

## Roles of a secretary

Most organisations have a secretary, either elected at the Annual General Meeting or appointed from amongst the members of the committee. They have a very important role in making sure that the committee runs smoothly and has the information it needs to run the organisation.

As secretary, you do not need to do everything yourself. Some jobs can be shared with other committee members and some groups may also have a membership secretary, minute secretary, publicity officer and so on to spread the work.

If your organisation has paid staff they can help with some of the work but they cannot take on the role of secretary. This is an unpaid role and you must be a full, voting member of the committee to take it on.

The secretary is sometimes known as the honorary, hon or committee secretary. These all mean the same thing.

There is however a different job of Company Secretary who has very a specific role in a charitable company. See VODA information sheet 1.3 *Becoming a charitable company* for more information on this.

The job of secretary includes

### Planning and supporting meetings

- Prepare the agenda for the next committee meeting. The agenda includes a list of the main items to be discussed as well as any follow up from previous meetings. You need to discuss it with the chairperson and other members to make sure that all their items are included.
- Arrange the meeting room, refreshments and any equipment you may need. Make sure the room is accessible to all your committee members.
- Send out the details for the meeting (date, time and place), the agenda, notes from the last meeting and any other information or supporting papers to all committee members. Ask if any of the members would like the papers in another format, eg larger print or on a computer disc.
- If you have a constitution, check how many committee members have to be there to make a decision (the quorum). Make sure that you have a quorum for each meeting.
- Note any apologies from people who can't attend the meeting – people should contact you in advance.
- The secretary is also responsible for making sure that all the members of the organisation know about the Annual General Meeting and any Special or Extraordinary Meetings and are sent all the right information.

## Minutes

Secretaries usually take the minutes of committee meetings. These are an important record of the work of the organisation.

You will develop your own style of minute taking but you should

- take notes during the meeting and write them up as minutes later. Keep your notes until the next meeting in case there are any questions
- record all the decisions that are made. If you are unclear or feel something is important to get right, ask the meeting to agree the wording before moving on
- always minute any action to be taken, the name of the person who'll be doing it and any deadline for doing it
- keep the minutes short and to the point
- circulate minutes before the meeting, both as a record and as a reminder, especially for people who agreed to do things
- keep the minutes together in one place eg a minute book or ring binder and take them to meetings with you so they can be referred to if necessary
- have the minutes of the last meeting agreed (or amended) by the committee and have a copy signed by the chairperson for your records
- remind people of anything that they have agreed to do. Make sure that members know about any tasks given to them at a meeting they didn't attend

## Keeping records and dealing with correspondence

- keep an up to date contact list for committee members
- keep an up to date list of the group's members and how to contact them. You may have a separate membership secretary to do this. You should check if you need to be registered under the Data Protection Act
- open and deal with any incoming mail on behalf of the organisation. Mail that you can't deal with should be passed onto the right person or take it to the next committee meeting
- make sure that formal and legal letters such as insurance renewals, returns to the Charity Commission, grant letters and so on are dealt with in the time limits
- write letters on behalf of the organisation, keep copies and let people read them if they wish at the committee meetings
- look after the organisation's records including copies of past minutes, letters to and from the organisation, the original of the constitution and any reports

## Other tasks

- Annual report – make sure that the organisation produces an annual report giving details of its work over the year and that copies are sent out to the right people
- Signing cheques - most organisations need cheques to be signed by two out of three or four named people; the secretary is usually one of these

- Staffing - take part in any recruitment, disciplinary or grievance and complaint panels as needed

## Agendas

The agenda sets out what will be talked about at a meeting. A formal meeting must have an agenda that is sent to everyone before the meeting.

### What does an agenda do?

An agenda

- tells people what will be discussed so they can prepare
- gives people a reminder during the meeting, so nothing is forgotten

- helps manage the timing of the meeting
- helps the secretary take notes during the meeting and write them up afterwards

### What should an agenda include?

All agendas should include (see sample agenda)

- the name of the organisation
- the name of the meeting or group
- the date, time (start and approx finish) and venue of the meeting

## Example Community Group

### Management committee meeting Monday 28 February 2008 1.30-3.30pm Example Community Group Centre, Green Room

Agenda item	Purpose	Led by	Time
1. <b>Apologies for absence</b>	Record		2mins
2. <b>Minutes of the last meeting</b> held on 28 January 2008	Approve	Chair	5mins
3. <b>Matters arising</b>	Information		10mins
4. <b>Correspondence</b> Information received from local council about new grant application process	Information	Secretary	5mins
5. <b>Finance</b> Budget 2008 – 2009	Approve	Treasurer	20mins
6. <b>Staff report – training</b> Report of training service	Information	Trainer	15mins
7. <b>Summer events</b> Programme for summer 2008	Discussion	Chair	20mins
8. <b>New youth project</b> Proposal to fundraise for new project to support local young people	Decision	Chair	30mins
9. <b>Any other business</b>			
10. <b>Date and time of next meeting</b>			

- numbered agenda items, including a subject line and brief description of the item
- who is leading on each agenda item
- an approximate time for how long each agenda item will take to go through
- the purpose of each item
  - for information only eg staff changes
  - to be discussed eg a new lieu time policy
  - to make a decision on eg use of office space
  - to be approved by the meeting eg decisions made in a sub committee
  - to be recorded eg apologies and date, time and venue of next meeting

Items for discussion and approval and usually more important so more time will be needed for them

### Putting items on the agenda

The secretary should set up an easy and fair way for everyone to put items on the agenda. People should contact the secretary a specified time before the meeting with items for the agenda. They should tell you what the item is, how long it will take, the purpose of the item and a brief description.

### AOB – any other business

Any other business should only be used in a genuine emergency for an item that came up after the agenda was put together. Committee members should tell you or the chair before the meeting starts so you can decide whether it is important enough to include in the main part of the agenda. This will try to help prevent important items being

discussed in a rush at the end of the meeting.

### Training

VODA runs a range of training for committees and committee members through its regular Training programme.

For more information contact

① **North Tyneside VODA**  
**Voice 0191 200 8555**  
**bookings@voda.org.uk**

### For more information

*The minute takers handbook* by Lee Comer and Paul Ticher

*So, you're on a committee now...a guide for anyone involved in the work of a committee* by Michael Kindred and Malcolm Goldsmith

Both available from North Tyneside VODA's library

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