

Guideline Leaflet C13: Writing Minutes

A guide for all those in Baptist churches who have the job of writing minutes. Although the guide focuses on Church and Trustee Meetings much of what it contains is relevant for recording other meetings.

This Guideline Leaflet is regularly reviewed and updated. To ensure that you are using the most up to date version, please download the leaflet from the BUGB website at www.baptist.org.uk/resources

The date on which the leaflet was last updated can be found on the download page.

C13: Writing Minutes

These notes are offered as guidelines by the Legal and Operations Team to provide information for Baptist churches.

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[L17 Legal and Operations Team – Regulatory Information](#)

These notes can never be a substitute for detailed professional advice if there are serious and specific problems, but we hope you will find them helpful.

If you want to ask questions about the leaflets and one of the Baptist Trust Companies are your property trustees, you should contact them. They will do their best to help.

If your church property is in the name of private individuals who act as trustees they may also be able to help.

INTRODUCTION

Minutes are the official written record of the meetings of an organisation or group and so writing minutes is an essential job in church life which someone needs to do. Minute-writing is not a skill which everyone has but is something which many can learn.

Whenever you have a meeting, it is important that there is some sort of record of what took place. However different meetings require different levels of recording and it can be quite helpful to realise this.

In this leaflet we look specifically at the sort of minutes which are needed to record Church Meetings and Trustee meetings (e.g. Deacons or Leadership Team). At the end of this leaflet we have two 'sample' sets of minutes. These are not to be regarded as a blueprint for your minutes but are included so you can see how minutes could be produced.

Your church's constitution (or other governing document) should have something to say about keeping minutes so you ought to look at this to see what that says you should be doing. However, many Baptist Churches will be using one of the Baptist Union's Approved Governing Documents (AGD) – there are separate ones for unincorporated churches and CIOs – and so we refer to what these say at various points in this document. For more information about (and the full text of) our governing document for unincorporated churches please refer to our Guideline Leaflets C04 and C05 which can be found at <https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220865/Charities.aspx>

You may also find it helpful to read the Charity Commission Guidance on meetings in general (which includes a section on Minutes). This can be found on the Charity Commission website (go to www.gov.uk and search for CC48) or click [here](#) for a direct link.

Minutes should be produced as soon as possible after the meeting has taken place.

Do we need minutes?

As indicated above, not every meeting needs to be recorded in the same way. However, Church Meetings and Trustee Meetings do need what we might call 'formal' minutes. The main purpose of such minutes is to record the decisions which were made and the reason for those decisions. Minutes are NOT supposed to be a description of what took place.

Other meetings may be better recorded in other ways such as ...

Complete transcript – i.e. an exact record of everything which was said by everyone. It is very rare that this would be needed for normal meetings in a church context.

List of Action points – this would be relevant for a small-group such as a 'Buildings Working Group' when the main reason for meeting is to agree what needs to happen and who will do it.

Report – this would be written in a narrative style, designed for inclusion in a newsletter. This is a very good way of informing the church of what has taken place at a particular meeting such as a "Leadership Review Group".

Unfortunately, some churches do tend to use one of these approaches when writing their formal meeting minutes. To avoid doing this please keep reading!

Who should take the minutes?

In most churches this is the responsibility of the Church Secretary, but it can also be helpful for someone else who is not as involved in the meeting to do this. It is much easier for someone to actively participate in a meeting if they are not also trying to take adequate notes of everything. Some churches therefore appoint a minute secretary for Church Meetings and/or Trustee Meetings.

AGD for unincorporated churches

Clause 14.1: The business conducted at Church Members' Meetings and, in particular, any decisions of the Members shall be recorded in the Minutes for future reference.

Clause 17.10: Minutes shall be prepared of the proceedings at the meetings of the Charity Trustees...

AGD for CIOs

Clause 27.1: The Charity Trustees must keep minutes of all proceedings at Church Members meetings and meetings of the Charity Trustees and committees of Charity Trustees.

Clause 27.2: The Charity Trustees must keep a record of decisions made by the Charity Trustees otherwise than in meetings.

What do we need minutes for?

The minutes of a meeting are a record of the decisions that were taken. Their purpose is to give an accurate account of what was agreed and how the decisions are to be implemented. It does also help to have some explanation of how a decision was arrived at.

As well as being a formal permanent record of such meetings, minutes provide

- a) A reminder to people who were at the meeting of what was decided and who is supposed to be doing what as a result
- b) Information about what was decided at the meeting for those people who were unable to be present

AGD for unincorporated churches

Clause 14.4: The signed Minutes shall be conclusive evidence of the decisions taken at the Church Members' Meeting to which they relate.

AGD for CIOs

Clause 27.4: The Minutes signed pursuant to clause 27.3 shall be conclusive evidence of the decisions taken at the Church Members' Meeting to which they relate.

It is worth noting that minutes might need to be referred to later by the Charity Commission or others if something has gone wrong to determine why a decision was made and to ensure that it was properly considered. Therefore, if there is a particularly controversial or difficult decision it is important to record the reasoning behind the decision and the issues considered as well as the decision itself.

Advice on what to include (and what to leave out)

Formal minutes are not supposed to be a verbatim account of what took place at the meeting. As a result, the person writing them needs to decide what should be included and what should be left out.

The Baptist Union AGDs do give some guidance on this in relation to Trustee meetings as follows

AGD for unincorporated churches

Clause 17.10: including any appointments, the names of those present, the decisions taken, and where appropriate the reasons for the decisions.

AGD for CIOs

Clause 27.4: ... including the names of those present at the meeting, the decisions made at the meetings; and where appropriate the reasons for the decisions

The minutes of most Church Meetings should be no longer than 2 sides of typed A4 paper – a general 'rule-of-thumb' would be one side of A4 per hour of a meeting.

Here are the things which we suggest should be included.

The Basics

Name of church and/or group (*e.g. Anytown Baptist Church Leadership Group*)

Date of meeting (*time and venue may also be useful to include*)

Names of those present (*although for a church meeting a list – or signing-in sheet - can be attached to the minutes rather than listing everyone in the actual minutes*)

Apologies for absence (*as above this can be a list attached to the minutes*)

The Decisions

The main purpose of your minutes is to record the decisions which have been taken. If a particular meeting doesn't actually make any decisions, then your minutes will be very short!

Any reports (other than those presented verbally at the meeting) do not need to be reproduced in the minutes except in the briefest terms. However, where recommendations in a report are approved, then these should normally be included in the minutes so that the minutes have a complete record of the decisions made.

Ideally you should record the precise wording of any resolution together with the name of the proposer. You should also make sure that all information relevant to that decision is included. For example, it is not very helpful to record that "The Church agreed a new policy about the use of alcohol on church premises" without explaining what that policy says or where it can be found. If a decision taken at a meeting of the Charity Trustees is not unanimous then you should record who voted in favour and who voted against.

For a Church Meeting it is usually sufficient to record that a motion was passed 'unanimously', or 'by the required 2/3 majority' or 'with no-one voting against' or some other suitable phrase. In some situations, you may want to record the numbers voting for and against and the number of abstentions.

Where there is a risk of conflict of interest (e.g. the church entering into a transaction with a trustee or trustee relative, or considering the pay of the minister), it is important to record how this conflict was handled in the decision-making process (e.g. X left the room or X did not vote) so that Trustees can demonstrate good governance.

The Actions

An often-neglected part of the minutes is the listing of what actions are needed as a result of the decisions which have been taken – and who is responsible for ensuring they happen.

Sometimes a meeting will breathe a collective sigh of relief when a particularly difficult decision has been taken and quickly move onto the next item without noting who is responsible for implanting the actions which will be needed. Minute -takers need to be alert to this possibility and ask questions such as “Who is going to?” Or “When will this need to be done?”

It is helpful to highlight the Actions in some way either within the main minutes or by listing all agreed actions at the end.

Some churches may also find it helpful to create a rolling action log which takes the actions agreed at each meeting into a tracking document that can be reviewed at each meeting to ensure none are forgotten.

The Reasons

For future reference, and to help those who weren't present, the minutes should usually include a **brief** summary of how the meeting arrived at the various decisions it made. Distilling a 45-minute discussion into a brief summary is a skill which can be developed with practice and we look at this in more detail in the next section.

The Rest of the Meeting

Whilst the above four items should form the basis of your minutes, there are other things which happen during a meeting which it can be helpful to include – welcoming newcomers, times of worship and prayer, opening devotions and reports given.

It is also helpful to record the date, time and venue of the next meeting.

What skills are needed to write a good set of minutes?

In essence you need to be able to listen carefully and write clearly and concisely.

Listening

If you are taking minutes in a meeting then you need to follow closely what is going on, be able to hear what everyone is saying and understand what is being discussed.

- It will help if you have read through all the paperwork in advance and are aware of why each item is on the agenda – is it to provide information, for discussion or to make a decision?
- If you are someone whose mind wanders easily, you will need to find ways of ensuring you stay focused at the meeting (or find someone else to take the minutes!)

Writing

Very few people will write out their minutes by hand these days – although there will still be a few people who do. If you do, then you really need to make sure your handwriting is legible and ask someone to proof-read them for you. If you type out your minutes, you should still ask someone to check them through to ensure they are clear and as error-free as possible.

Layout

Minutes should be clear and easy to read. Make use of short sentences, clear headings and sub-headings, numbered (or bulleted) points and gaps between items.

Summarising a discussion

- Acts 15:6 records a meeting of the early church to discuss a very controversial issue. The next verse starts with a phrase which is ideal to use in minutes – “After much discussion”!
- Remember that it is the decision which is the important thing to record and not the discussion which preceded it.
- During the meeting you will need to note all the points which are made during a discussion, but they don't all need to end up in the minutes. Once the outcome of that discussion is known it is much easier to look back at your notes and decide what is helpful to record.
- This could be:
 - Listing some possible solutions and then, in more detail, the one which was agreed
 - Identifying two or three main points which emerged in the discussion
 - Noting the main points for the resolution and the main points against
 - Outlining the issue which was aired and then noting that “After much discussion it was agreed that”

The Appendix 'Sample Minutes' at the end of this leaflet shows how these could be used.

Including names

There are times when names need to be included – generally this is where someone had a clear role in that meeting such as chairing, proposing/seconding a resolution, presenting a report or specific item - or has an agreed 'action' as a result of the meeting. Other than those occasions you should avoid using names in your minutes. There are four good reasons for this

- **Avoiding Controversy** – by not including names against specific comments you will avoid complaints that someone has been misquoted or that you ignored their comment.
- **Brevity** – your minutes will be a lot shorter (and clearer) if you don't start recording the names of people contributing to a discussion.
- **Confidentiality** – if sensitive items are being shared verbally then details (including names) should not be minuted. “A number of pastoral concerns were shared and prayed about” is so much better than listing all the names which were mentioned and their various issues/concerned. This is true even if the concerns being shared are known by all.
- **Data Protection** – with the introduction of GDPR, people have become more aware of their rights and might start asking for their names to be removed from minutes. They could also ask to see a copy of any minutes which mentioned them.

What happens next?

1. Once you have finished the minutes ask someone (ideally the Chairperson) to check them through for accuracy and then have someone else proof-read them. If you have someone in your church who seems to delight in finding all your spelling and punctuation errors, then this could be the ideal job for them!
2. Once this has been done then the minutes should be circulated as soon as possible – ideally within a week of the meeting. At the very least, you should make sure that everyone who has an 'action' as a result of the meeting has been reminded of this.

3. Different churches will have different ways of circulating the minutes – named paper copies for all members, email to all members, added to a members-only area of the church website or another form of online storage.
4. It is normal practice for the minutes of any meeting to be confidential to those people who would be eligible to attend. However, churches should note that their Auditor or Independent Examiner may ask to see them as part of their work in examining the church's financial records.

AGD for unincorporated churches

Clause 17.10: The Charity Trustees shall decide from time to time whether all or part of these minutes [i.e. the minutes of their meetings] shall be treated as confidential.

AGD for CIOs

Clause 27.5: The Charity Trustees have an obligation (subject to any overriding legal binding requirement to the contrary) to keep confidential the affairs of the Charity Trustees' Meeting.

5. It may be helpful to circulate the minutes again with the agenda for the next meeting in case people have lost their earlier copy.

Agreeing the Minutes

One of the first items on the agenda of each meeting should be approving the minutes of the previous meeting. Given that the minutes are an official record of each meeting, it is important that those at the meeting realise the importance of approving the minutes each time

AGD for unincorporated churches (Clause 14.3) and CIOs (Clause 27.3)

Each set of Church Meeting Minutes shall be approved by the Church Members attending the next Church Members' Meeting. They shall have the opportunity to review the Minutes and to correct any errors of fact before a formal vote on the approval of the Minutes is taken. If the Minutes are approved the person chairing the Church Members' Meeting shall confirm the Members' acceptance of the Minutes by signing and dating them as a correct record of the preceding meeting.

The minutes should be signed and filed accordingly. Ideally this should include making sure the signed minutes have been scanned and saved electronically.

AGD for unincorporated churches (Clause 14.2) and CIOs (Clause 27.6)

The Minutes shall be written or printed and filed in a book or binder set aside for this purpose using materials of sufficient quality to ensure that they survive for many years and shall be kept in a safe place.

APPENDIX 1: Sample Church Meeting Minutes

Upton Downs Baptist Church

Minutes of the Church Members meeting held on 28 November 2018

There were 38 members present and 10 apologies for absence were recorded.

The meeting was chaired by Simon Smith who began by welcoming everyone to the meeting and opening in prayer. He then spoke about the verses he wanted the church to have as our focus in 2019 - **Matthew 28:19-20**.

Melody Mitchell then led us a time of sung worship.

The **minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2018** were approved and signed as a correct record of that meeting.

Simon reminded us about our forthcoming **Christmas services** particularly the Carol Services on 16th December (7pm) and 23rd December (4.30pm) – all of which were ideal to invite friends and family to. Rachel Robinson spoke about the 'Celebrating Christmas' event on December 9th which was also suitable to invite people to.

1. **SHAPE follow-up**

We were reminded that, in September, we had spent time looking at how we can use our gifts and abilities to serve God in and through the church and that the SHAPE material had also been used in Life Groups this term. Jackie Jones shared her recent experience of exploring what it was right for her to continue doing and what she should give up. She encouraged people working through this process to:

- Seek God's Will
- Seek Godly counsel
- Step up and serve where you see a need

We then spent time in small groups, sharing our experiences of using the SHAPE material

Following a time of feedback from these groups Simon explained that

- There was currently a real need for people to help lead our Sunday morning group for young people aged 11-16.
- A group was being set up to befriend and visit people within the church
- The catering team needed a new co-ordinator.

He asked anyone interested in any of these areas to speak to him or any of the Deacons.

2. **Cleaning Rota**

Rachel reminded the meeting about the issues raised at the last meeting and the need to decide whether we wanted to continue with an opt-out rota as now. A number of comments and suggestions were made which included

- Opt-in rotas can result in a diminishing number of people being involved – or a core group of committed people
- Even on an opt-out rota, people could opt-in to clean more often than requested.
- Having clear information about what was expected would be very helpful as some areas are often not cleaned.
- We should regard this work as a privilege

There was also some discussion as to whether employing someone to clean the kitchen and toilets each week was a good idea. Whilst this would cut the work and time for those on the rota we would need to work out how such a person would be managed and whether this was the best use of our resources.

In summing up the discussion Rachel said she felt the majority wished to continue with our current opt-out system but that we should

- Offer people the opportunity to take on extra turns
- Produce a new rota more frequently and ensure everyone on the rota knew they were on it
- Put together some clear instructions as to what was required by those on the rota
- Ask the Deacons to look at the suggestion of employing a cleaner

3. Revision of Church Alcohol Policy

Rachel presented a proposed new Alcohol Policy (as reproduced on the agenda) on behalf of the Deacons. She explained that the existing policy had been agreed in 2004 and that twice this year the Church Meeting had been asked to consent to alcohol being allowed at other events.

There was then a lively discussion which indicated the various viewpoints held by Church Members on this issue including those who felt there should never be any alcohol allowed on the premises.

Carol Collins reminded people why the 2004 policy had been agreed – so that the church could provide an alternative venue for people to watch international football events – a place where alcohol was being consumed but not excessively, a place where parents and children could watch together and safely – all of which lessened the chance of domestic violence occurring after such events.

Whilst a few people were unhappy with the actual wording, an overwhelming majority of people indicated they were in favour of the principles behind the policy and asked the Deacons to come back to the January meeting with a slightly revised version for ratification.

4. Draft 2019 Budget

In the absence of the Church Treasurer, Rachel presented this explaining that it would be the responsibility of the Deacons to agree the budget at their December meeting. She promised to circulate a copy of the slides used in her presentation to members.

Key points which Rachel mentioned were

- As work was needed to address some health and safety issues the budget for maintenance had been increased for next year.
- We had increased the outreach budget for 2019 to enable us to cover the costs of our new 'Living Room' community initiative.
- Total budgeted expenditure was just under £115,000
- Church giving in 2018 was anticipated at being around £85,000 – the same as last year. If this was the same in 2019 the total income would be around £105,000 – around £10,000 less than the budgeted expenditure. For the last 6 years, at least, we had been spending more than we had received and whilst this could happen when we had enough funds to cover our losses it cannot continue indefinitely.
- We will therefore need to cut our expenditure in future years or increase our giving.

Simon then reminded us that giving to God is an act of worship and that we should be thinking in terms of 'Tithes' (regular giving) and 'Offerings' (additional giving in response to blessings received)

5. Pastoral Needs and prayer

Various pastoral needs within the fellowship were shared.

We then spent time in small groups praying for these situations and for our forthcoming Christmas Services

We closed the meeting just before 10pm by saying The Grace

APPENDIX 2: Sample Deacons Meeting Minutes

Upton Downs Baptist Church

DEACONS MEETING

Minutes of meeting on 12 March 2018 at Upton Downs Baptist Church

Present: Simon Smith, Briony Bridge, Chris Collins, Esther Evans, George Green, Nick North and Rachel Robinson.

Apologies had been received from **Kenny King**

The meeting was chaired by Simon Smith.

Esther led us in some reflections on Sabbath Rest. She started by reading Psalm 127 and Matthew 11:25-30 and then referred to the college paper she has just completed on the subject. She reminded us all that, as we are a very busy church, we need to make sure we focus on what God is asking of us. 'Doing' and 'Being' are far less important than 'Belonging'. We may all know that we are 'saved by grace' and don't need to earn our salvation but do our lives reflect that belief? We then spent some time in silent reflection before Esther closed in prayer.

1. Minutes: The minutes of the meeting on 19 February were approved and signed as a correct record.

2. Matters Arising (not included elsewhere)

Office Equipment and IT Strategy:

Laptop computer – Nick reported that a laptop had now been agreed for the church administrator and this could now be bought.

Printer/Copier – As requested Nick had made contact with another company which leased printers and was waiting for further information from them.

It was noted that we really need a review of all IT equipment being used by the church - including a new laptop for Simon and the projection equipment. Nick agreed to work with others to start this process

Church Membership

Simon explained that he had now been able to meet with Andy and Alice Allen who were now worshipping at Upton Downs Community Church. Following that meeting the Allens had decided it was now right to resign their membership and this would be reported to the next Church Meeting.

3. Property Matters

Storage - Following the last meeting Rachel and Simon had walked around the church to see what was being stored where and discuss how the situation could be improved. Their report had been circulated with the Agenda and this included the following suggestions

- Designate the lockable cupboard to the right of the kitchen as a 'Cleaning Cupboard' and move all cleaning materials there. This would include the vacuum cleaners from under the stairs leaving this free for occasional storage.
- Clear some of the unused equipment from the cupboard in the schoolroom and, if possible, move the large Toddler toys in there.
- Install new sturdier storage in the Resources Room

All were happy with these suggestions and Rachel said that she and her husband were willing to manage this storage reorganisation project. After some discussion it was agreed we should aim to have this completed by September.

Electrical Cupboard – George had obtained a quote from the company which had installed the new kitchen, and this was for less than £900. There was some concern that this quote didn't include all that we needed, and George agreed to check this out. As time was of the essence we agreed to let Simon and George make the final decision with Rachel or Briony being brought in if necessary

Front Door – Rachel expressed concern about the security of this. It was agreed that George would change the code on the Key Safe and we will then consider replacing the front door in 2019.

4. Data Protection Policy

Rachel had prepared a Data Protection Policy for the church using a template provided by the Baptist Union. This had been circulated with the Agenda and Rachel took us through it.

After Rachel had clarified a few points raised by individuals, the meeting unanimously agreed the policy and appointed 'The Church Secretary' as the 'Data Protection Trustee'. We also agreed the Action Plan which Rachel had proposed.

It was noted that it would be good to have the work done and Procedures and Guidelines in place by the May Church Meeting which could then include some basic DP training using material produced by the Baptist Union.

5. Finance:

The figures for 2017 were circulated and attached to these minutes. It was noted that we had made a much smaller loss than budgeted due mainly to the Gift Aid refunds received which included money due from 2016.

Because we are still in the process of moving bank accounts we are currently operating two current accounts which did make producing monthly figures a bit more complicated. However, Briony and Rachel are now able to make payments online which will make things easier in future.

We need to try and ensure everyone moves their Standing Orders as quickly as possible, so we can close our account. Briony agreed to follow this up

6. Any Other Business:

Esther asked if some thought could be given to using the window which faced onto the car-park for promoting church events. It was thought that this might fit in with creating access from the car-park to the new Prayer Room so could be looked at by that working group.

Simon closed the meeting in prayer at 9.45pm

The next meeting will be on Thursday 19 April

ACTION POINTS

- **Nick** to buy new laptop and get this set up for the Administrator
- **Nick** to look at setting up a review of all IT equipment used by the church
- **Rachel** and her husband to make a start on the storage reorganisation process
- **George** to check out the electrical cupboard quote and ensure that a final decision is made on which quote to accept as soon as possible
- **Rachel** to ensure that the work listed in the Data Protection Action Plan is completed by the May Church Meeting
- **Briony** to speak to those people who had not yet moved their Standing Orders
- **Esther** to ask the Prayer Room group about making use of the window facing the car-park

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This is one of a series of *Guidelines* that are offered as a resource for Baptist ministers and churches. They have been prepared by the Legal and Operations Team and are, of necessity, intended only to give very general advice in relation to the topics covered. These guidelines should not be relied upon as a substitute for obtaining specific and more detailed advice in relation to a particular matter.

The staff in the Legal and Operations Team at Baptist House (or your regional Trust Company) will be very pleased to answer your queries and help in any way possible. It helps us to respond as efficiently as possible to the many churches in trust with us if you write to us and set out your enquiry as simply as possible.

The Legal and Operations Team also support churches that are in trust with the East Midland Baptist Trust Company Limited.

If your holding trustees are one of the other Baptist Trust Corporations you must contact your own Trust Corporation for further advice. A list of contact details is provided above. If you have private trustees they too should be consulted as appropriate.

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