



HOME STUDY FOR TENANTS Secretary Skills

Workbook

AIM:

The aim of this course is to assist you to identify the skills required to be an effective secretary, from preparing for a meeting, duties at the meeting, setting out a letter and taking minutes.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS WORKBOOK:

- ❖ The roles and responsibilities of the secretary
- ❖ How to plan and prepare for a meeting
- ❖ How to take minutes
- ❖ How to set out a letter

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

Go through it at your own pace. Stop for a break whenever you want or at times suggested in the workbook - whichever suits you best. When you start up again, look back at the section you had just completed.

As you go through the workbook you are asked to carry out tasks.

Do not look ahead in the workbook for answers. These are given in the correct place in the workbook. You will come to them at the correct stage.

If you get stuck on something, try the following:

- ❖ Leave aside and try again later
- ❖ Turn back pages in the workbook looking for clues and ideas
- ❖ Phone TIS for assistance - use our free phone number 0800 731 3772 or reverse the charges

Hello and welcome to this Secretary Skills Workbook. It is hoped that you find the workbook informative, enjoyable and easy to use. Take your time and carry out the tasks at your own pace, but remember to follow the order of the book and don't miss sections or jump ahead to others too soon.

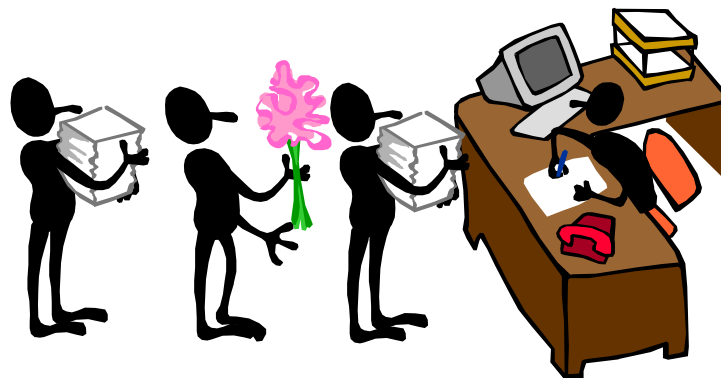
Have Fun and Good Luck!

INTRODUCTION

Many groups often find it difficult to persuade one of its members to take on the role of secretary. This may be because we think that we need to be able to "take shorthand" or that we think our letter writing skills aren't that great or we think that being the groups' secretary will be like having a "full time job" and we don't have the time. But don't worry this workbook will provide you with the basics on how to be an effective secretary for your association, without making it too much hard work.

The secretary is an important role within any organisation - but you do not need to be a trained administration officer - you just a good system, be able to communicate and have a good working relation ship with others on your committee.

All groups need a good secretary - someone who will make sure that minutes are taken and distributed to members, someone who can communicate with others and keep people informed so they feel involved and are able to join in and keep track of what's being going on with the group - that person could be you. Maybe it already is you!

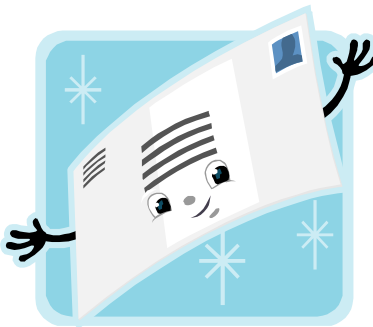


Activity 1 - Responsibilities of a Secretary

What do you think are the responsibilities of a secretary?

Note this in the space provided below

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.



Activity 2 - What are you afraid of?

For some people being a secretary would be the last thing they would want to do. The very idea of it fills them with **terror**. But what exactly is it that we are afraid of?

List 5 things that would make you afraid of becoming a secretary or if you are already a secretary what concerns you most in this role?
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.



The key responsibilities of a secretary are:

The 3 P's....

Preparation and Paperwork

- **Produce** - a draft of the minutes of each meeting as soon as possible after it while discussions are still fresh
- **Check** - the draft minutes with the chairperson and finalise
- **Circulate** - the minutes to the members in good time for the next meeting, including members who were not able to attend the last meeting
- **Include** - any papers discussed at the last meeting to members who were unable to attend
- **File** - keep a copy of all minutes and supplementary papers as a record of your meetings
- **Agree** - the agenda for the next meeting with the chairperson and circulate in good time to all members
- **Confirm** - the date, time and venue of the next meeting (it is your responsibility to book the venue)
- **Bring** - to the chairperson's attention any correspondence that has been received and that should be discussed at the next meeting
- **Clarify** - with the chairperson, how much information should be minuted, e.g. every point that is made in a discussion (usually not necessary) or jus the general thrust of the discussion

Participation

- **Ensure** - you note all those attending the meeting and any apologies received. If you have guests at your meeting, note their names and which organisation they are from
- **Obtain clarification** - from the chairperson when decisions are made so that they are accurately minuted
- **Note** - who is responsible for any action to be taken as a result of the discussions at the meeting and any timescale for the action
- **Contribute** - your views on any matter under discussion at the meeting
- **Note** - any topics to be carried forward and to appear on the next agenda
- **Ensure** - you have a note of the time, date and venue for the next meeting



Some of the fears people may have about being a secretary are as follows: -

- ❖ Too much responsibility
- ❖ Lack of confidence in own ability or writing skills
- ❖ Thinking you don't have enough experience
- ❖ Taking up too much time
- ❖ Not getting enough support

POINT TO NOTE

The secretary should keep copies of all approved minutes - you never know when you may need to refer to them

Activity 3 - Tools of the Trade

As in any job, it is important to have the right tools or equipment. Please use the space below to insert what things you think will assist the secretary to carry out the tasks.

Activity 4 - Setting the Agenda

Having an agenda ensures that everyone at the meeting knows what items or topics will be discussed at the meeting. It also assists the chairperson to keep order and make sure that each item / topic is discussed in turn.

Use the space below to draft a sample agenda

It may be a good time to take a break now!



Activity 5 - Minute Taking

1.	Why is it important for groups to take minutes at meetings?
2.	Other than the secretary is there any other office bearer who could take the minutes?
3.	Who should receive copies of the group's minutes?
4.	When should people receive their copy of the minutes?
5.	It is important to record d_c__i__s , who is responsible for the a__t__n and the t_me__a l__ in the minutes. (complete the blanks)
6.	What does AOCB stand for?

Activity 6 - Minute Secretary

Some groups have a minute secretary as well as a general or correspondence secretary.

Please indicate what you think would be the advantages and disadvantages of having a minute secretary?



Advantages	Disadvantages

Activity 7 - A Minute Taking Case Study

The following is an example of a group's minutes, look over them and note in the space provided whether or not any improvements could be made.

Minutes of the meeting of Ashgrove Tenants Association, 29th May.

1. **Present:** Alison, John, Mary, Stephen, David, Ellen
2. **Apologies:** Mark & Stacey
3. **Previous minutes:** The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and signed. Mary told the group that she and Ellen did not receive their copies of the minutes until the day of the meeting.
4. **Finance:** The treasure reported that there is £32.00 in the account and that the group is waiting on a cheque for £100.00 from the landlord. After a lengthy discussion it was agreed to spend £15.00 on booking a table at the community gala so the group can raise some more funds.
5. **Open Meeting:** a heated discussion took place on what the subject of the next open meeting should be. John said it should be about anti-social behaviour, Alison thought it should be about the new allocations policy the landlord wants to introduce and David said it should be about repairs. In the end, Mary's suggestion that the next open meeting should be about the plans for the parkland was agreed.
6. **Matters arising:** Ellen asked if the Landlord had got back to the group about the possibility of using an empty flat for a meeting house for the community.
7. **AOCB:** Mary told the group that she had received a letter from the Community Association asking for help in running the gala and a letter from the landlord about a training course that members could attend.

How do you think these minutes could be improved?

Observations on how the Ashgrove Tenants Association Minutes could be improved!

1. The date of the meeting does not include the year i.e. 2006
2. There is no detail of where the meeting took place
3. Names of people attending or giving apologies should be written in full i.e. surnames - the members may all know each other but anyone else reading these minutes would not know to whom the minutes refers
4. The previous minutes should be approved and seconded by persons who had attended the meeting to which they refer and this should be noted in the new minutes.
5. It is not particularly necessary to note that some persons did not receive their minutes until the day of the meeting. This makes the minutes very descriptive - It would be important to note this if the group is going to make a decision on how to address this in the future. This would therefore be recorded as an action.
6. In section 4 Finance - there are 3 distinct points made. It would be better if these were written as 3 separate bullet points or numbers such as:
 - The treasure reported that there is £32.00 in the account
 - The group is waiting on a cheque for £100.00 from the landlord.
 - It was agreed to spend £15.00 on booking a table at the community gala so the group can raise some more funds.
7. In section 5 Open Meeting - a value judgement is made - "heated discussion" - a question could be raised as to who decided it was a "heated discussion".

It is okay just to record that a discussion took place.
It is not really necessary to say who came up with what ideas - you could just list the options i.e.

"A discussion took place on what the subject of the next open meeting should be. Suggestions were:

 - *anti-social behaviour*

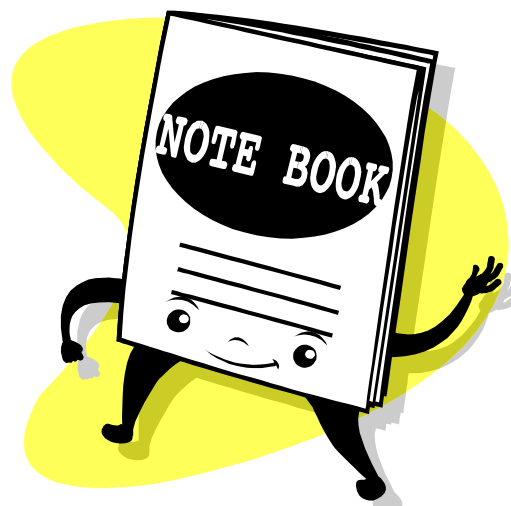
- *the new allocations policy the landlord wants to introduce*
- *repairs*
- *the plans for the parkland*

It was agreed that the topic should be the plans for the parkland."

NOTE

The minutes should then reflect the groups' decision on how this open meeting will be organised and identify who shall carry out what tasks.

8. Section 7 Matters Arising - should have come directly after the previous minutes section as this is something that is outstanding from the previous meeting. There is also no feedback detailed or any note of what action the group will take to deal with this issue. This effectively leaves "loose ends" and members will become increasingly frustrated if this and other issues are left like this, with no real decision or action being taken to address them.
9. Section 8 AOCB - this section should be for items not on the agenda but that need to be discussed by the group. The two items referred to in this minute are actually letters that have been received by the group. They should therefore come under the heading of **Correspondence**. The correspondence section should come before the finance section and any decisions taken or actions identified in relation to the correspondence should be noted in the minutes.



Minute Taking - Points to Note!

- ✚ The minutes are an essential report or record of the meeting.
- ✚ Minutes are the group's memory
- ✚ Minutes should follow the same layout as the agenda
- ✚ All groups or meetings should ensure that an accurate record of what happened, what was discussed, what decisions were made and what actions should be taken next are recorded.
- ✚ Accurate minutes can prevent members going over the same ground time and time again
- ✚ Minutes can be used to settle disputes and guard against people leaving meetings with everything stored up in their heads
- ✚ Going over the minutes of the previous meeting should assist groups to check what action has been taken between meetings and identify if there's anything still outstanding
- ✚ Giving copies of previous minutes to new members, can be an important aid to introducing new members to the work of the group
- ✚ Minutes should be circulated to all members before the meeting
- ✚ Some group's appoint a minute secretary who takes the minutes and a general secretary who deals with all the correspondence, venue booking etc



Setting the Agenda - Points to Note!

Having a pre-planned agenda sent out to all members before the meeting will assist people prepare for the meeting. Everyone will then be clear about what will be discussed at the meeting. Using the following format at all meetings will make it easier for the secretary and chairperson to agree. Points 1-6 and 8 should be standard items, with the main topics for discussion being covered at point 7.

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 Correspondence** - - 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 imperative 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.



Having a minute secretary can lighten the work load of the secretary. The minute secretary would:

- Compile minutes of meetings recording decisions and action to be taken and by whom and within what timescale
- Ensure minutes are available to all committee members prior to meetings (in some case minutes can be distributed at the meeting - but it is good practice to make sure people have the minutes before the meeting)
- Retain copies of all minutes in an adequate file for future reference

If a minute secretary is appointed by the group it is vital that the minute secretary and secretary are in regular communication so that the secretary can make sure all points detailed in the minutes are acted on and where necessary put on the agenda for the next meeting.



Sample minutes

Minutes of Oldtown Tenants & Residents Association Meeting held on Wednesday 15th February 2006 at 7.00pm in Oldtown Community Centre.

1. Present:

Joan Smith (chair), Sam Bell (minutes), Terry O'Neil, Brad Gilbert, Sandra Muir, Patricia Flynn

2. Apologies:

Steve Martin, Sylvia Smith

3. Minutes of the previous meeting:

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 06 were read and approved, proposed by Terry, seconded by Sandra

4. Matters Arising:

Sam asked for an update on the repairs review. This will be discussed under item 7 on the agenda.

5. Correspondence:

- a. Letter received from landlord inviting group to the annual rent setting meeting on 21st March, in the Silverstone Hotel.
Agreed Joan and Brad will attend
- b. Letter received from community council re play park
No action required

6. Finance - Treasurers report

- a. Sandra tabled the finance report for January 06
- b. The association has £265.00 in the bank
- c. The meeting agreed to pay train fares for the chairperson and secretary to attend the TIS annual general meeting. Receipts to be forwarded to treasurer asap.

7. Repairs review

Terry reported on the work of the repairs review working group. A draft report with recommendations for change has been sent out for consultation. All members were given a copy of this report for discussion at the next meeting. Comments will be sent to the landlord after the next meeting.

ACTION - all members

8. Training

Patricia reported that the dates for the next committee skills training are set for 19th & 20th April. It was agreed that Joan, Patricia and Brad will attend.

ACTION - above reps to attend and provide feedback to group at May meeting

9. AOCB

Sam informed the meeting of the dates of the gala week, 15th - 20th May. It was agreed to have a stall at the gala day to get publicity for the work of the association.

ACTION - all members

10. DONM

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 15th March 06, at 7pm in the Oldtown Community Centre.

[It may be a good idea to take a break now before moving onto Activity 6](#)



Activity 8 - Letter Writing

Before moving on to discuss the detail of how you could set out your letters, please consider the following, note your thoughts in the space provided.

1.	Why do you think it is important for the group to send out well presented letters?
2.	How do you think the people your group wishes to communicate with will react to poorly laid out or confusing letters?
3.	Having your own headed notepaper will help create an identity for the group and make it easier for the reader to know who letters have come from. What key things do you think headed notepaper should include?

Activity 9 - Setting out a Letter

Imagine your group is organising a public meeting for the whole community to attend. The committee would like your local MSP to come along to this meeting to let everyone know about the proposals to reinstate the old golf course at the back of your houses.

Use the space below to write a letter inviting MSP Sadie McFly to this meeting.



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

	<p>Oldtown Tenants & Residents Association</p> <p>Secretary: Sam Bell 25 Main Street Oldtown O21 UZ2 Tel 01234 987654 e-mail oldtownta@issiwissy.net</p>
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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)

¶
¶
¶
¶
¶
¶

28th January 2005

¶

Ms Sadie McFly MSP
Parliamentary Advice Centre
32 White Street

Oldtown

O23 HT4

¶
¶
¶

Dear Ms Mcfly

¶

Subject: Invitation to Public Meeting

¶

As you are aware the tenants and residents of Oldtown recently set up a Tenants & Residents Association to work with our landlord 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 April 2005 at 7pm in the Community Centre, Oldtown.

¶

We would like to invite you to attend this meeting in your capacity as our local MSP to discuss the proposal to reinstate the old golf course at the rear of our houses. Please can you let us know if you are available to attend this meeting?

¶

Thank you

¶

Yours sincerely

¶

¶

¶

¶

¶

Sam Bell

Secretary Oldtown Tenants & Residents Association

¶

¶

cc Councillor Bill Jones






Top Tip

The following items will assist the secretary carry out his / her tasks on behalf of the group.

The Secretary should have:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A diary	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stamps / envelopes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paperwork for the meeting - agenda, minutes, correspondence, reports....	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Computer / typewriter
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Notebook & pen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A dictionary
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Folder to keep all your paperwork	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Headed notepaper
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lockable filing cabinet (if possible and especially if you have use of an office)	

If your group has a Minute Secretary, he / she should also have:

-  A diary
-  Paperwork for the meeting - agenda, minutes, correspondence, reports....
-  Notebook & pen
-  Folder to keep all paperwork
-  Access to a computer / typewriter

Congratulations, you are almost at the end of this workbook however - before we finish, please complete the following

This section gives you a chance to check over what we have covered in the workbook. It takes the form of a quiz. All you have to do is insert your answers in the spaces provided.

	Question
1.	The secretary is one office bearer role - name another two?
2.	With whom should the secretary plan the agenda for the forthcoming meeting?
3.	The record of the meeting is called?
4.	The 3 P's of being a good secretary are?
5.	What paperwork should all members have for meetings?
6.	List any 4 items that will assist the secretary carry out her / her duties
7.	Why is it important to have an agenda for each meeting?
8.	A well written letter is important because:
9.	What should groups have to ensure that the letters sent by the group are easily identified?

What Next?

Phone or write to TIS to ask for the Checkback pack for this workbook.
We'll send it to you straight away.

In it you will get: -

- ❖ The answers to the quiz
- ❖ A list of other course in the TIS "Home Study for Tenants" series
- ❖ A Certificate of Completion

For the moment - Congratulations in completing this workbook.
We hope you enjoyed learning this way and that you will go on and do more of the course in the series.



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