

So, you want to ...

Be a Local TN Secretary

By Mike Wood & Ann Willis



Talking News Federation

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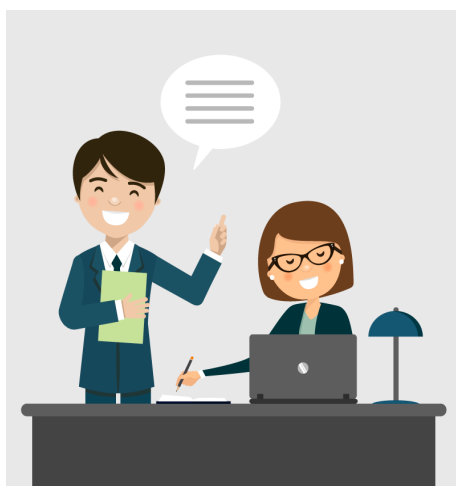
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'So you want to be a Local TN Secretary' is written by Mike Wood and Ann Willis
Checked by Janet Berry.

The document was first produced in 2018, revised in March 2024.

Next review due March 2027.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SECRETARY?

The role of the Secretary is to support the Chair in ensuring the smooth functioning of the Committee.

In summary, the Secretary is responsible for:

- Ensuring meetings are effectively organised and minuted.
- Maintaining effective records and administration.
- Upholding the legal requirements of governing documents, charity law, company law etc (where relevant).
- Communication and correspondence.

It is important to note that although the Secretary ensures that these responsibilities are met, much of the work may be delegated to paid staff or volunteers.

Given these responsibilities, the Secretary often acts as an information and reference point for the Chair and other committee members: clarifying past practice and decisions; confirming legal requirements; and retrieving relevant documentation.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SECRETARY

The role of Secretary of a Committee is key to the efficient functioning of the Committee, particularly in organisations with few or no paid staff members.

Below are some of the qualities, skills and knowledge which should be demonstrated by those carrying out this role.

Quality, skills & knowledge

A good Committee Secretary will:

- be methodical, with a good eye for detail;
- be well organised, with an orderly mind;
- bring objectivity to the proceedings;
- deal promptly with correspondence;
- be able to take accurate notes of meetings;
- make sure members receive all the necessary material;
- bring the necessary material to the meeting;
- work well with the Chairperson;
- ensure quorum is met for meetings; and
- have knowledge or experience of committee procedures.

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SECRETARY

The responsibilities of the Secretary of a Committee are outlined below:

1. Ensuring meetings are effectively organised and minuted:

- Liaising with the Chairperson to plan meetings.
- Receiving agenda items from committee members.
- Circulating agendas and reports.
- Taking minutes (unless there is a minutes secretary).
- Circulating approved minutes.
- Checking that agreed actions are carried out.

2. Maintaining effective records and administration:

- Keeping up-to-date contact details (i.e. names, addresses and telephone numbers) for the committee and (where relevant) ordinary members of the organisation.
- Filing minutes and reports.
- Compiling lists of names and addresses that are useful to the organisation, including those of appropriate officials or officers of voluntary organisations.
- Keeping a record of the organisation's activities.
- Keeping a diary of future activities.

3. Upholding legal requirements:

- Acting as custodian of the organisation's governing documents.
- Checking quorum is present at meetings.
- Ensuring elections are in line with governing documents.
- Ensuring organisation's activities are in line with its aims and objects.
- Ensuring charity law requirements are met.
- Sitting on appraisal, recruitment and disciplinary panels, as required.

4. Communication and correspondence:

- Responding to all committee correspondence,
- filing all committee correspondence received and copies of replies sent,
- keeping a record of any of the organisation's publications (e.g. leaflets or newsletters) and,
- reporting the activities of the organisation and future programmes to members, the press and the public (unless there is Information or Publicity Officer).

Use the links below to access further articles and resources which will help you understand the role of the Secretary and prepare your own role description or person specification:

THE SECRETARY'S ROLE AT MEETINGS

The Secretary is crucial to the smooth running of a Committee meeting. This involves activities before, during and after Committee meetings.

In order to be effective, the Secretary of the Committee should ensure that they carry out the following activities:

Before the Meeting:

- Consult with the Chairperson on the order of business for the meeting, and the way in which it should be dealt with on the agenda. Decide what business requires discussion and what requires a decision by the Committee;
- Ensure that the notice of the meeting is given, that suitable accommodation is arranged and confirmed, and that copies of the agenda is prepared;
- Circulate to all members (a) any papers to be discussed at the upcoming meeting and (b) a copy of the agenda and minutes of the previous meeting;
- Make sure that any reports or information requested at the last meeting is available or that there is a good reason why not.

At the Meeting:

- Arrive in good time before the meeting with the minutes and with all the relevant correspondence and business matters for that meeting, in good order. Record the names of those who are present, and convey and record apologies received from those who are absent;
- Read the minutes of the previous meeting, and if they are approved, obtain the Chairperson's signature on them;
- Report on action or matters arising from the previous minutes. Read any important correspondence that has been received;
- Unless there is a Minutes Secretary, take notes of the meeting, recording the key points and making sure that all decisions and proposals are recorded, as well as the name of the person or group responsible for carrying them out. Make sure action points are clear; and
- Make sure that the Chairperson is supplied with all the necessary information for items on the agenda, and remind the Chairperson if an item has been overlooked.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Prepare a draft of the minutes (unless there is a minutes secretary) and consult the Chairperson and most senior staff member (where relevant) for approval;
- Send a reminder notice of each decision requiring action to the relevant person; this can be done by telephone, or by an 'action list' with the relevant action for each person duly marked; and
- Promptly send all correspondence as decided by the Committee.

IN SUMMARY

Do's and don'ts

A GOOD SECRETARY WILL:

- Be organised.
- Keep copies of all correspondence.
- Check quorum is met for meetings.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Work closely with the Chairperson.
- Make it easy for others to take over by keeping clear records.
- Prepare for meetings well in advance.
- Summarise discussions effectively.
- Keep people informed.
- Ensure accurate minutes of meetings are kept.
- Enjoy the Secretary role.

A GOOD SECRETARY WILL NOT:

- Ignore correspondence.
- Keep information to themselves.
- Be late for meetings.
- Throw away important papers.
- Rely on his/her memory.
- Write down trivial details of all discussions at every meeting.
- Repeat private conversations.
- Organise meetings at the last minute.