

This guide is not the set format for writing minutes in our borough. Our clerks use a combination of informal and formal styles, depending on their relationship with the governing body. It is intended as guidance only, to interested parties, who wish to gain an understanding in the concepts and principles of writing minutes.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Governing Bodies are statutory bodies made up of volunteers from different sectors of the community. Minutes of meetings must be recorded, entered into a book or file and signed by the Chairperson.

Minutes are a method of recording discussions and decisions in a clear and concise form. They should be written using plain language.

Topics covered in these guidelines include:-

- **Taking notes**
- **Using abbreviations**
- **Different styles of minute writing**
- **Presentation and layout**
- **Language and grammar**
- **Making sense of your notes**
- **Numbering minutes**
- **How to turn everyday comments into appropriate minutes**
- **Useful phrases to remember**
- **Making sure the minutes are concise**
- **Minuting special meetings**
- **Example of minute writing**

## **DURING THE MEETING**

### **a) Taking notes**

Being a clerk is an important role in a meeting and making sure you accurately record what the governors say and decide can be difficult. It is therefore important that accurate notes are kept which describe the main points of the discussion and any decision that was reached. It is also necessary that the clerks understand their notes so that they can be deciphered later.

Everybody has a different way of taking notes and there are a number of methods to choose from. Here are just a few:-

- write down everything as it is said under headings just in case it is important – but you would have to be a very fast writer!
- write a few lines for each heading which will remind you of the discussion
- use bullet points describing the conversation on a grid for each topic being discussed with columns for the subject, any comments and the decision reached

These three methods would look something like this:-

#### Type A

**Minutes – are approved by governing body**

**Matters Arising – the school trip was very good and everybody had a good time**

**Finance Report – the budget sent to school and was looked at by headteacher and chairperson. Looks to be a good provision for this financial year**

**School Report – headteacher reported on the examination results which were excellent**

#### Type B

**Minutes – OK**

**Matters Arising – trip went well**

**Finance – had budget and looks good**

**HT Report – good exam results**

#### Type C

TOPIC	COMMENTS	DECISION
Minutes	Ok	Approved
MA – trip	Went well	None
Budget	Looks good	Approved
Exam results	Excellent	Congratulate pupils and staff

When you first begin to take notes you may find that you adopt Type A for a few meetings as it will take time to learn what needs to be noted and what is irrelevant.

#### b) Using Abbreviations

You may find it useful to use abbreviations in your notes. This will enable you to accurately record decisions as long as you can understand what the abbreviation means! There is nothing worse than looking at your notes the next day and trying to remember what it all means as this defeats the whole object of using abbreviations.

So be careful! Here are some that to use when taking notes:-

Abbreviation	Meaning
Mins	Minutes
MA	Matters arising
Ctee	Committee
Ch	Chair
VCh	Vice Chair
HT	Headteacher
OK	Approved
GB	Governing Body
Govs	Governors
WO	Welsh Office
LEA	Education Department
PSD	Property Services
Conc	Concern
Cap	Capital
Avail	Available

Prep	Prepare/preparation
P	Pupils/parents
T	Teachers/staff
Imp	Important
Doc	Document
Stat	Statutory

You do not have to use any of these abbreviations you can use your own. The golden rule is to remember what they mean.

### 3. PRESENTATION

#### a) Different styles of minute writing

The work of Governing Bodies is important and their minutes are considered formal public documents. Minutes should therefore be written using business-like language in a clear, concise and simple way without using pompous or stuffy vocabulary. They should be typed using a formal layout with headings for each item. Normal everyday phrases should be substituted for a more appropriate business-like language. Further information on how to do this is discussed later in these guidelines. Minutes should not be written in an informal or casual way.

#### b) Presentation and Layout

Each governing body has its own preferred style of presentation for minutes and although there is no set layout prescribed in any legislation it is advisable that minutes should contain some basic information as follows:-

- **minutes should state what meeting it is and when and where it was held**
- **a list should be included of those governors present, anybody else present and who apologised**
- **the chair of governors is usually listed first in the list those present and should be identified as the chairperson**
- **minutes should be numbered consecutively starting at 1 for the first meeting of the autumn term where the chair of governors is elected. This continues until the last meeting in the summer term. The numbering begins again at 1 every September.**
- **headings should be used for each topic especially with matters arising and committee reports**
- **minutes are always written in the past tense and should be clear and concise**
- **always use capital letters for Headteacher, Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Governor, Governing Body and the name of the school**
- **Resolutions should be in bold type and indented so they stand out**

Using the above suggestions will help governors to refer back to specific minutes at the next meeting under matters arising or a later date. It can be embarrassing when governors cannot find an important reference in a previous minute because there are no headings or consecutive numbering. **It is also a good idea to have your minutes typed rather than hand written.**

#### c) Language and Grammar

Attention should be paid to spelling, grammar and punctuation throughout the minutes. It is especially important to use commas and apostrophes correctly. Clerks should be careful not to repeat the same phrases too many times and to begin

paragraphs differently. This will prevent the minutes from becoming repetitive and boring.

Remember to use active or specific and not passive or vague phrases. This ensures that sentences are more concise and clear. It is important to know who agreed or said what for future reference. Examples of active and passive phrases are as follows:

PASSIVE	ACTIVE
It was decided...	Governors decided
Assurances were given by the Chair	The Chair assured Governors that
Concerns were expressed by ...	Governors expressed concern

#### 4. WRITING THE MINUTES

##### a) Making sense of those notes

Well now we come to those notes you took at the meeting last night. In an ideal world minutes should be written as soon as possible after the meeting although this is not always feasible. You may find it helpful to read through your notes to refresh your memory before attempting to write anything and perhaps highlight any comments or issues that you feel should be included in the minutes. This will help to sort out any unnecessary notes you have and give you an idea of what you need to write.

Remember that minutes are written in the past tense. So it is important to transfer any comments or decisions into the past tense. The only exception to this rule are governing body resolutions which are written in the present tense. This is because they have not happened yet but will in the future.

Examples of transferring present into past tense would be:-

Present tense	Past tense
A Governor has agreed	A Governor had agreed
The Headteacher is pleased	The Headteacher was pleased to

##### b) Numbering minutes

Things can get complicated when there are subsections of subsections of paragraphs so it is best to number using this guide.

The main minutes are numbered consecutively. Matters arising are numbered using roman numerals and any further subsections use letters. An example would be:-

#### 23. COMMITTEE REPORTS

##### i. Premises Committee

###### a. Internal Decoration

The Headteacher reported that the school entrance would be painted during the holidays.

###### b. Dutch Barn

The Governing Body expressed concern at the state of the Dutch barn and requested the LEA demolish it on the following grounds:-

- i. health and safety of pupils and staff
- ii. the barn could not be used for indoor sport as the roof leaked

##### c) How to turn everyday comments made in meetings into appropriate minutes

It is important to remember when writing minutes that spoken words have to be transformed into a different language – one that is acceptable for minutes.

This does not mean that everything has to be altered, it depends on the Headteacher and Chair of Governors, but in certain circumstances this may be advisable.

It is especially important not to include familiar colloquialisms or slang phrases in minutes even when they are uttered by those at the meeting. Instead either omit those words from the finished minute or if they form part of a decision or important point substitute a more appropriate phrase. *A list of useful phrases commonly used when writing minutes is listed in the next chapter.* See what you think about the next paragraph:-

**Mr Jones wasn't happy with the stupid rule of not letting kids eat snacks in the huts at play time. He had been to see the head but could get no joy and thought the governors should sort it out pronto.**

It could be rephrased to read like this:-

**Mr Jones was concerned that pupils were not allowed to eat snacks in the school during breaks. He had approached the headteacher to raise his concerns without success and requested that governors discuss the issue without delay.**

The two paragraphs say the same thing but the second paragraph is phrased in a minute friendly way. Notice that words such as "pronto", "no joy", "wasn't" and "kids" would not usually be included in that form and would be rephrased appropriately. Similarly phrases such as "Mickey mouse idea", "gobbledegook" and "codswollop" would also not be appropriate. In most cases there should be an alternative to the slang phrase used by governors which would be better suited for inclusion in a set of minutes. Similarly, if a disagreement developed during a meeting then a brief statement would be sufficient instead of itemising the whole debate. The minutes could read:-

**"A full and frank discussion took place during which various views and opinions were expressed."**

Although this does not specify who was in disagreement or what was said it does acknowledge the fact that a discussion took place. If a decision was reached then that could be added to the end of the sentence.

#### **d) Useful phrases to remember**

You may find it useful to refer to this table of phrases but do not feel that these are the only phrases you can use. Remember it is better to use simple language rather than official jargon.

<b>Useful phrases</b>
Governors were concerned
After a full discussion
Governors agreed
The Headteacher highlighted
Governors RESOLVED
The Headteacher explained
In conclusion
Governors requested

#### **e) Making sure the minutes are concise**

Minutes should be clear, concise and accurate.

A basic guide is to

- **briefly introduce the subject**
- **summarise any major points raised**
- **record the decision reached.**

For some topics you may need to include more detail than just a few sentences. This would probably be the case with a discussion about finances, examination results or the headteacher's report.

Some circles about writing minutes say "**If in doubt leave it out**". This can be a helpful little phrase to use when you are unsure of a particular note. Of course if the chair and the headteacher have approved the draft minutes without amendment then you know you have gauged the content correctly.

## **5. MINUTING SPECIAL MEETINGS**

There are other meetings apart from the full governing body meeting that you may have to clerk. These could include pupil exclusion committee meetings or a special "one item" governors meeting.

### **a) Pupil Exclusions**

Special meetings do not usually have more than one item for discussion so this makes writing minutes more difficult. Often in the case of pupil exclusion meetings very little detail is needed in the minutes due to the confidential nature of the topic. Therefore the same format can be used for each meeting with just the name of the pupil and the reason for the permanent exclusion changing each time. Remember that minutes from Pupil Exclusion Committee meetings are always deemed confidential.

### **b) Finance meetings**

For meetings where the budget is being discussed more detail would be required than for pupil exclusions. Notes should be made of any virements to balance the budget and any other major decisions.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

We hope that these guidelines have helped you to become a better minute writer. It is advisable that you read through your minutes once they have been written to make sure that they make sense and are presentable. Make sure that a draft is sent to the Head and Chair for approval.

Below are a set of minutes which you can use as a guide.

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY FOR GREENPARK PRIMARY SCHOOL HELD ON TUESDAY 2 JUNE 1998**

**PRESENT:** Mr G Roberts (chair), Mrs Y Poole, Miss R Bishop, Mr J Taylor, Mrs A Hampton and Mr J John.

Apologies for absence were received from Ms G Jones.

#### **23. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2004 were approved as a correct record and the chairperson authorised to sign them.

#### **24. MATTERS ARISING**

##### **ii. minute 16 (i) – Membership**

Governors noted that Mr J Jones had been appointed as an LEA Representative.

##### **iii. minute 18 - Proposed School Extension**

The Headteacher had been notified by the LEA that money would be available to extend the school to cope with rising numbers on roll. The work would commence in September 1998.

#### **25. HEADTEACHER'S REPORT – Mr J Taylor**

The Headteacher informed governors that SATs had now been completed and had went well.

Governors were invited to attend the school sports day due to take place on Friday 10 July 1998.

Concern was expressed at the number of windows broken by vandals. A claim form would be submitted to the LEA to replace broken glass. Governors considered options for increased security on the site and agreed to contact Property Services to discuss costings.

The list of visitors to the school during the term was noted. Governors were informed that the Link Adviser had given positive comments on the School Development Plan.

The SEN Co-ordinator had resigned and an advertisement would need to be prepared to appoint a replacement.

#### **26. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

The Committees had not met since the last governors' meeting.

Governors agreed that the Staffing Committee should meet to discuss the appointment of the SEN Co-ordinator. The Building Committee were requested to organise a site meeting to discuss the location of the new extension.

#### **27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 9 July 1998 at 7.00pm.

#### **28. DETERMINATION OF MATTERS TO BE REGARDED AS CONFIDENTIAL**

There were no such matters