



Information Note

Secretary's Training Pack

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SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

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Introduction

The role of the secretary within a group is crucial to the well running of the organisation. The secretary's job is to keep tenants and residents informed so that they feel involved and are able to join in what the group does. This training pack sets out the key duties of the secretary and provides some practical examples to assist you carry out your tasks. This pack will assist in combating the common fears described below.

Common Fears

- ◆ Too much responsibility
- ◆ Not confident in writing skills
- ◆ Not having enough experience
- ◆ Taking up too much time
- ◆ Not getting support
- ◆ Any others, you can think of?

The role of the secretary

A good secretary must be reliable and efficient. He/she will pay strict attention to matters of detail and ensure incoming letters obtain prompt replies.

It is important that the secretary's name, address and telephone number are well publicised to landlords and organisations that want to make contact with the committee.

Before the meeting:

- ◆ Arrangements and an agenda for the meeting should be prepared in consultation with the chairperson
- ◆ A suitable venue for the meeting should be arranged and speaker arranged if necessary
- ◆ A notice of the meeting and agenda should be sent to all committee members so that they will receive them at least a week before the meeting is arranged. Agendas should be sent out for all meetings even if they are held at the same time and place each week or month
- ◆ The secretary must keep a complete, approved and signed up to date set of minutes
- ◆ Ensure that all correspondence has been dealt with, and when necessary, obtain replies for the next meeting
- ◆ Keep an accurate filing system

At the meeting:

- ◆ Keep a record of everyone attending the meeting or collect his or her signatures in an attendance book. Apologies for absences should also be recorded
- ◆ Ensure that a quorum is present before any business is done (the number of committee members needed to hold a meeting as set out in your constitution)
- ◆ Read the minutes of the previous meeting (unless already sent out) and obtain the chairperson's signature for the official copy
- ◆ Read out all correspondence received and report any action taken since last meeting
- ◆ Ensure that the chairperson is supplied with all the necessary papers and information relevant to the meeting

The Secretary should have:

- ◆ A diary
- ◆ Necessary paperwork for the meeting, agenda, minutes, reports
- ◆ Notebook / Pen
- ◆ Folder to keep all your paperwork
- ◆ Headed notepaper
- ◆ Stamps / Envelopes
- ◆ Computer or typewriter
- ◆ A dictionary

Setting out a letter

Setting out a letter neatly and attractively is very important. A well-presented letter will show the outside world that the group is well organised, capable and on the ball. On the other hand, busy professionals will not take the time to read a badly laid-out letter that is confusing. It also gives a bad impression of the group.

Most groups design their own headed notepaper. This should have the name of the group and the name and address of the secretary. Including your telephone or email address is optional; however it could assist in a more prompt reply.

Example of Headed Notepaper

Anytown Tenants & Residents Association
Secy: Sam Bell, 4 Seafield Avenue, Perth PA1 5VX
Tel: 01738 362336
(If you have one you can insert your own logo here)

The next page shows a common layout of a letter that you could use. Note the spacing in the letter. It shows you how many blank lines to leave between letter items. The paragraph sign (¶) is only used to illustrate a space, it will not show up in a letter. (The space at the top of the letter is to ensure that you leave enough space for the headed notepaper)

Setting out a letter

¶
¶
¶
¶

1st October 2005

¶

Ms Sally Gordon MSP
Parliamentary Advice Centre
32 Green Street
Kilmarnock
KA1 2DD

¶

¶

¶

Dear Ms Gordon

¶

Reference: Invitation to Public Meeting

¶

As you are aware the tenants and residents of Anytown recently set up a Tenants & Residents Association to work with the Council and other agencies to improve our area and to prevent it from going further down hill.

¶

We have had a few committee meetings and are now holding our first public meeting on Thursday, 18th November 2005 at 7pm in the Council Chambers, Anytown.

¶

We would like to invite you to attend this meeting in your capacity as our local MSP. Please can you let us know if you are available to attend this meeting?

¶

Thank you

¶

Yours sincerely

¶

¶

¶

¶

Sam Bell
Secretary Anytown Tenants & Residents Association

¶

cc Councillor Bill Jones

Minute Secretary

To lighten the duties of the secretary some groups consider dividing the duties and having a minute secretary.

The minute secretary should:

- ◆ Compile minutes of meetings, recording decisions and action to be taken and by whom.
- ◆ Ensure minutes are available to all committee members prior to or at committee meetings
- ◆ Retain copies of all minutes in adequate file for future reference.

The Minute Secretary should also have:

- ◆ A diary
- ◆ Necessary paperwork for the meeting, agenda, minutes, reports
- ◆ Notebook / Pen
- ◆ Folder to keep all your paperwork
- ◆ Access to a Computer or typewriter

The Minutes

The minutes are an essential report of the meeting. A method is needed to ensure the minute is a correct record. A group's record is its memory. Minutes can avoid going over the same ground twice, they can be used to settle many disputes; guard against people leaving with everything stored up in their heads; and they should be an important aid to introducing new members to the group's work. Minutes should be circulated to all members before the meeting.

What things should the minutes actually record:

- ◆ Who was present, when and where
- ◆ Minutes should follow the agenda items
- ◆ Be short, clear, easy to read and understand
- ◆ Include all decisions made and if necessary record the discussion leading to that decision
- ◆ Record monthly financial reports and any financial decisions made at the meetings
- ◆ Details of incoming correspondence and decisions about replies

Tips:

- ◆ It is a good idea to include an action column stating who is responsible for carrying out decisions made.
- ◆ Write up minutes, as soon after meetings as possible while your memory is still fresh about what happened at the meeting.
- ◆ Share the task. Have a correspondence secretary and a minute secretary.

Example of Minutes:

MINUTES OF THE ANYTOWN TENANTS ASSOCIATION MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 DECEMBER 1998 AT 7.00 PM IN CENTRAL HALLS, ANYTOWN

1. Present: Joan Smith (chair) Sam Bell (minutes) Tony Jones, Patricia Thomson, Jean Millar, Ray Hamilton, John Smith, Susan Ramsay
2. Apologies: Ted Ray, Alicia Kemp
3. Minutes of previous meeting
The minutes of the meeting on 9 November 1998 were agreed as accurate.
4. Matters a rising
Sam asked for an update on the letting initiative. This will be discussed under item 7 of the agenda.
5. Correspondence
 - 1) Letter received from Housing Department inviting group to annual rent setting meeting. Agreed Joan will attend meeting.
 - 2) Letter received from Community Council. No action required.
6. Treasurer's Report
Patricia tabled the financial statement for the month ending 30 November 1998. The Association has £265.00 in the bank account.
The meeting agreed train fares for the Chairperson and Secretary to attend the TIS Annual General Meeting. Receipts to be forwarded to the treasurer.
7. Lettings Initiative
Tony reported on the outcome of the meeting with the housing manager and the local councillor on the development of a local lettings initiative for our area. A draft of the procedures was circulated to all committee members for discussion at the next meeting.
A further meeting will be arranged with the Council when committee members have discussed the proposals. Proposals circulated to all members.
ACTION: All
8. Training
John reported that the dates for the next committee skills training had been fixed for the weekend 13/14 February. Tony, John and Susan will attend the training.
Patricia reminded the meeting that a budget of £100 has been fixed for this training course and that this must not be exceeded given the current financial situation. John offered to produce a costing for this training course for the next meeting to see if any costs could be cut.
ACTION: JOHN
9. Any other business
Jean informed the meeting of the dates for next Gala Week, which has now been fixed for 6-12 March 1999. The committee agreed to have a stall at the gala day to get publicity for the work of the tenants association.
ACTION ALL
10. Date of next meeting: The next meeting will be held at 7.00 p.m. on Wednesday 13 January 1999 in Central Halls, Anytown

Sample Agenda Format

1. **Present** – All people attending meeting, including invited guests etc
2. **Apologies** – all people putting in apologies for not attending this meeting
3. **Minute of previous meeting** – minutes approved and seconded by anyone who attended that meeting, any corrections to the minute
4. **Matters Arising from the Minutes** – updates on any items in the previous minutes. If these items are continuing on the agenda for the meeting in hand they can be dealt with under the appropriate agenda item
5. **Correspondence** – summary by the secretary of all information received since the previous meeting, details of any letters / information sent out by the group since the previous meeting, if a decision has to be taken by the group regarding information received or sent out, it can be done at this point in the meeting or dealt with under AOCB
6. **Financial Report** – a report given to all persons present by the treasurer on the current financial position of the organisation. It is recommended that this is given in written format and backed up with a verbal report from the treasurer. It is important that all members of the organisation are fully aware of the financial dealings of the organisation. Compiling financial statements for each meeting also assists the treasurer keep up to date and helps when doing the yearly report for the auditor and AGM.
7. **Other agenda items** – the next few items should have been previously agreed by the chairperson and secretary and include items that other members request to be discussed.
8. **Any Other Competent Business** – time should be allocated at the end of the meeting to discuss any other relevant items. It will assist in the smooth running of the meeting if the chairperson asks members if they have any other items at the beginning of the meeting, so that they can be added to the end of the agenda. If there are too many to cover in the time allocated to the meeting, a decision should be taken on which items to defer to the agenda of the next meeting.
9. **Date / Time / Place of next meeting** – this information should be clearly identified on the bottom of the minutes. It is also good practice to ensure that the minutes are sent to everyone before the next meeting. If this is not possible then it is essential that all members are aware of the date/ time / place of next meeting therefore it may be useful to send out a “calling notice” with this information. This will ensure that any “absentees” as well as those in attendance will have the details of the next meeting.

Tenants Information Service

This Information Note was produced by TIS. We are a national organisation providing independent advice, support and training to tenants throughout Scotland. We welcome membership from tenants & residents associations, landlords and individual members.

This Information Note is only one of many guides produced by TIS on topics of interest to tenants.

Contact us for more information.

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