

## MINUTE TAKING

Writing minutes is a skill that requires listening, analysing and the ability to record all that is relevant. It is at the heart of being a clerk to the governing body because the minutes are the public official record of what has been discussed and decided. The minutes are among the first things that Ofsted inspectors look at when the school is to be inspected - they are a window through which the governing body can be viewed and judged. Consequently the content and preparation is of great importance.

It is not a skill that comes naturally to everyone. Like most things people tend to improve with experience. Remember the purpose is not to make a full verbatim record of what was said but to provide a clear succinct record of the business conducted, decisions made, and action to be taken.

### Always

- Include the details of the meeting including name of school, type of meeting (e.g. full governors or committee), date, time and location (if appropriate).
- Record *everyone* present including yourself
- If someone is only present for part of the meeting make it clear when they were there and when they were not.
- Note any individuals who are not governors eg Associate Members or anyone invited such as a teacher who is not a governor.
- Record apologies for absence. The reasons for absence do not have to be recorded in the minutes. Record anyone who was not present without sending apologies. There is no legal requirement for apologies to be “accepted”. They can just be “noted”. This can be significant should it become necessary to disqualify governors for lack of attendance.
- Record all decisions unambiguously. Use words like “..it was agreed that...” or “..it was resolved that...”
- Record action items including who is responsible for taking the action.
- Make it clear if there are associated part 2 minutes which cover confidential items.
- Make it clear who has written the minutes.
- Check spelling.

### Good Practice

- Write minutes in the past tense.
- Number items to agree with agenda. When items are taken out of order make it clear .
- Number paragraphs - this enables easy reference to specific points. There is no set numbering system.
- Use plain English - minutes need to be understood by the majority.
- Keep jargon to a minimum and explain acronyms the first time they are used.
- Keep in mind that the minutes need to be understood by someone who knows nothing about the school.
- Keep in mind the roles and responsibilities of governors in the way you word the minutes.
- Don't repeat detailed information contained in papers already issued or attached to the minutes eg Headteacher's report. Note additional information and refer to the documents concerned. All accompanying papers constitute part of the public record.
- Write up the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting - within seven days is a good guideline.
- Do not be afraid to ask the Chair for advice about what should be recorded to ensure that there is no misunderstanding. It is better to delay the proceedings for a few minutes while you do this than to find an issue being brought up again at the next meeting because of disagreement with a resolution or action as recorded.

### Points of Law

The Law says that *“Every question to be decided at a meeting of the governing body is to be determined by a majority of the votes of the governors present and voting on the question”*.

In practice many decisions are agreed unanimously. Where this is the case it should be recorded as unanimous. If there is a disagreement, the number of votes for and against and any abstentions must be recorded. However do not record how individuals vote as the decisions of the governing body are corporate.

Clerks need to be aware that where individuals are named in Part 2 minutes, the individual usually has access (on request) to information which is *about them specifically* under Freedom of Information Legislation.

Remember that for all governor meetings there is a legal requirement for 7 days notice, and an agenda must be issued in advance. This can only be waived in exceptional circumstances.

### What are Part II minutes?

Part II minutes record confidential items. As a general rule, anything of a sensitive nature concerning a named individual, whether a pupil or a member of staff should be recorded under a Part II minute. However governors should not normally be discussing named members of staff or pupils, as should actions result in an appeal, all governors would be tainted and so unable to be part of a panel.

These minutes should be kept separately from the main minutes and should not be made available to anyone outside of the governing body, the Headteacher, the clerk, the LA and the Diocese. Associate members of the governing body may be asked to leave the meeting when a confidential matter is to be discussed, and therefore do not have an automatic right to see all part II minutes. (see below).

In writing Part II minutes clerks need to be mindful that all governors are entitled to see them whether they were at the meeting or not, because of the governing body's corporate responsibility. Associate members are not governors and do not have the same right but they can see them at the discretion of the governing body. Individual governors are still bound by the confidentiality of the governing body and must not discuss the contents of the Part II minutes with anyone else. It is therefore sufficient when writing Part II minutes to include only brief details of any discussion together with a statement of the decisions reached and any action to be taken.

### Who checks the minutes?

Whoever chaired the meeting checks the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting and agrees the draft which can then be sent out to members of the governing body and the LA. The Chair may make **minor** corrections (spelling, etc) but the minutes do not become formal, or in the public domain, until the governing body as a whole has accepted them as a true and complete record or has resolved changes.

The minutes record what went on at the meeting only. It is sometimes acceptable in the interests of clarity to add an "afternote", but this must be clearly marked as such.

There is **no requirement** for the Headteacher to approve draft minutes.

### How are minutes corrected?

Minutes are corrected at the *next* meeting of the Governing Body if there is an inaccuracy. Changes are *not* made to the previous minutes but recorded in the next set. A note on the signed minutes can be added to draw the reader's attention to the fact that an amendment has been agreed. Once the minutes are agreed, subject to the changes, the Chair signs them to record they are a true record of the meeting.

### Where are the minutes kept?

The signed minutes must be kept in a file and should remain in the school. Part 2 confidential minutes should be kept separately in a secure place.

### To whom are the minutes circulated?

Minutes are usually circulated to all members of the governing body and to the Headteacher, whether or not he/she has opted to be a governor. The Local Authority (LA) also requires a copy of minutes of full governing body minutes and minutes of committees dealing with curriculum matters and finance matters. These should be emailed to [governors.helpdesk@bracknell-forest.gov.uk](mailto:governors.helpdesk@bracknell-forest.gov.uk) In the case of RC and C of E schools, the diocese may also request copies.

It is good practice to circulate minutes to all governors and associate members as soon as possible after the meeting, after the Chair has approved the draft. The signed minutes (*excluding* confidential Part II minutes) are part of the public record and must be made available to anyone who asks to see them. Many schools publish the minutes of their meetings on the school website or put them on a noticeboard. Part II minutes do not *have* to be circulated to all governors but all governors have a right to see them and should know where they are kept.

A growing number of governing bodies use a virtual office on a secure website. This allows the Clerk to upload documents to the website and for those entitled to see them to log in and read on screen or download them. This adds a higher level of data protection and saves paper and time.

Most individuals are now proficient with the internet. However if a governor is not, the Clerk is obliged to provide paper copies of all relevant papers.

In all cases the signed copy of the minutes, which constitutes the official record should be kept in school as hardcopy.