

## **South Eastern Education and Library Board**

### **GUIDELINES ON RECORDING MINUTES FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000**

#### **Introduction**

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 all corporate records created by the Board and its staff can be accessed by any individual. While there are exemptions which can be applied in certain circumstances to protect information from disclosure, in general, information will be accessible.

The Board has a number of committees and sub-committees where minutes of meetings are recorded. These formal meetings of the Board, at which Board business is transacted and decisions reached, should be properly documented. There already exists a template for the presentation of these minutes however no guidelines for officers on how minutes should be taken currently exist.

There are also a high number of management, staff and subject specific meetings that take place throughout the Board all of which will be accessible to the general public come 1 January 2005.

The following advice has been prepared to help develop a consistent approach to minute taking and to provide some guidance to staff who record minutes. This advice covers standard presentation for minutes but also explains how minutes should be written.

#### **Definition**

Minutes may be defined as a written record of the business transacted at a meeting.

#### **Good practice in minute taking includes the following:**

#### **Contents**

- Heading;
  - name of meeting
  - kind of meeting (where relevant)
  - location, day, date and start time of meeting
- Names of those present
  - list those present and identify the Chairman
  - list those "in attendance" i.e. those who are there by invitation and not as members
  - list those who send apologies
- Agreement/approval of minutes of the previous meeting
- Matters arising
- Items discussed as per agreed agenda along with any decision(s) reached for each item as well as reasons for the decision being taken.
- Details of any documents or papers related to items on the agenda should be listed against the relevant item on the agenda. Where possible these documents would be circulated in advance of the meeting to allow the members an opportunity to consider them.
- Correspondence
- Presentation of reports that are not part of the listed agenda e.g. reports or documentation circulated for information purposes
- AOB
- Date of next meeting
- If there was no further business state this and the time the meeting concluded.
- Record when people entered/left meeting and those who are present to present special item(s)

### *Guidelines on Recording Minutes*

- The secretary (or minute taker) should retain any drafts of the minutes and ensure that when amendments or alterations are made, the most up to date version of the minutes are circulated to members.
- Chairman's signature (where applicable): Following approval of minutes at a subsequent meeting they should be signed and dated by the Chairman. (All previous drafts can then be destroyed provided they are not currently subject to an FOI request).

### **Recording Minutes of Meetings**

When recording minutes the practice of naming members who attend/do not attend, report on matters arising, present reports, etc. should continue with the following key principles in mind

- Minutes should be accurate, grammatically correct and concise
- Minutes should be written in plain, easily understood language
- Minutes should be consistent in their form and content
- Minutes should concentrate on the decisions taken

### ***However the following should be considered when items are being discussed:***

- Do not record every discussion verbatim. The minutes you will prepare from your notes are a summary and not a verbatim report of the discussions which took place.
- When recording an item, discussion should be recorded in a manner that gives a precise account of the proceedings of the meeting.
- Individual contributions during general discussions at a meeting should only be attributed when an individual expressly requests it and the meeting agrees that the contribution should form part of the minutes.
- It is advisable to record all the necessary information and no more; i.e. the relevant business considered, facts noted, the decision taken and its rationale.
- Record points, not people. The minute-taker's focus is on the ideas, arguments and facts being presented not on the individuals present. Where there is doubt about what to record, the Chairman of the meeting should be consulted.
- It is essential to record the decision made and where applicable the person who has responsibility for carrying out that decision. The minutes ideally should record the discussion in such a way that a reader can understand the reasoning behind the decision made **by that committee** and where alternatives were suggested why these were regarded as unsuitable by the members.
- Your recorded notes should focus on points made for and against a proposal or idea and the reasons to support these points.
- Minutes should be written so that they are complete, and in sufficient detail to enable a person who was not present at the meeting to fully understand what business was transacted.
- Minutes should be retained in accordance with good record keeping practice in a safe environment.
- Final versions of documents and reports considered at meetings should be retained with the minutes when it is necessary to have access to them in order to understand the minutes.
- Arrangements should be in place to allow the efficient transfer of the formal minutes to a new staff member or new secretary of the Committee/Authority;
- Initial drafts of minutes should not normally be retained.
- Drafts should only be kept if the development of a decision was the result of discussions at a meeting. These drafts may be accessible under the FOI Act 2000.

### ***The role of the Chairman***

To ensure that an accurate and comprehensive record of a meeting is made, the Chairman of the meeting has a responsibility to assist the officer taking the minutes by

- Agreeing the items to be included on the agenda.
- Following agenda items in sequence and informing the minute taker of any departures from the agreed agenda.
- Summarise specific points, decisions or courses of action agreed for each specific agenda item before moving on to the next item.
- Where necessary, and in agreement with those present, providing specific guidance to the minute taker on what to record for a particular agenda item where lengthy discussion has occurred or a complex issue has been discussed.
- Taking time to review the minutes when they are drafted.

### ***All committee members should be advised:***

- Unless specifically requested, opinions and statements will not be attributed to individuals as it is the responsibility of the committee to make all recommendations/decisions.
- Where lengthy general discussion occurs it is more appropriate to highlight the significant points made (without attribution) unless specifically relevant.
- That access may be given to all minutes and associated documents under the Freedom of Information Acts 2000. Certain information is protected from disclosure under the various exemptions of the Act.