

# Committee Secretary Skills



## Training Course Information Pack

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# The role of the Committee Secretary

There are usually two aspects to the Secretary's role. The core of the job is to carry out all the 'writing' tasks that are needed on behalf of the committee. The other part is to act as an 'organiser' for various aspects of meetings.

## Writing responsibilities

Typically the Secretary will be responsible for writing:

- Agendas and notices of meetings
- Any correspondence needed
- Minutes of meetings.

When other writing tasks are needed, it is often the Secretary who will take them on; for example press releases, newsletter articles or reports.

It is important that the Secretary should work in co-operation with other officers, particularly the Chairperson. For example, it is a good idea for the Secretary and Chairperson to jointly agree on meeting agendas.

## Organisational responsibilities

Besides writing agendas, notices and minutes, some Secretaries are also responsible for arranging their distribution.

Other tasks that *some* Secretaries take on are:

- Booking rooms for meetings
- Arranging refreshments
- Helping organise Annual General Meetings or any Special General Meetings
- Maintaining committee records, such as a file of past minutes
- Receiving correspondence addressed to the committee and reporting on it at meetings.

# Agendas

An agenda is the summary of items to be discussed at a meeting and show the order in which they should be discussed.



The agenda should give the name of the group or organisation that is meeting, and the date, time and place of the meeting.

Items which are often placed at the beginning of agendas are:

1. Attendance and apologies for absence
2. Minutes of last meeting
3. Matters arising from minutes

'Minutes of last meeting' gives everyone a chance to check that the minutes were an accurate record of what took place. 'Matters arising' gives everyone a chance to check that the decisions reached last time have been acted upon.

It can be useful to allocate a certain amount of time to each item, for example by putting a note in the right hand column of the agenda.

The order of items can be important. Any issues which need careful consideration should be put earlier in a meeting, so that people can deal with them while still fresh and clear-thinking. Easier, lighter, or more routine matters can be left until later.

Items that are usually placed at the end of agendas are:

9. Any other business
10. Date, time and place of next meeting

Some groups ask that the chairperson is notified at the start of the meeting of any issues that people want to raise under 'any other business'. This is to prevent the item becoming over-long.

Agendas should always be circulated in advance of meetings, to give people time to think about the issues. The headings should give people a clear ideas of what is to be discussed.

## Sample agenda

### Greener Grass Residents Association Meeting

The Community Hall, 10 Grass Bank Road  
7.00 – 8.45 pm – Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March

#### AGENDA

1. Apologies for absence 7.00
2. Minutes of last meeting
3. Matters arising from minutes 7.05
4. Secretary's report 7.15
5. Treasurer's report 7.25
6. Planning for the annual general meeting 7.30  
*The Secretary will be asking for volunteers to help with key tasks at the AGM*
7. Ideas for training 7.50  
*Members should identify individual topics for training and consider whether a regular training programme is required.*
8. Preparation for meeting with the landlord 8.10  
*Please bring comments and suggestions about the way the new housing office has been functioning.*
9. Any other business 8.30  
*Please notify the chairperson before the meeting of any issues you want to raise.*
10. Date, time and place of next meeting 8.40

# Minutes

Minutes are the official record of what took place at a meeting.

They should record:

- the names of the people present
- a brief summary of the discussion that took place
- the decisions reached and action to be taken.

The minutes should be distributed soon after meetings, so that people agreed to take action are reminded what to do. Minutes are also a way of letting people outside your group know what you are up to.

Under 'Minutes of last meeting', all participants of a meeting have one chance to say whether the minutes were a true record of what took place at the previous meeting.

Here are some suggestions for minute-takers:

- At the top of minutes, state the title of the group who is meeting, and the meeting date. Then list the names of the people who were present, noting who is representing particular organisations and any officers' roles. It is also a good idea to note who chaired the meeting and who took minutes.
- Minutes should be laid out according to the agenda, item by item.
- You do not need to record all the details of discussions – a brief summing-up will do. The most important thing is to record decisions and agreed action.

Examples of different types of decision are:

- To follow a course of action (*The secretary will invite a community police officer to address the next public meeting...*)
- To find out more (*Joan will contact other tenant groups to find out how they are dealing with stray dogs...*)

- To refer to another group (*It was agreed that the proposed anti-graffiti work should be discussed by the environmental working group...*)
- To adopt a policy (*It was agreed that future decisions about area budgets should be made by area panels...*)
- If, as minute-taker, you are not clear about a decision, stop the meeting and ask for clarification. It can be helpful if you read out your understanding of important decisions, to check that everyone in the group agrees and has understood.
- It can be useful to have an 'action' column down the right-hand side of each page of the minutes. There you can put the names of the people who have agreed to take some action, alongside the decision. For example:

<i>It was agreed to install a new park bench to replace the one that is derelict.</i>	Action: J. Maloney
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- You do not need to record the names of who said what in the meeting, other than when individuals agree to take action. It is the issues that are important rather than personalities.
- It is useful to record important information given during a meeting – and always be precise about money.
- Do not try to write proper minutes during the meeting itself – that is extremely difficult. Just take notes at the meeting and then write out the minutes as soon as possible afterwards.
- It is a common practice for the chairperson to sign the bottom of minutes at the following meeting, once everyone has agreed that they are an accurate record.
- Keep a copy of all minutes (if necessary, signed as a true record) in a minutes book or folder. This is your group's official record of its meetings.

## Sample minutes

# Greener Grass Residents Association Minutes of meeting held on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> March

### Present:

Gavin Taylor, Chairperson; Errol Thompson, Secretary; Kate Johnson, Treasurer; Nandita Gupta; Tim Rose; Joan Baker; Nita Ventura

Action:

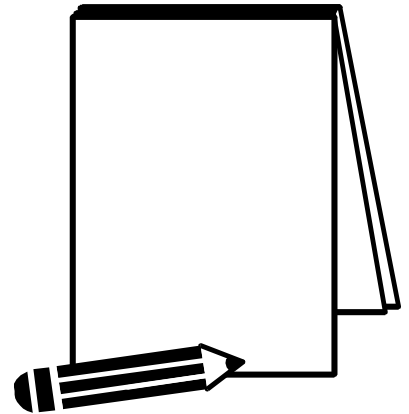
- 1. Apologies**  
Received from John McBarron; Winston Magumba
- 2. Minutes of last meeting**  
Approved
- 3. Matters arising from minutes**  
The newsletter was distributed on Saturday 1 March.  
A big thank you to Stephanie Leroi and Peter Crombie for their help.
- 4. Secretary's report**  
A letter has been received from the Federation of Community Associations about responses to crime and vandalism in the borough. A meeting is planned on 7 April between the landlord, the police, and representatives of community organisations. Nandita agree to attend as our representative. Nandita
- 5. Treasurer's report**  
Kate reported that the cost of producing the newsletters was £63.80. We have £214.70 in the bank account and £8.10 as petty cash.
- 6. Planning the annual general meeting**  
Tim and Joan agreed to set up the room and organise refreshments. Tim and Joan  
Errol agreed to organise an interpreter and liaise with the landlord representative who will be attending. Errol  
Gavin, Kate and Nandita agreed to knock on doors to encourage residents to attend. Gavin, Kate, Nandita

7. **Ideas for training**  
The main areas we all need training in are allocations and negotiation skills. We agreed to set up a regular training programme. Joan will draft a proposal for the next meeting. Kate will discuss costs with the landlord.  
Joan  
Kate
8. **Preparation for meeting with landlord**  
Everyone brought comments. The main problems raised were removal of graffiti, abandoned cars, and litter. The difficulties in reporting repairs seem to have been resolved. Gavin and Winston to attend meeting with Environmental Section on 12 March.  
Gavin and  
Winston
9. **Any other business**  
Nita is concerned that the grocery store on Delilah Street is closing down. The need for shops in the area selling basic commodities will be discussed as an agenda item at the next meeting.  
Secretary
10. **Date, time and place of next meeting**  
Tuesday 18 April at 7.00 pm in the Community Hall.



# Taking notes of discussion

If you are the minute-taker for a meeting, you will need to take notes during the meeting and then write them up into proper minutes afterwards. The amount of notes that minute-takers write down during meetings varies from person to person. If you write too many notes, you may find it difficult to listen and mentally summaries or to take part in the meeting. If you take too few notes, you may forget important points when you come to write the minutes. Good note-taking really needs practice, and each person must develop methods which best suit them. Here are some suggestions which might help:



- ✂ Key words & phrases  
Do not try to record whole sentences. The detailed points which each person makes do not need to be recorded. But do try to capture the important points by noting the key words and phrases that will help you remember afterwards.
  
- ✂ Symbols and abbreviations  
You will find it quicker to take notes if you use some symbols and abbreviations. Unless you know how to write shorthand, you will need to develop your own system. Here are some ideas:
  - eg - for example
  - i.e. - that is...
  - NB - 'note well' / this is important
  - ∴ - therefore
  - < - is less / smaller than
  - > - is greater / bigger than
  - = - equals / is the same as
  - ≠ - does not equal / is not the same as
  - ∴ - implies / it follows from this that
  - B4 - before
  - ASAP - as soon as possible
  - tbc - to be confirmed

You can also

- use **arrows** to link words or phrases
- put blocks of text inside **bubbles** and draw lines linking them to other blocks
- develop your own **symbols or drawings**
- use **asterisks** (e.g. against the names of individuals who volunteer action)
- **shorten words** (e.g. mtg for 'meeting'; h.mgt. for 'housing management')
- use **initials** for individuals' names

✂ A4 paper – 1 agenda item per page?

It is important to use sheets of paper of a reasonable size. Note-taking is a creative mental activity, and you will find yourself cramped if your paper is too small. Some people like to start their notes of each agenda item on a new page

✂ Can use columns

Some people like to organise their note-taking by drawing columns on their paper, and giving each column a particular purpose – e.g.

Item	Key points	Decision
<i>Football</i>	<i>Need more help - under-10s. Parents? + Equipment? (RS) Problem → residents</i>	<i>Newsletter item (JK*) Visit residents next to pitch: try to agree times (AF / PR*)</i>

✂ Try mind-maps?

People who are practised at using mind-maps sometimes use them for noting discussions of meetings. This can be an effective way of gathering and organising ideas – you might even be able to note the whole meeting on a single sheet!

✂ Can use colour / highlighters

Different coloured pencils and pens can be used to note different things (e.g. red for problems, green for decisions, purple for action, blue for ideas, brown for costs / money issues etc.). Highlighters can be used to draw attention to particular points.