



## **MINUTE TAKER**

This is a general guide for those taking notes at meetings and producing draft minutes in the appropriate format.

### **Preparation**

Before the meeting starts make sure you have a copy of

- the agenda and
- a copy of the previous meeting minutes, if any.

### **The Contents of Minutes**

Minutes should record the following details:

- The title of the meeting;
- The venue;
- The time the meeting started;
- Those present;
- Apologies for absence;
- A summary of matters discussed;
- The reasons for decisions that were made;
- Action points and to whom they were assigned;
- A list of any documents to be attached to the minutes;
- The time the meeting closed;
- Time, date and venue of the next meeting(s).

### **Taking Notes**

If you are not familiar with the names of some, or many, of the people attending the meeting it may be a good idea to do a rough plan of the meeting room layout and write in names as people are introduced, but if you find you cannot identify a speaker during the meeting do not hesitate to ask the Chairman at the earliest opportunity. The Note Taker at meetings must have liberty of interrupting the meeting where necessary to ensure the accurate recording of proceedings.

If you are not clear about the conclusions reached, or action points assigned, do not hesitate to ask the chairman immediately. You may not be the only one who is not clear on the point, perhaps just the first to be forced to clarify your thoughts.

### **Format of Minutes**

If the meeting is already established follow the pattern already used for numbering items within the minutes and numbering action points (if required). The general style for layout, headings, paragraphs, etc, should also be followed.

## **Minute Format Design**

If you need to set or revise a format for meeting minutes the following points need to be considered;

- Numbering of Items is essential so that easy reference can be made to items referred to in the meetings. The method of numbering may be varied to suit the type of meeting. The following systems may be considered;
  - Items numbered from 1 upwards at each meeting. Good for one off meetings but can cause confusion at regular meetings when several sets of minutes could be discussed.
  - Items numbered from 1 upwards from the start of a regular series of meetings or from the start of each year with a prefix of the year, e.g. the first item of the meeting in 2009 is numbered 09/1.
  - A numbering system that aligns with the Agenda Item numbers, e.g. items relating to agenda item 6 are numbered 6/1, 6/2, etc.
- Control of Action Points also needs to be considered. For many meetings it may be sufficient to clearly mark action points in the body of the minutes. This is satisfactory so long as the points are sufficiently emphasised so that follow up review of them is not missed at the next meeting.
- For meetings that generate a lot of action points, or which have action points that are progressed over many meetings, it may be better to have a separate list of action points attached to the minutes. The action points can then be easily review at the next meeting and marked as completed, carried forward or dropped. A numbering system for action points should also be considered.
- Caution is required if action points are assigned by initials rather than by name. Duplicated initials often occur and can cause confusion.

## **Approval of Minutes**

Notes taken at meetings are formed into Draft Minutes in the appropriate format and are normally sent to the meeting Chairman for approval before circulation to meeting attendees and others on the meeting minutes circulation list. The minutes remain as “Draft” until they are approved at the next meeting. There should be an item on the meeting agenda for “Minutes of the Previous Meeting”. At this point the meeting may -

- Approve the minutes,
- Approve the minutes subject to certain amendments,
- Refuse to agree the minutes, a highly unusual step that would in effect nullify the entire previous meeting.

Once the decision has been taken it should be recorded in the notes with particular attention to the precise words to be used for any amendments to previous minutes.