



Guides

Effective Committees & Meetings



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Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to help groups to ensure that their committees and meetings are effective.

Some sections also have checklists for you to use.

There are a series of templates at the back of this guide to help you. If you would like these electronically please contact the Deal for Communities Team

Effective meetings

To make sure people attend regularly, it is important that meetings are positive and effective. Meetings should not last longer than two hours. Any longer and boredom will set in and you will lose the focus and interest of the attendees.

Everyone at the meeting needs to feel welcomed and be involved and everyone should have the opportunity to speak, if they wish.

If a person attends for the first time, make sure everyone introduces themselves and their role in the group. Encourage this person to speak and give their opinion if they want to. If necessary, give some background to the issues that are going to be discussed.

Jargon should be avoided, if not explain what you are talking about so people do not feel uncomfortable and embarrassed if they cannot follow what you are saying.

Position tables and chairs so everyone is comfortable. There are different options on room layout, for example

- Around one large table where everyone faces each other.
- Attendees are grouped around smaller tables and the Chair, Secretary and guest speakers are on a separate 'top' table facing the audience.
- Attendees are in rows and the Chair, Secretary and guest speakers are on a separate 'top' table facing the audience. Please bear in mind that this layout can be difficult if attendees have papers to follow and they are also juggling refreshments.

Everyone should have a copy of the agenda and also the minutes of the previous meeting, if appropriate.

There should be a sheet for everyone to sign in their names and contact details. Due to data protection rules, the information on this sheet must be safeguarded and not passed onto anyone else. The sheet must be stored in a safe place so no-one else will have access to it. It is very important that everyone completes this sheet as this

will also be used as a register in case there is a fire in the building whilst the meeting is taking place. In these circumstances it is very difficult to remember who is actually present so the list is essential. This list can also be used in the future when you need to call another meeting. This will save time if you do not want to distribute leaflets to everyone again, as you can now concentrate on the people who are interested. It is advisable that the attendance list only includes names and signatures. Make a note of names, address and contact details separately. See Templateⁱ for a suggested layout.

For the meeting you will need a list of items to be discussed. This is called an agenda. See Templateⁱⁱ for a suggested layout.

Someone needs to control the meeting to make sure it flows. This person is usually the Chair or Vice-Chair. This person will follow the agenda. The Chair needs to make sure that everyone who wants to say something has the opportunity to do so.

If it is necessary, appoint a Code of Conduct Monitor (see section on how to behave in meetings).

Notes or minutes need to be taken during the meeting. It is usually the Secretary who will take the minutes. These minutes do not need to cover exactly what everyone said, just the important points that have been raised and items that need action. See Templateⁱⁱⁱ for a suggested layout.

There are separate sections in this guide that go into more detail on the role of the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee Members.

Effective meeting check list		Tick
1.	Print off attendance list	
2.	Print spare copies of agenda & minutes of previous meeting	
3.	Appoint Chair	
4.	Appoint Code of Conduct monitor	
5.	Appoint note taker	

What to expect in a meeting

The Chair should open the meeting by welcoming everyone and thanking them for attending.

The Chair should also ask for the names of people who could not attend the meeting and sent their apologies.

Before starting on the agenda items, some Chairs will ask for items that attendees wish to bring up under any other business. These items are not for full discussion at this point, but simply an indication of what the subject/issue is. This will enable the Chair to gauge how much time needs to be allocated at the end of the meeting to cover it properly. This is very good practice to consider as it means that the Chair allocates time appropriately. There is nothing more infuriating for attendees than turning up at a meeting with a burning issue, only to be told that there is no time for it to be discussed.

The Chair will quickly run through the minutes of the previous meeting (if appropriate). The purpose of this is simply to pick up on any errors in the minutes so these can be amended.

The Chair will then ask someone to approve the minutes (this is called proposing) and maybe ask someone to second the proposal (seconder).

The Chair will then go through the matters arising or action points from the previous meeting to make sure that progress is being made.

The Chair will then follow the agenda to cover the remaining items for discussion.

At the end of the meeting the Chair will confirm the date, time and venue for the next meeting.

The Chair will thank everyone for attending and will then formally close the meeting.

What to expect in a meeting check list		Tick
1.	Welcome everyone and ask for apologies	
2.	Maybe ask for any other business items	
3.	Run through minutes of previous meeting	
4.	Ask for proposer and seconder that the minutes are accurate	
5.	Go through matters arising/action points from previous meeting	
6.	Continue with agenda	
7.	Set date, time and venue for next meeting	
8.	Thank everyone for attending	

Behaviour in meetings

People are not generally aware that certain behaviour is expected of them in meetings. Such as:

- Always listening to the person who is speaking.
- Not talking over someone else and holding separate discussions with the people you are sat with.
- Putting your hand up to speak.
- Respecting someone else's point of view, even if you disagree with what they are saying.
- There is nothing wrong with healthy discussion or debate, but tempers should not be lost, voices should never be raised and swearing is not allowed under any circumstances.

Most groups have a Code of Conduct to ensure that meetings remain positive and everyone present knows what is expected of them.

It is customarily the role of the Chair to keep meetings in order, but sometimes if the meeting is well attended, Chairs prefer to appoint a separate Code of Conduct Monitor. This allows the Chair to concentrate on what is being said and by who. The Code of

Conduct Monitor will ensure that only one person speaks at a time. The Code of Conduct Monitor may also help the Chair to make sure that, if a person has their hand up to speak, they are allowed to do so in order.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

It is very important that groups treat all information confidential. Personal issues must not be discussed in open meetings and individuals must not be named.

The Data Protection Act 1988 controls how personal information is used by organisations – whether business or private. The rules require everyone who collects data to follow strict rules and to keep information safe. This rule applies to community groups. Personal details of members, or the general public, must not be passed onto anyone else, even if you think they won't mind. If someone asks for contact details for one of your members, ask the enquirer for their details and tell them you will ask the member to ring them. Do not let them persuade you otherwise.

It is the role of all members of the group to keep personal information safe.

Where do I fit in?

Helen Keller said "alone we can do so little, together we can do so much".

You will find that group members fall into one of the following categories. Next time you are in a meeting try and guess who is there because they want to be, or because they have to be.

- A **Participant** is someone who wants to be in the group and gets as much as they can from the experience.
- A **Passenger** is someone who enjoys being in the group, but takes a back seat.
- A **Pirate** is someone who is unhappy about being in the group and lets everyone know it.
- A **Prisoner** is someone who is unhappy about being in the group, but does not let others know it.

It is important to remember that once a group is set up, everyone who is part of it must work as a team. To work as an effective team, all the members must go through different steps to feel truly part of it.

The first step include:

- Trying to work out the purpose of the group.
- You may find that some individuals try to stamp their own identity on the group.
- Wonder where you fit in.

The next step is to:

- Work through disagreement and resolve conflict.
- Setting realistic goals and procedures.

The third step is:

- Establishing a comfortable way of working together.
- Discovering new levels of openness and ways of taking decisions.

The final stage is getting on with it producing results and achieving goals.

You may find that different members of the group have different ways of doing things. Theorists suggest that there are different ways of learning and getting on with life, these four ways are as follows:-

Visual	-	Prefer to see pictures
Auditory	-	Prefer to hear
Kinaesthetic	-	Prefer to do
Auditory Digital	-	Combination of the above

Once you realise which type of person you are and those you are working with, you may understand 'what makes them tick'.

Another theory is that teams or groups that contain individuals fall into one of these five modes:

Avoiding	-	Prefer withdrawal to conflict, evasive
Accommodating	-	Sacrifice their needs to satisfy others
Competitive	-	Wants to satisfy their own needs
Collaborating	-	Works with others so everyone wins
Compromising	-	Aims to meet in the middle where everyone gives up something to gain something

The following are some of the reasons why group often fail:-

- Power struggles as there is no clear leader.
- The workload not being shared equally.
- Different aspirations of members
- Problems over who gets the credit.
- Lack of commitment by individuals.
- Lack of trust and not sharing information fully.
- Lack of understanding of the groups' aims.
- Confusion over role of members.

Effective groups

It is important that a group is effective. People will not attend meetings if they feel that nothing is being achieved. Some of the key points that a group must remember are:

- Act for benefit of everyone in area.
- Personal viewpoints should not dominate.
- Must have a democratic voting system.

- Constantly evolving and learning from mistakes.
- Moves and looks forward, rather than dwelling in the past.
- Has an action plan to keep aims and objectives on track.
- Keeps everyone in the wider area informed via a newsletter, for example.

Most groups are run by committees, who are a group of people working towards a common goal.

A good committee will :-

- Delegate responsibilities equally so no-one is over burdened.
- Concentrate on strengths within the group and identify specific positions (if required).
- Tackle conflict and accept differences of opinion as they arise.
- Have well organised meetings.
- Have clear roles and responsibilities of committee members.
- Have trained and informed committee members.
- Provide a fair service for all in area.

There are no rules as to who may be on the Committee. Most committees are made up of the following:

- Chair or Chairperson
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Committee Members

You may decide to have deputies for key positions, such as Vice-Chair, Vice-Secretary or Vice-Treasurer. Some committees have other specialist roles such as Training Officer, Youth Support Officer, Communication Officer or Funding Officer.

Role of Chair

The role of the Chair is first and foremost to be the figurehead of a group and to control the meetings.

The Chair should:

- Draw up an agenda, with the Secretary.
- Ensure the venue is suitable - (local, accessible, loop system, childcare etc)
- Start the meeting on time, follow the agenda, summarise decisions and create action points
- Ensures everyone gets a chance to speak
- Make sure the purpose of the meeting is achieved and members know what is expected of them as a result.
- Ensuring the meeting keeps time.

Chair should not:

- Hog the meeting.
- Allow people to talk amongst each other.
- Let people move away from the agenda items.
- Allow people to talk at once or over each other.
- Allow people to dominate any discussion.

A good Chair needs to be:-

- Organised.

- Confident.
- Assertive, but not aggressive.
- A good listener.
- Firm, but fair minded.
- Encouraging.
- Committed.
- Positive.
- Self disciplined, but flexible.
- Objective.
- Familiar with procedures.

Sometimes the Chair takes on so much responsibility that the power of the group shifts towards the Chair and away from the whole group. It is up to other members of the group to make sure that they do not let this happen. It is too easy to sit back and let one person do everything.

Some of the other tasks that the Chair carries out are:-

- Making sure that the group makes clear priorities.
- Acts as its main spokesperson and represent the group outside.
- Makes urgent decisions between meetings.
- Making sure that meetings are conducted properly.
- Controlling the discussion without doing all the talking.
- Dealing effectively with problem situations and people.

Role of the Secretary

The Secretary's primary role is to keep people informed, so that they feel involved and able to join in what the group does.

The secretary also :-

- Types up and distributes the minutes of meetings.
- Keeps an up to date contact list of members.
- Keeps a record of contact details for possible guest speakers.
- Writes letters on behalf of the group.
- Help the Chair draw up an agenda.
- Makes sure that items from previous meeting have been followed up.
- Lets people know when and where the next meeting is.
- Invites speakers to attend the meeting, making clear what they are being asked to speak about.
- Writing and receiving letters on behalf of the group.
- Keeping members informed of all correspondence sent out or received.

Some groups have a different Secretary for different roles such as Minutes Secretary, a Correspondence Secretary and/or a Membership Secretary. It just depends on the size of your group, the amount of time people have available, the skills people have and what people like doing.

Role of the Treasurer

The position of Treasurer can sometimes be the hardest position to fill, as the issue of funds can be sensitive and daunting for some people.

The primary role of the Treasurer is to keep an eye on the money and to look after the finances for the group, this includes:-

- Keeping accurate financial records.
- Paying the bills and collect receipts.
- Keeping group members informed of the financial situation.
- Enter income/expenditure in a ledger.
- Prepare financial statements for meetings.
- Prepare accounts for inspection at the Annual General Meeting.
- Collect the subscriptions, if applicable.
- Bank cheques and cash.

The responsibility for the groups finances should not totally fall on one person. The finances of a group should be open, honest and transparent. To shift some of the responsibility from the Treasurer it is essential that, at every meeting, the Treasurer has the opportunity to report on the finances. This way there can be no suggestion of wrong doing as everyone is kept up to date. The Treasurer should take the accounts to each meeting so people can look at them if they wish. Ensure bank statements are filed and kept safe in date order.

If the above is followed there will be no arguing or accusations of abuse of funds. It will also be easier to plan for future spending.

Role of a Committee Member

Committee Members are sometimes seen as unimportant, because they do not have a specific role. It is important to remember that there are generally more Committee Members on a group than there are all the other positions put together.

The role of Committee Member is to support everyone else. It may be that they cannot give enough time to hold a specific position, but they want to help when they can.

If you think of a whole committee as blocks in a pyramid, typically the Committee Members will be on the bottom row. If there are no Committee Members supporting the rest of the group, the whole thing will collapse. So Committee Members are just as important as the chair.

Agenda

The purpose of the agenda is to list the order of events at a meeting. This is so attendees know what is going to be covered and when.

Ideally agendas should be sent out in advance of the meeting with the minutes of the previous meeting.

People should know how to get an item put on the agenda for discussion. This is usually through the Chair prior to the meeting, or if it is urgent or only just apparent, it can be brought up under any other business.

The chairperson uses the agenda to make sure that the meeting runs smoothly and all items are covered.

The items covered on the agenda should form the basis of the minutes.

The following is a suggestion of what should be discussed under each agenda item:

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

Welcome people, especially newcomers. List the names of people who said that they could not attend.

As mentioned previously, the Chair may, at this point, ask for items that attendees wish to bring up under any other business.

2. Minutes of previous meeting

This item is purely to agree that there were no mistakes in the minutes of the previous meeting. There should be no new items brought up under this heading. Sometimes the Chair and proposer signs a copy for the secretary to keep on file.

3. Matters arising

Discussion about subjects in the minutes, especially any action points or developments.

4. Chair's Report

The Chair should regularly update the group on what he/she been working on.

5. Correspondence or Secretary's Report

The Secretary should advise everyone of what correspondence has been received or sent since the previous meeting.

6. Financial or Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer should update everyone on the current bank balance. If there are major differences from the previous month the Treasurer should explain what has been bought.

7. Funding and fundraising

This may fall within the Chair or Treasurer's Report rather than be a specific item. If the group is planning a large project it maybe that it has its own agenda item with funding as a sub-heading.

8. Agenda Item specific to group, e.g. Feedback from other meetings

Groups may designated certain individuals to attend different meetings. This is the opportunity for them to feedback to the rest of the group on what happened.

All large projects / issues should have a dedicated item. There may be one or two on an agenda

9. Any other business

This is everyone's opportunity to bring up issues that do not fall within any of the set agenda items. These are usually last minute or small items.

10. Date, time and venue of next meeting

Agree the date, time and venue of the next meeting.

Minutes

Minutes are a method of recording discussions and decisions in a clear and concise form. They should be written in a simple and understandable form.

The role of the minute taker is extremely important. The minute taker is responsible for making sure that any discussion or decision that takes place during a meeting is accurately recorded. This can be a difficult task without adequate preparation and training. Minutes should be accurate, concise and clear. In order to accurately record a meeting it is essential that correct notes be kept. Notes should describe the main points of a discussion and any decisions that were reached. The minute taker must ensure that they understand their notes in order to be able to write them up following the meeting

There are different types of minutes:-

- Verbatim – recording everything people say – such as in court or parliament.
- Bullet or action points – just record items that need action.
- Threads of discussion and decisions – a brief summary of discussions and decisions.

There are a number of methods which can be used to take notes, you may even prefer to come up with a method of your own.

Three possible methods are as follows:

- Write down everything that is said under headings and decide what is important when writing them up.
- Write a few lines under headings in order to remind yourself of the main gist of the discussion

- Noting discussions on a table with columns for the subject, comments and decisions reached.

You may find it useful to use abbreviations to speed up your note taking. You could record people's names, by using their initials. If you make up your own abbreviations make sure you remember what your abbreviation means. There is nothing worse than looking at your notes the next day and not being unable to understand them!

Minutes should be written in a clear, concise and simple way so that people can easily understand them. Try not to use pompous or stuffy vocabulary and use a formal layout with headings for each agenda item.

There is no set format for the presentation of minutes and you will find that different people will have slightly different styles of presentation.

What should be included?

- State when, what time and where the meeting was held.
- List everybody that is present and anybody who has sent their apologies.
- Minutes should be numbered according to items on the agenda.
- Headings should be used to outline agenda items.
- Minutes should always be written in the past tense and should be clear and concise.
- Any actions leading from decisions should include the person who is responsible.

Sometimes minutes can be monotonous to read, try breaking sentences up using some of the following phrases:

- The committee were concerned ...
- After a full discussion ...
- The committee agreed ...
- The Chair highlighted ...

- The committee resolved ...
- The Chair explained ...
- In conclusion ...
- The Chair requested ...
- The Importance of Presentation

The presentation and layout make minutes understandable for anybody reading them. They help members of the committee to refer back to previous meetings.

Make sure you:-

- Pay attention to spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Do not repeat too many of the same phrases.
- Begin each paragraph in a different way in order to prevent minutes becoming repetitive and boring.

Minutes should be written as soon as possible after the meeting. Read through your notes before attempting to write anything in order to refresh your memory and to highlight the important issues that need to be included. Minutes should be written in the past tense so try to transfer any comments / decisions made in your notes to the past tense, for example. You will need to be able to turn everyday comments made in meetings into appropriate minutes. People speak differently in real life, but it is important when writing minutes that spoken words are transformed into a language that is acceptable for minutes. It is especially important not to include colloquialisms or slang phrases in minutes when they are spoken and to phrase them in a more minute friendly way.

Re-phrasing what was said :-

Mr Jones wasn't happy with the kids on his estate hanging around outside the precinct and making a nuisance of themselves. He had told them off, but without any joy and thought that the problem needed to be sorted out pronto.

This sentence could be re-phrased without words such as 'pronto', 'no joy', 'wasn't' and 'kids' to read in a more minute friendly way.

Example of re-phrasing your minutes :-

Mr Jones was concerned that youths were gathering outside the precinct. He has approached them to raise his concerns without success and requested that the issue be discussed without delay.

Minute takers also need to be careful when recording arguments. If a disagreement developed during a meeting then a brief statement would be sufficient rather than recording what each person has said. For instance :-

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

It can sometimes be difficult to decide what should be included when everything seems equally important. Try to concentrate on :-

- Briefly introducing the subject.
- Summarising any major points raised.
- Recording the decision reached.

Always read through your minutes once they have been written to make sure that they make sense and are presentable.

It may be useful to send a draft version to the chair for approval before they are distributed.

Account Keeping

As mentioned previously the role of the Treasurer is sometimes the hardest position to fill. This is due to the fact that sometimes people are put off the fact that they have to handle money.

The following are some of the terms that you may come across when dealing with finances:

Terminology		Explanation
Income	-	Money in
Expenditure	-	Money out
Signatories	-	People authorised to sign cheques
Petty cash	-	Cash in hand
Audit	-	When accounts are independently inspected
Books / Ledger (Accounts book)	-	This is where day to day transactions are recorded. This can be an electronic spreadsheet if it is easier for the Treasurer.

Consider the following :-

- It is recommended that a group have three people as cheque signatories. Only two of these people need to sign cheques at a time. It should be avoided at all costs that family members are signatories. If this is the case, they should only be able to counter-sign cheques with the third signatory.
- The committee should limit the Treasurer to an amount they can authorise alone. Expenditure over this limit must be presented to the full committee for authorisation
- Adopt a clear book-keeping system
- Keep the books up to date

It is advisable to purchase the following: -

- Ledger
- Spreadsheet
- Calculator
- Lockable cash box
- Receipt Folder - Number the receipts and keep in order
- Duplicate Receipt Book

The Treasurer needs to keep all the equipment together in a safe place. Income should be paid into the bank as soon as possible. Only a small amount of petty cash should be kept. Keep a receipt for every item of expenditure - no matter how small. Do not give money out unless there is a receipt. Make sure the books / spreadsheet matches the bank statements.

An example of an accounts ledger can be found at Template^{iv}

Glossary of Terms

Below is a brief explanation of some of the terminology used in this guide. If there are any more terms that you do not understand, please contact the Deal for Communities Team and we will endeavour to include them in the next edition.

Agenda	-	Running order for a meetings
Aims and Objectives	-	What the group wants to achieve and how it is going to do it
Apologies	-	If someone cannot attend a meeting
Chair	-	Somone who leads and directs the group
Code of Conduct Monitor	-	Someone who ensures that people behave appropriately in meetings
Committee	-	Group of people working towards a purpose
Committee Members	-	Individual members of a group who are key position holders
Communication Officer	-	Lead person in a group who makes sure that the wider public are of the groups activities
Correspondence Secretary	-	Person responsible for sending and receiving letters on behalf of the group
Discrimination	-	Unfair treatment of person because of race, ethnicity, age, religion or gender
Funding Officer	-	Person responsible for securing grants for the group

Independent Person	-	Someone not involved in the group who can chair the annual general meeting or who can prepare a statement of accounts
Membership Secretary	-	Person who is responsible for keeping details of the group membership up to date
Minutes	-	Record of the events at a meeting
Minutes Secretary	-	Person who takes minutes to record the events of a meeting
Policies	-	Documents that the group need to operate
Prejudice	-	An opinion of an individual that is formed on the basis of insufficient knowledge or external influences
Proposer	-	Person who either puts forward a suggestion in a meeting or someone who agrees the minutes
Seconder	-	Person who agrees a suggestion
Secretary	-	Person who takes the minutes and deals with correspondence on behalf of the group
Treasurer	-	Person who looks after the finance of the group
Vice-Chair	-	Person who assists the chair and stands in, in the absence of the chair
Vice-Secretary	-	Person who assists the secretary and stands in, in the absence of the secretary
Vice-Treasurer	-	Person who assists the treasurer and stands in, in the absence of the treasurer

Attendance List

Name of meeting :

Date:

Name	Signature

Agenda for Meeting

Name of meeting
Time of meeting
Date of meeting
venue

Agenda

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies
2. Code of conduct
3. Minutes of last meeting
4. Matters arising
5. Chair's Report
6. Secretary's report
7. Treasurer's report
8. Agenda item 1
9. Agenda item 2
10. Agenda item 3
11. Any Other Business
12. Time date of next meeting

Sample Minutes Layout

Name of meeting**Date****Venue****Attendance:** name

- role (e.g Chair)

Apologies:**ITEM****ACTION**1. **Welcome**

•

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

•

3. **Matters Arising**

•

4. **Chair's Report**

•

5. **Treasurer's Report**

•

6. **Secretarys Report**

•

7. **Agenda Item**

•

8. **Agenda Item**

•

9. **Any Other Business**

•

10. **Date of Next Meeting**

•

Sample Accounts Ledger

									B/fwd	£
Income						Expenditure				
Date	Detail	No	Grants	Raffles / Bingos	Misc	Refresh ments	Prizes	Expenses	Misc	
										£
										£
										£
										£
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			£ -	£ -	£ -	£	£ -	£	£ -	£ -

Templates

ⁱ Attendance list

ⁱⁱ Agenda for meeting

ⁱⁱⁱ Sample minutes layout

^{iv} Accounts ledger