



Supporting The Orkney Community

The role of the Secretary

A guide to the duties and
responsibilities of a Secretary in a
small voluntary organisation

The role of the Secretary



He or she is probably the most important person in any Community group! A good and efficient secretary is a great asset to any organisation and helps it to run smoothly. The secretary should be familiar with the organisation's constitution and the rules contained in it, as should every member! There should always be a close link between the secretary and the chairperson, together they should draw up the agenda for each meeting, be aware of what decisions need to be taken at a meeting, and collaborate about what is recorded in the minutes.

Constitution



The secretary will find much of relevance in the constitution, e.g. the frequency of meetings, when the AGM is due, who receives notices of meetings, and the length of notice to be given. It is a good idea to keep a master copy of the constitution safely in a file but to have a spare copy at every meeting in case of questions or disputes.

New Committee members



All new committee members should receive a 'welcome pack' consisting of the constitution, minutes of the AGM, the latest annual report and accounts, copies of minutes of the most recent meetings and any leaflets produced by the organisation. The master for this pack should be kept with the secretary along with an up to date record of membership and contact details.

Planning a meeting



Always ensure that the venue is booked and arranged suitably for the meeting and that additional copies of all papers being discussed are at hand. Have someone prompted to meet and welcome any guests.

Agenda



It is normally the duty of the secretary, in consultation with the chairperson, to draw up the agenda. The chairperson has the final say about the order in which items appear. The agenda should not be too short or too long. If you cannot think of items for an agenda you should question the need to hold a meeting. No meeting should be longer than two hours. As a guide allow 10-15 minutes for each major item on the agenda.

Any major items which are ongoing warrant their own place on the agenda and should not be brought up under matters arising. Matters arising should consist of only brief updates from the previous meeting.

Sub committees should each have a slot on the main committee agenda so that any decisions taken by the sub-committee can be ratified or approved.

Recurring calendar business should always appear on the agenda in good time for decisions, eg the AGM, finance, holiday schemes, Christmas party, etc

All items should appear on the agenda in a logical order. For example, a decision about spending money should appear after the treasurer has given the financial report.

The agenda should make it clear why each item is there. It should state what is to be discussed and why. For example, for information only, for discussion, for review, etc. It is also appropriate to add the name of the person expected to present the item or report, and even add a time limit to the item. This ensures that everyone attending will know what is expected of them and how long they may have to present an item or put forward their argument.

Correspondence



Correspondence should be discussed with the chairperson and if necessary brought to the attention of the next meeting. All correspondence should be filed after action has been completed. All important correspondence and financial records should be stored in a safe place for seven years.

Annual Report



If the organisation has a written annual report it often falls to the secretary to compile the report with the chairperson adding a chairperson's report as part of it. A draft of the report should be approved by the committee prior to publication as it is in fact the committee's report of the organisation's activities during a particular financial year.

Sample Agenda



1. Apologies, welcome and agenda review
2. Minutes of previous meeting, 21 May
3. Matters arising (not covered elsewhere in the Agenda)
4. Finance sub-committee, recommendations for ratification (Treasurer)
5. Annual General Meeting, decision on venue and guest speaker
6. Halloween Disco, decision on prizes and judge
7. Film Club, report on current and future activities (Joan Flett, 5 mins)
8. Any other competent business
9. Date of next meeting