trainers. The full details of our extensive training offer for the 2020/21 academic year can be found via our website www.boltingovernanceservices.org.uk

Whilst I understand that some governors and trustees are eager to return to holding face to face meetings and training sessions, we must remember that the priority for educational settings is to ensure that students and staff are able to return to school in as safe an environment as possible, and if we can limit and reduce any potential risks by utilising technology, this will ensure effective governance can continue, albeit slightly different than we are used to.

As with all services to schools, we will continue to monitor these arrangements as we move throughout the autumn into the spring term.

If you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details below. Remember your Clerk to the Board is an excellent source of support in all governance related matters, including providing assistance with virtual platforms, especially for those individuals that may need additional support.

On behalf of the Team, I would like to wish you and your school communities a safe and productive school year.

Yours sincerely



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cc. all governors and trustees

Director of People **Bernie Brown**



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