

More about meetings...

Agenda

The agenda sets out the order of business for the meeting. It should be sent out with the notice of meeting. Many councils use the agenda as the notice of the meeting, and it must be publicly available two clear working days before the meeting to which it refers.

Agendas must be available publicly at a meeting, along with copies of all reports and other papers to be discussed in open meeting, so that people can follow what is happening.

Quorum

The quorum is the minimum number of councillors that must be present before a meeting can conduct business. A meeting quorum consists of more than half the councillors currently holding office. There must be a majority of non DE&T members present. Declaration of a conflict of interest does not destroy a quorum.

Note: If the council has a number of casual vacancies, the quorum is more than half the remaining council members.

Apologies

Only apologies received from those who cannot be present must be recorded. An apology does not meet the requirement of "prior leave". Councillors who miss three consecutive meetings without prior leave of the council cease to be members and a casual vacancy occurs. To obtain prior leave, a councillor needs to request leave for however long the need is, at a council meeting, and the council must approve it.

Minutes

The minutes are the written record of the business conducted at the meeting. Minutes of the previous meeting are usually reviewed and confirmed at the beginning of each meeting. Any councillor who was at the previous meeting can move the appropriate motion "That the Minutes are a true and accurate record of the meeting".

Once that motion is carried the chairperson should sign and date the record copy of the Minutes.

Minutes should be brief, factual, and accurate. It is not necessary to record everything said by everyone during a meeting. At most, a couple of sentences about the general nature of the discussion will be sufficient. What the minutes must contain are the facts: which councillors were present and late arrivals or early departures. It is most important the minutes contain what motions were put forward, who moved them, who seconded them. Any amendments to the motion, and what happened to those amendments, and in the end, what happened to the motion.

In addition, the minutes should record at the end, when and where the next council meeting will be held. If the public has been excluded from any part of the meeting, the minutes for that part of the meeting are confidential. To identify them it is useful to print them on a different coloured paper and note them as 'Confidential'. They can either be circulated with council papers or at the next meeting for confirmation. In some cases, councils choose to number and collect each copy after confirmation so all copies can be destroyed. The originals should be filed in a separate folder in a secure place.

Note, that minutes are required to be retained indefinitely. For advice about minutes of meetings when the public is excluded, refer to the "In committee" part of this article.

Matters arising from previous minutes

Matters arising are matters which were nominated for action at the previous meeting and recorded in the minutes. Dealing with arising matters means that a check is kept on whether all tasks have been carried out from the previous meeting.

Correspondence

Council should have access to all correspondence. Correspondence that the council needs to take some action on should generally be copied to all councillors before the meeting and discussed either under general business or in the relevant section of the meeting. Other correspondence may be listed and tabled so board members can look at it if they wish. It is important that any letter addressed to the president of the council is seen by the whole council.

Letters of complaint should be tabled at one council meeting and only considered once relevant reports in response to the complaint have also been received. This usually would be the following meeting or, in some cases, the council may delegate action to a special committee.

Motion

A motion is a formal proposal for consideration. It is moved by the person proposing it and seconded by another person. It is then open for discussion, after which a decision is made by way of a vote. When a motion is accepted it is described as being carried and should then be referred to as a resolution.

Amendment

Motions can be amended during discussion. The amendment must be moved and seconded before it is discussed and voted on.

Moving from the chair

The chair can put a motion before the meeting. When moved from the chair, a motion does not require seconding.

Points of order

Points of order are questions directed to the chair which require an answer or a ruling. They are not open to debate and usually relate to the rules for the running of a meeting.

Lying on the table

When a matter cannot be resolved, or when further information is necessary before a decision can be made, the matter can be left unresolved for future discussion.

Tabling documents

When written information is used in support of a discussion, it should be tabled so that it can be examined by those present. It then forms part of the official record.

In committee

Although common usage describes a meeting going private as 'going into committee', the correct terminology is "that the public is excluded". Therefore, some matters are better described as being discussed in the public-excluded section of the meeting.

Members of the public, including the media, are excluded from the meeting when it moves into committee, unless specially invited to stay. The motion to allow that must be passed while the meeting is still open to the public. The publicly excluded part of the meeting is most often used to discuss personnel or financially sensitive issues.

A record of what happened while the public is excluded must be kept. The form of these minutes should be identical to those kept while the meeting is open to the public. It is suggested that these minutes be printed on a different coloured paper and be pasted into a separate minute book when they have been approved and signed off.

These minutes are not for general public viewing.

All minutes are available to all councillors, both current and future, regardless of whether the councillor was actually present at the meeting. The exception is where the reason the trustee was not present was because the matter under discussion concerned him or her.

It must be stressed that discussions held when the public are excluded are confidential to the council. Revealing details to members of the general public could potentially render the council liable to consequential legal action. If a member of the council, acting as an individual, releases information, he or she may be held personally liable for any damages the council may suffer.

The council should ensure that any advisers they may consult on matters being dealt with in committee are made very aware that the matter is confidential and is being dealt within committee by the council.

Attendance of the general public

Council meetings are meetings held in public, they are not public meetings. Members of the school staff are entitled to attend council and council committee meetings as members of the public. They have the same rights and are subject to the same restrictions as any other members of the public.

In respect of meetings of the school council or committees of council, members of the public are:

- entitled to know in advance when and where meetings are to be held
- entitled to copy of the agenda prior to the meeting. (This includes copies of all written reports ; and other documents that are relevant to matters to be discussed in open meeting)
- entitled to attend the meeting to watch and listen
- entitled to take notes
- not entitled to take part in the meeting by word or action (the Council can resolve to grant a member of the public speaking rights.)

- required to leave the meeting if the chairperson believes, on reasonable grounds, that the member of the public's behaviour is likely to prejudice the orderly conduct of the meeting.
- **not** entitled to communicate with school councillors during the meeting unless the councillor leaves the meeting (and preferably the room to cause the minimum disruption to the meeting)
- **required** to leave the meeting room when the meeting goes "in committee"; and . entitled to return to the room when the meeting comes "out of committee"

Any board of trustees wanting further clarification or advice on any of the above should contact ASCIV.