

How to: minute a meeting effectively

How the clerk and chair can work together to ensure effective minutes

1

Agendas

Clearly structured agendas. The agenda should outline what is expected from each agenda item and focus on the strategic rather than the operational. A purposeful agenda should keep the discussion on track and help the clerk take effective notes. It is important that the chair allows enough time for agenda setting with the clerk and the head and responds to the clerk in good time.

Timed agendas. This will help keep the meeting on track and to time. Two hours should be long enough for most meetings; longer than this may cause governors to disengage and the clerk to lose focus. If you use timed agendas it is important that the chair keeps the meeting on track.

Note. The agenda should be driven by governors, not by the headteacher. The governing board are holding the headteacher to account and should be clear on what information they need to do this.

2

Supporting papers

Circulation. The agenda and meeting papers should be made available 7 clear days ahead of the meeting. The chair should ensure that governors are aware of their responsibility to read these papers ahead of the meeting and come prepared with relevant and appropriate questions, if they have not been sent in advance. If they are sent in advance it should be agreed that the clerk is copied in so they can include them in their meeting notes.

Tabling papers at the meeting. It is very poor practice to allow papers to be tabled at the meetings; governors do not have the opportunity to review the information in advance and may not therefore be able to make fully informed decisions. Although the clerk may chase papers to an extent, if this is a pattern of behaviour it is for the chair to speak to the headteacher and set out the expectations of the board and the requirement for governors to have these papers in advance.

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The meeting

Follow the agenda order. The chair should ensure the agenda is taken in order. Jumbled meetings may well result in jumbled minutes as the clerk should write the minutes in the order the meeting actually took place. If there is a pattern of taking items out of order, then the clerk and chair should work together to review the agenda structure. See under agendas for guidance on using timed agendas.

Good chairing. Multiple conversations will make it very difficult for the clerk to make an accurate record. The chair can support by managing the conversation, bringing debate to a close, ensuring any voting is clear and transparent and clarifying with the clerk what to record. Actions should be clearly attributed with a deadline.

Strategic role. The clerk cannot minute challenge or strategic governance that has not taken place. The chair should lead on this and ensure governors understand their role.



The minutes

Timing. There needs to be an agreement on the timeframe for the clerk to draft the minutes, for the chair to approve them and for them to be circulated. These timeframes should be respected by all in the process. As a guideline we would suggest a week to produce the draft minutes and a week for the chair to approve these.

Approval. The minutes belong to the chair, not the headteacher. Although it is good practice to copy in the headteacher to the draft minutes, it should be clear that changes are minimal and must be agreed by the chair in conjunction with the clerk. Changes to the minutes by the chair and governors should also be minimal; the clerk is the governance professional and is objective.

And finally... creating a clear and effective set of minutes takes time. Ensure the clerk is allocated enough time and pay to do the job justice.