

GUIDELINES FOR THE PC/PTA SECRETARY

There are very few rules governing how Parent Councils and PTAs operate (unless they have charitable status), however it is good practice to have someone to take the role of Secretary. Some Parent Councils opt to pay a clerk to the committee instead, and some have both! A clerk can be paid for with the money a PC receives from the local authority. The Clerk can't be a member of the PC.

The main roles of the Secretary

The Secretary can be any member of the committee. The main role of a Secretary is to support the Chairperson to ensure the smooth running of the PC/PTA and to maintain effective communication links between committee members and between the PC/PTA and the school. Their role may also include:

- Ensuring meetings are well organised and minuted.
- Maintaining records and administration – these should be kept in a file or storage box to be handed on to the next Secretary.
- If the PC/PTA has charitable status, they should make sure legal requirements are met.
- Handling communication and correspondence.

Do you need a Secretary/Clerk?

There is no legal requirement for a Parent Council or a PTA to have a secretary although it certainly makes life easier. If your group finds it difficult to get anyone to volunteer to take up the post, then you could always offer it as a job share or pay a clerk.

Preparing for a meeting

- Arrange a suitable venue for the meeting and if necessary take out the let for the school.
- Check all committee members and parents have plenty of notice of the meeting.
- Help to set the agenda with the Chair and make sure that any reports/papers are sent to committee members well in advance of the meeting.
- Make sure that members have minutes of the last meeting.

At the meeting

- The Secretary should arrive in good time with all the relevant papers.
- A Secretary may be given the task of reporting on actions or matters arising from the previous minutes and should read any correspondence that has been received.

- Take notes of the meeting and record the key points and any decisions and actions. Remember these notes will be used to help write the minutes.
- The Chair should summarise any discussion before a decision is made and the Secretary should clarify this before moving onto the next item on the agenda. This helps to make sure that all committee members understand what has been decided.
- Remind the Chairperson if an agenda item has been missed.

After the meeting

- Prepare a draft of the minutes and discuss with the Chairperson before these are sent to other committee members and the Headteacher as soon as possible.
- Send a reminder of each decision requiring action to the relevant person.
- Follow up on any correspondence as soon as possible.

Writing the minutes

Minutes are an "official record" of a meeting and it is a good idea to write them as soon as possible. There is no short cut to writing good minutes; it is about interpreting what was said and being clear about who agreed to do what and by when.

Here are some more useful tips:

- Take a note of those present and any apologies.
- In your notes it is helpful to write initials of those speaking but their names should be written in full in the minutes.
- Minutes should be clear and concise and written in neutral language. They should not record everything that was said but they need to show the gist of differing opinions without the feelings that may have been expressed at the meeting. If a long discussion takes place, then the main points could be bullet-pointed. This provides the reasons for a decision and will help to prevent this or future committees having the same discussion time and time again. It could also help if someone questions decisions in the future.
- Minutes will be in draft form until they have been approved at the next meeting; this can be done informally with a show of hands or more formally by asking someone to propose and second them.

And finally ...

- A Secretary should not be over-burdened with committee business but if this is the case it may be a good idea to split the role by having one person to take minutes and another to handle correspondence, arrange meetings, etc.
- It is a good idea to foster links with the school's office staff to make sure that any correspondence is passed on.
- The role of the Secretary should be agreed by all the committee members and explained clearly to anyone taking up the post.

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