

No. 60

Revised: January 1997

This Information Sheet explains the role within the Committee of the Secretary and describes the Secretary's main duties.

The Secretary's Work and Relations with the Main Committee

1. General

The Secretary is the Executive Officer of an Association, Society or Committee. In community organisations. He/she is usually Secretary both of the organisation and of its main committee, so the effective functioning of the organisation largely depends on his/her work, and ability to work with others. This applies not only to colleagues in the organisation, but also to the outside bodies with which the community organisation is co-operating.

To a degree, the detailed working relationships of the secretary are bound to be determined by the constitution and structure of the community organisation concerned. Later references in this Information Sheet to the committee part of the secretary's work are based on a community organisation working to the model constitution supplied by Community Matters.

Whatever the form of committee, the secretary should establish good personal relations with its members and particularly so with the Chair, Treasurer and other officers. The general aim should be to treat the committee as a team with everybody having an important part to play - this defeats the attitude of 'leave it to the secretary', with the consequent overwork he/she often endures.

Consultation with the Chair of the committee should be as frequent as possible, and all matters affecting the finance of the association should also be discussed with the treasurer. Similarly, as a general rule, no action should be taken which is likely to affect another committee, e.g.: the Social Committee, without consulting one or all of its officers. It may seem that all this consultation is rather overdoing it, but it is not, for the delays and bad feeling caused by failure to consult may waste far more time than the few minutes spent chatting with a colleague before action is taken.

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The duties of the Secretary include:

1. calling committee meetings and (with the Chair) preparing the agenda;
2. circulating agenda, minutes and other relevant papers prior to committee meetings;
3. noting the decisions of committee meetings for future action, and compiling their minutes;
4. dealing with the organisation's correspondence and, where necessary, presenting it to the committee;
5. putting into effect committee decisions;
6. keeping the organisation's files, Minute Book and other essential records.

To do all this the secretary should, with the active support of the committee, delegate as much work as possible. The appointment of a Minutes Secretary is a great help, as by freeing the secretary from taking detailed notes of proceedings, it enables him/her to give fuller reports to committee and generally to play a more active and helpful part in its discussions.

One of the 'essential records' of a community organisation with a Community Centre is the Bookings Diary, and the appointment of a Lettings Secretary is highly desirable.

If the community organisation is fortunate enough to have the services of a full or part-time Warden or paid Secretary he/she may carry out some of the tasks which would otherwise fall to the Honorary Secretary. Paid officers may be employed by the community organisation or by another body (usually the Local Education Authority) and, in effect, seconded to work with the community organisation.

If the ground has been properly prepared before the appointment, the policy of both the

employing body and the community organisation will be the same, but, if not, difficulties may arise. The community organisation should retain the right to decide how much of its secretarial work it should ask the paid officer to do and to appoint an Honorary Secretary if it so desires. Obviously, where there is a paid officer undertaking some secretarial work, there needs to be careful agreement between the officers as to the duties each is to perform and the kind of correspondence each will deal with.

2. Community Association Committees

The main committee of a Community Association is usually called 'the General Committee', though it is sometimes known as 'The Community Association Council' or 'The Management Committee'. It is on this committee that all interests are represented - it comprises members elected by the Annual Meeting and appointed by Sections, Affiliated Organisations and the local Statutory Authorities. At meetings of this committee the appointed representatives can therefore give news of their activities, seek the assistance and backing of the Association for some project, or raise matters of general concern to the community. However, the committee's prime function is to determine the Association's policy, and measures should be taken to ensure that it is free to do so. The constitution empowers the General Committee to appoint sub-committees, and in busy Associations a small Executive Committee is usually elected to run the day-to-day affairs of the Association. When an Executive Committee is appointed, it will have to meet regularly (probably once a month), but it then may be possible for the General Committee to meet less frequently (e.g. at quarterly intervals). Information Sheet No. 2 *Model Standing Orders for Community Associations*, contains a suggested Standing Order setting out the duties and composition of a Community Association Executive Committee. Where an Executive Committee is appointed,

the officers and representatives of Sections and Affiliated Organisations must feel free to approach it and ask it to consider matters of concern to their particular group or interest. In this, as in so much of the Association's work, the secretary can be a vital link in ensuring effective communication - he/she should know, and be known to, the officers and representatives of all Sections and Affiliated Groups, and 'look in' on them from time to time to afford them an opportunity of raising any problems, either formally or informally.

If the Association is functioning without an Executive Committee, the examples, which follow, will apply to meetings of its General Committee.

3. Preparing for Meeting

As much thought and energy should be put into the preparation for a meeting as in carrying out the decisions made by it.

The secretary must prepare the business for the meeting and, having done so, consult the Chair, particularly, to decide the order of business. Items dealt with at previous meetings take precedence over new business - important matters should appear as separate items on the agenda, less important ones may be dealt with under 'Matters Arising'. It is useful to place the treasurer's report as early on the agenda as possible, for many decisions are bound up with the state of the organisation's finances. Committees tend to have a set order of business, but if meetings last a long time it may be an advantage to alter the order of other items sometimes, so that different subjects get a chance of being considered near the beginning, when people's minds are fresh.

Preparation of business means not only deciding what ought to be mentioned and/or discussed at the meeting, but also making arrangements for its presentation. Some business may only be reporting, without discussion. Other business may require considerable discussion, and for this the secretary needs to make sure that all the

necessary information will be presented to the meeting, either by him/herself or by someone else.

Having settled the business to be brought before the meeting, and its order, the secretary should put this in the form of an agenda and send a copy to each committee member.

If the committee does not have a fixed date for meetings, the secretary should see that all its members are notified of the date of the meeting in good time. If it is necessary for the agenda to be prepared later, then the first notice should include some reference to any items about which members will need time to take action, make enquiries etc. A combined notice of meeting and agenda will be found on the next page.

Prior to the meeting, the secretary should gather all his/her papers together and place them in the order they are likely to be needed at the meeting. He/she should also try to think of the likely questions which may arise during discussion and make a note of possible answers, or gather together any papers or other information on the subject, even to files of correspondence and previous minutes relating to the matter, or to similar decisions made in the past.

For a meeting with the agenda as given on the following page, the relevant documents might well be:

1. For reference as required: a copy of the Constitution of the Community Association and of any Standing Orders it has adopted.
2. Attendance sheet to be passed round and signed by those present.
3. Spare copies of the agenda.
4. Spare copies of the minutes of the previous meeting.
5. Minute Book.
6. Copy of Treasurer's report.

OLDBURG COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Tel: 1234 15

Mill Street,
Oldburg.

Dear

(date)

Executive Committee Meeting

The next meeting of the committee will be held in the Quiet Room at the Community Centre, Church Road, Oldburg, onday, .../.../19..., commencing at 7.30 p.m. I hope that you will be able to attend.

Yours sincerely,

(signature)

Hon. Secretary

The AGENDA will include:*

1. Minutes of the previous meeting - attached herewith.**
2. Matters arising from the minutes:
 - a. canteen equipment;
 - b. use of school premises;
 - c. footpath repairs.
3. Treasurer's Report.
4. Correspondence:
 - a. 81 'bus service;
 - b. Drama Group -use of stage and halls;***
 - c. Community Matters Annual Meeting & Conference.
5. Grant Aid application.
6. Report of Extensions Sub-Committee.
7. Tenth Anniversary Celebrations.
8. Date and venue of next meeting.
9. Any other business.

* 'will include' permits items of importance that may occur between the despatch of the notice and the holding of the meeting to be included in the final agenda, and avoids the necessity of enumerating all the items in 'Matters Arising' and 'Correspondence', only the most important being indicated. Any additions to the agenda, other than the two just mentioned, should be laid before the committee, after apologies for absence have been given, and accepted for discussion at the meeting.

** Whether the secretary can attach minutes may depend on the time and help available. See also 'After the meeting'.

*** As mentioned earlier, it is assumed that Section reports are presented at General Committee meetings, and that they will notify the Community Association secretary of matters they wish

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| 7. | Correspondence in the order shown, plus any other letters to be dealt with. | should, however, be able to see the officers easily. |
| 8. | Notes of major items to be included in drafting the grant-aid application and copies of applications made in previous years. | Having done this, the secretary is at ease and able to have a friendly word with other members when they arrive. During the meeting the Secretary will often be called upon to introduce the subject under discussion but, as previously suggested, whenever possible, this responsibility should be delegated to another member of the committee. In this way all committee members are encouraged to widen their responsibilities and made to feel that they play an active part in the affairs of the organisation. |
| 9. | Minutes of the Extensions Sub-Committee and any separate correspondence, sketch plans and rough estimates (assuming the scheme to be at this stage). | The Secretary (or Minutes Secretary where one is appointed), should record:
(a) the names of those present and those who send apologies for absence, and (b) all decisions reached by the meeting, usually called Minutes. |
| 10. | Notes of any suggestions for Anniversary events. | Sometimes the main points raised in discussing a subject should also be recorded in the Minutes. This is usually more important in a meeting which is discussing policy than in one concerned with immediate action. No hard and fast line can be laid down beforehand. If in doubt, the Secretary should consult with the Chair or the meeting as a whole. One factor to be considered is whether the Minutes have to be passed on to a higher meeting, for decisions to be confirmed, as from a sub-committee to a main committee. |
| 11. | Notes of items likely to be raised under 'Any other business'. | The procedure for the meeting of which notice was given might well be: |
| 12. | A large notebook or loose paper on a clipboard, for taking the secretary's own notes, and some paper for other committee members to make their own jottings. | 1. Minutes of previous meeting read or, if previously circulated, taken as read.
2. Minutes, when accepted as a true record, signed by Chair****. (N.B: When loose sheets of Minutes {e.g: duplicated Minutes} are used, it may be considered desirable for the Chair |

Wherever appropriate, and after consultation with the Chair, the Secretary should arrange for another member of the committee to introduce the various items to be discussed at the meeting and supply the member with such information, papers, etc., as may be needed for the purpose.

4. At the Meeting

The secretary's arrival at meetings should not be merely punctual but should be *early* to allow time for making sure that the room where the meeting is to be held is in good order: chairs properly arranged, ash-trays available, the room adequately warmed, etc., and to arrange his/her own papers and books in such a manner that he/she has immediate access to them during the meeting. Arranging the chairs properly does *not* mean the committee room should look like a formal board-room - all members

Until the Minutes are accepted and signed the Chair cannot proceed to other business.

to initial or sign each sheet).

3. Brief report made on each item of 'Matters arising', as itemised in the agenda. Opportunity afforded to committee members to raise any other matter(s). Each subject should be dealt with separately, normally in the order of the previous Minutes.
4. Treasurer makes his/her report, including accounts for payment. The bank pass-books, cheque book and any other relevant documents and receipts should be available for inspection.
5. Secretary refers to, or reads where necessary, correspondence sent and received (including dates), dealing with each subject separately. It is not necessary to read every item of correspondence nor every word of every letter presented to the meeting, though care should be exercised in editing to avoid confusion or even misrepresentation.
6. Application for grant for submission to Local Education Authority - treasurer to introduce.
7. Additional accommodation: Extensions Sub-Committee Chair to introduce.
8. Tenth Anniversary Celebrations: Social Secretary to introduce.
9. Any other business - the secretary should use his/her notes to see that any urgent matters which have arisen since the agenda was sent out are brought to the meeting's attention. The item also affords others an opportunity to raise matters not on the agenda, though committee members should be encouraged to inform the secretary of such items in advance so that they may appear on the agenda in the first place.

5. After the Meeting

The secretary (or Minutes Secretary) has to compile the Minutes (dealt with in some detail below) and see that a note of each decision requiring action is sent to the person concerned as soon as possible. Some secretaries send a copy of the Minutes, marked appropriately, to each person who has something to do. When it is not possible to circulate the Minutes quickly after the meeting, the secretary should nevertheless compile the Minute Book copy whilst the meeting's proceedings are fresh in his/her mind. Not only are Minutes drafted within 24 hours of the meeting more likely to be an accurate record but, as they contain, in the clearest form, the instructions of the meeting, they can be used by the secretary as notes for action to be taken in sending letters and reminding others of jobs they have undertaken.

Minutes are not a full report, but a concise record of decisions reached at the meeting to which they refer. They should contain:

1. a list of those present;
2. a record of apologies for absence;
3. the terms of all motions, no matter what happened to them - carried, defeated, amended or withdrawn; and also a record of all rulings made by the Chair;
4. a brief note of each subject, together with the decisions taken.

There are no hard and fast rules as to whether how members voted should be recorded or not, and the practice of organisations varies. In general, Minutes recording decisions which do not involve finance need not show the names of Mover and Seconder, nor the way members voted, unless specifically requested. Motions involving finance should carry the names of Mover and Seconder, and the number voting for and against. Any member of the committee has, however, the right to have recorded how he or she voted on

a particular item. Minutes should be numbered consecutively and entered under subject matter in an index. With this in mind, it is better for Minutes referring to 'Matters Arising' to be recorded separately, as in the case of 'Canteen Equipment' and 'Use of School Premises' in the example below. Minute Books may sometimes be purchased complete with index. The systematic entry of Minutes in an index makes for easy reference on future occasions. Duplicated or typed Minutes should be pasted into the Minutes Book.

Examples of Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting already referred to might be:

Min. 173 CANTEEN EQUIPMENT - reported that crockery to the value of £74.55 had been purchased as authorised by Minute 167. *NOTED*

Min. 174 USE OF SCHOOL PREMISES - Reported that no reply had yet been received to our letter addressed to the Director of Education regarding the use of school premises on Sundays. *NOTED AND AGREED*: that the matter be kept under review.

Min. 176 TREASURER'S REPORT & STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS -Mr. Summer, the Treasurer, reported as follows:

<i>General Account</i>			
Cash at Bank at 30.6.84.		£1,235.84	
Cash in Hand at 30.6.84.		£ 3.24	
		£1,239.08	
<i>Accounts for Payment</i>			
A. Winter (Stationery)	£ 26.83		
Gas Board	£212.67		
Electricity Board	£ 72.54		
G. Spring (Provisions)	£ 21.49		
	£313.53	£313.53	

Balance after payment of accounts £925.55

Extensions Fund

Cash at Bank (Deposit Account) 1.6.84. £3,987.60

REPORT ADOPTED AND ACCOUNTS PASSED FOR PAYMENT

Min. 182 10th ANNIVERSARY

CELEBRATIONS - Mr. Robinson, Secretary of the Celebrations Sub-Committee, outlined its proposals. It was suggested that a series of 'spotlight' evenings should be held, focusing attention on the various activities of the Association, its Sections and Affiliated Organisations. Ms. Browning proposed, Mr. Summer seconded, and it was *resolved* (nem. con.)^{*****} that the proposals be approved in principle, and the Sub-Committee authorised to spend up to £250 for the purpose.

Having completed the Minutes, the Secretary may have to devise an order of priority for matters requiring attention. Letters should be concise and free from jargon, and a copy kept of all but the most trivial communications. If the secretary has undertaken to 'see' somebody about a certain item, care should be taken not to let the matter drift. If the person to be seen proves not easily available, it is better to write suggesting a definite appointment.

Speedy attention should be given to all correspondence arising out of the meeting, for there are probably only four weeks between one meeting and the next. It is as well to remember that a week or more usually elapses between writing a letter and receiving a reply, so the longer the Secretary delays writing, the less likely he/she is to have an answer in time for the next meeting. It is all too easy to end up with a last minute rush which only achieves half the progress desired.

***** means 'nobody against' and is often used when some committee members abstain from voting. 'Unanimously' means all for (or against) a motion.

6. Between Meetings

The Secretary will receive letters and personal enquiries which should be dealt with promptly and courteously. If necessary, the enquirer should be advised that the matter will require a committee decision and when that decision will be made.

Much routine correspondence can and should be dealt with between meetings. Other matters arise which are not so simple but which obviously cannot wait for the next meeting of the committee. In such circumstances most committees authorise the secretary to act in consultation with the other officers, though such action must be reported to the next committee meeting.

A simple system of filing letters received and copies of letters sent is necessary, whilst care of essential documents such as Constitutions, Trust Deeds, Insurance Policies and the like is vital.

The Secretary's reward for the conscientious carrying out of his/her duties the ever-increasing reputation of the community organisation and the confidence of colleagues. For its part, the organisation must be prepared to give the Secretary all the material aid it can by supplying him/her with the necessary books and files, a typewriter/word processor and copying facilities. A Secretary cannot carry out his/her job satisfactorily without the proper tools.

7. General Meetings of the Organisation

The procedure for calling the Annual General Meeting and details of the business which must be conducted there will be specified in the organisation's Constitution and Standing Orders. The same applies to other General Meetings. Some community organisations have regular General Meetings to avoid any danger of the committee and general membership getting out of touch with each other; all make constitutional provision for Special General Meetings which may either

be called by the organisation's officers or committee (particularly when it wishes to consult the general membership about an important new development) or by a number of individual members of the organisation requesting a Special Meeting. The duties of the Secretary at such meetings are really quite similar to those at Committee Meetings, probably the most important exception is that at AGMs it is the Chair who normally presents the report of the work undertaken by the committee in the past year.

It is essential that at General Meetings when the committee is, as it were, 'on show' before the membership, the procedures of the organisation are above reproach. Guidelines for the conduct of General Meetings, and a specimen agenda for an Annual General Meeting, will be found in Information Sheet No. 68, 'Annual and other General Meetings'. See also: Community Matters Information Sheet No. 18, 'Community Association Committees and Procedure'.