GUIDELINES ON RECORDING MINUTES FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACTS, 1997 & 2003

Introduction
Under the Freedom of Information Acts, 1997 and 2003 all corporate records created since 21 April 1998 by the Institute and its staff can be accessed by any individual. While there are exemptions which can be applied in certain circumstances to protect information from disclosure, in general, corporate information will be accessible.
The Institute has many committees and sub-committees where minutes of meetings are recorded. Formal meetings of the Institute, at which Institute business is transacted and decisions reached, should be properly documented.
The following advice has been prepared to help develop a consistent approach to minute taking and to provide some guidance to staff who record minutes. The following guidelines on recording minutes in the Institute incorporate ODCE (Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement) recommendations under Corporate Governance.

Definition
Minutes may be defined as a written record of the business transacted at a meeting. They usually take the form of minutes of narration rather than minutes of resolution.

Institute Policy regarding minute taking states that the hand-written manuscript can be destroyed when the minutes have been typed and approved. A mere recording of decisions of a meeting does not give the flavour of the discussion which lead to a decision, therefore, in this case, the manuscript record must not be destroyed.

Good practice in minute taking includes the following:

Contents

- Heading;
  - name of meeting
  - kind of meeting
  - location, day, date and start time of meeting
- Names of those present;
  - name the Chairman
  - list those present
  - list those “in attendance” i.e. those who are there by invitation and not as members.
  - list those who send apologies
- Agreement/approval of minutes of the previous meeting;
- Details of any documents or papers tabled for consideration by the members, including the title and author of any such documents (generally these documents would be circulated in advance of the meeting to allow the members an opportunity to consider same);
- Matters arising
- Correspondence
- Presentation of reports
- Items discussed
Decisions taken

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If there was no further business state this and the time the meeting concluded.

Chairman's signature: Following approval of minutes at a subsequent meeting they should be signed and dated by the Chairman. (All previous drafts should be destroyed but having regard to any FOI restrictions).

Alteration to minutes should either be hand written with a notation stating at whose request the alteration was made or by subsequent redrafting. This should be done prior to the Chairman signing the minutes.

Date of next meeting

Recording Minutes of Meetings

When recording minutes the practice of naming members who attend/do not attend, report on matters arising, present reports, etc. should continue. However the following should be considered when items are being discussed:

Do not record every discussion verbatim. The minutes you will prepare from your notes are a summary and not a verbatim report of the discussions which took place;

When recording an item, discussion should be recorded in a manner that gives a precise account of the proceedings of the meeting. Minutes must give the flavour of the discussions which led to a decision being reached;

An account of the views expressed by each person making a contribution to the discussion should be recorded. While the minutes may summarise the contributions made, any summary should accurately reflect the substance of the contributions made. Where a member specifically requests that their contribution be minuted e.g. where disagreement arises, particular care should be taken to ensure that the minutes accurately reflect the contribution(s) made;

It is advisable to record all the necessary information and no more; i.e. the relevant business considered, facts noted, the decision taken and its rationale;

Record points, not people. The minute-taker’s focus is on the ideas, arguments and facts being presented;

It is essential to record the decision made and the person who has responsibility for carrying out that decision. The minutes ideally should record the discussion in such a way that a reader can understand the reasoning behind the decision made by that committee and where alternatives were suggested why these were regarded as unsuitable by the members.

Your recorded notes should focus on points made for and against a proposal or idea and the reasons to support these points;

Minutes should be written so that they are complete, and in sufficient detail to enable a person who was not present at the meeting to fully understand what business was transacted;

Minutes should be retained in accordance with good filing practice in a safe environment;

Final versions of documents and reports considered at meetings should be retained with the minutes when it is necessary to have access to them in order to understand the minutes;

Arrangements should be in place to allow the efficient transfer of the formal minutes to a new staff member or new secretary of the Committee/Authority;

Minutes, being a record of what was done, i.e. decided, should be written in the past tense;

Initial drafts of minutes should not normally be retained;
Draft should only be kept if the development of a decision was the result of discussions at a meeting. These drafts may be accessible under the FOI Act, 1997.

All committee members should be advised:

- Where individual contributions are succinct and few in number attribution is appropriate.
- Where lengthy general discussion occurs it is more appropriate to highlight the significant points made without attribution unless specifically relevant.
- That access may be given to all minutes and associated documents under the Freedom of Information Acts, 1997 & 2003. Certain information is protected from disclosure under the various exemptions of the Act.