

# Minutes Protocol

## Definition of minutes and their Purpose: Key Principles

With the exception of Cabinet minutes, the form adopted by any particular local authority is a matter of individual choice. However, the widely accepted chief principles of good practice are that minutes:

- a) are not a verbatim record but a summary of the proceedings that includes only the essence of the discussion – and not always that – and the decisions
- b) should be brief - precise and concise.
- c) must provide a clear and accurate record of all decisions taken at the meeting – there should be no ambiguity or doubt as to the intention.
- d) could provide evidence to explain the narrative and reasons for a decision.
- e) may include reference to alternative options considered.
- f) should refer to any new information introduced at the meeting which is material to the decision.
- g) should be complete and self-contained without being too long e.g.:
  - briefly refer to and hyperlink background documents
  - Where minutes are used to bring proposals/recommendations before Full Council, they also need to ensure that the record is sufficiently self-explanatory to enable the Council to make a decision in full possession of the relevant facts
- h) Should be intelligible and written in plain English.

Executive decisions made at meetings (Cabinet) must be recorded (i.e. minutes).

Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 state the minutes must state the following -

- a) A record of the decision
- b) The date the decision was made
- c) The reasons for the decision
- d) Any alternative options considered and rejected at the meeting
- e) A record of any conflicts of interest declared by a member of the body, and any relevant dispensation
- f) granted by the head of paid service in this regard

## Different Approaches: The case for different meetings, different styles

Different meetings have different legal requirements and objectives. Minutes should be '*fit for purpose*'. In developing different approaches, styles and formats the following should be noted:

- a) Public meetings (i.e. where minutes have to satisfy 3 different groups: Members, officers and the public.
  - Occasionally more detail may be required for minutes of public meetings as they should provide adequate information about the authority's business for press and public.
  - More details may also be provided for some meetings/items e.g.
    - Planning Committee and Licensing Sub-Committee minutes when applications are refused and there is potential for challenge (appeals)
    - Overview & Scrutiny Commission – the minutes reflect the range of views expressed and provide a summary of the discussion.
  - However, lengthy minutes are time consuming both to produce and to read – and the Chair or officers are more likely to suggest amendments at draft stage or other Members question them at Full Council.
- b) Working Groups and other closed/non-decision-making meetings
  - These can be the form of notes/action points as they are for Members and officers only.
  - Nevertheless, recording some narrative may be useful to establish the 'sense' of the meeting and background especially where oral rather than written reports are presented.

## **Requirements for good minutes**

The production of good minutes is greatly aided by officers and Members, particularly:

- Good, clear, well-presented reports, with clear recommendations.
- Members' reading the reports and putting questions to officers before the meeting;
- Good contributions at meetings e.g. comments and discussions which relate to and add value to the item being considered.
- Good chairing/control of meeting (Members and officers can also make chairing easier or more difficult).
- Clear recommendations (especially if revised at meeting) and decisions.
- Ideally there should not be a need to amend well-crafted minutes, only to correct errors – point of accuracy.