## Appendix 4 – Minute Taking Guidance

Minutes are a tangible record of the meeting for its participants and a source of information for those unable to attend. They can also serve to notify or remind individuals of tasks assigned to them and/or timelines.

Good minuting is a deceptively difficult and time-consuming task which is often under-valued. It is far more than an administrative formality. Key skills of a good minute taker include being able to:

- listen to multiple voices at the same time and capture both their arguments and tone.
- summarise an argument accurately and record decisions taken and action points on which to follow up.
- identify which parts of the discussion are material and should be recorded.
- have the confidence to ask for clarification where needed.
- have the confidence to stand firm when someone asks them to deviate from what they believe to be an accurate record.

A key factor affecting the ease of minuting a meeting is how well it is chaired. The quality of papers presented to the meeting is also important.

Minutes can take at least as long, often twice or three times as long, to draft minutes as the meeting itself took. Each organisation will have its own approach for minute writing.

Do not be intimidated by the term “minutes” as this can be misleading. The Board or Committee does not require a record of its meeting proceedings minute by minute. However, it is important to capture the essence of the meeting, including details such as:

- Decisions made
- Identification and tracking of action items
- Next steps planned

It is important to clarify expectations in regard to the type of detail expected within the minutes for the various types of meetings i.e. Board level, Assurance Committees, Sub-Committees, Groups, Task & Finish Groups, Advisory Groups.

The Board or Committee agenda will provide a useful guide or outline for taking notes and preparing the minutes, with the order and numbering of items on the minutes reflective of those on the agenda.

Before taking notes, it is important to understand the type of information that needs to be recorded at the meeting. As a general rule, all meeting minutes will need to include the following:

- Date and time of the meeting, including the mechanism through which it was held (ie in person, virtually, etc)
- Names of the meeting participants and those unable to attend (e.g. apologies)
- Declarations of interests
- Acceptance or corrections/amendments to previous meeting minutes

- Progress on actions from previous meeting
- Decisions made about each agenda item (e.g., actions taken or agreed to be taken, next steps, outcomes)
- Any other business
- Date and time of next meeting.

Use the Health Board's standard minute template customised to the agenda for the meeting. This will make it easier to jot down notes, decisions, etc. under each item as you go along. If you are taking notes by hand, consider including space below each item on the template for your hand-written notes, then print these out and use this to capture minutes.

Before the meeting, ask the Chair to provide a brief summary of the outcomes of discussions, and any decision made, at the end of each agenda item, including any items to be raised for alert, assurance and to advise the Board/parent Committee about. This will not only give attendees the opportunity to agree or suggest amendments to the summary but will also clarify the outcome of discussions for the minute taker.

Checked off attendees as they arrive. If an attendee is not known to the minute taker, through the Chair, it is advisable for everyone to introduce themselves at the start of the meeting or circulate an attendance list that they can check-off themselves.

Record decisions as well as notes on action items as soon as they occur to be sure they are recorded accurately.

Request clarification, if necessary. For example, if discussion on an item moves on without making a decision or an obvious conclusion, it is advised to clarification of the decision and/or next steps involved, e.g. one way this might done would be to say 'Excuse me, but just so that I am clear for the minutes…'

Consider recording the meeting if it will help keep up with note taking. If the meeting is recorded via MS Teams, make participants aware that they are being recorded. The recording can be useful to go back to if clarification is required. The recording should only be retained until the minutes have been approved at the next meeting.

**Process of Minute Writing**

Once the meeting is over, the minute writing process begins.

It is good practice to write the minutes as soon after the meeting as possible whilst everything is fresh. Request protected time for this if necessary.

**Formal minutes** for Board and Committees should follow the below house-style:

- minutes should be written in reported speech, i.e. past tense, and in the conditional mood for future actions (i.e. would and should, rather than will and shall)

- the Board has collective responsibility for its decisions therefore the naming of individuals should be avoided wherever possible.
- minutes should be sequentially numbered for ease of reference.

In addition, formal minutes should:

- **Not be a verbatim record** - They should summarise the key points of discussion and, especially, key challenges that have been raised, but focus on the decision or, in the case of a committee meeting, any recommendation to the board. A decision of the board should be clearly minuted and will usually reflect the recommendation contained in the associated report presented to the Board, e.g. The Board **approved** the …', or record if there were any deviations from this.
- **Record the reasons for the decision and include sufficient background information for future reference** - This will also be useful for those not at the meeting to understand why the board has taken the decision that it has. In simple terms, the purpose of minutes is to record what was done, not what was said, but with sufficient context to give assurance that it was done properly and that, where appropriate, the Board discussed the key arguments for and against a decision, and any stakeholder impacts. If the Board or Committee requires action to be taken, the minutes should make clear who has responsibility for the action, and the date by which it should be completed by, where a deadline has been agreed. There needs to be a balance between detail and brevity that provides a reliable audit trail, notwithstanding background information is usually contained in the Board or Committee papers.
- **Where Board and Committee papers are received and no decision is required** – As a public body, these discussions need to be recorded to demonstrate accountability. Papers should not routinely go to the Board and Committees for 'noting' as they should be active, requiring decisions, or actions or receiving/providing assurance or advice. Minutes should indicate that the relevant report was 'received' (or reviewed, if that is what happened) and its contents were considered'. The minutes should record the recommendation contained in the associated report presented, e.g., 'The Board/Committee received assurance on…'
- **Have a separate Table of Actions** – This should record the minute reference, detailed action, action owner, deadline, etc. along with status. This should be updated before the next meeting and an update Table of Actions should be presented to each meeting as part of the meeting pack and often discussed after the minutes. However, the Committee Secretary should apply a materiality test before recording actions in the minutes. I.e. actions need to be relative and meaningful.
- **Attribute individual contributions** – It is common practice in the public sector to name individuals who make contributions at meetings. This is undertaken to demonstrate that there is clear accountability. Names, as opposed to titles are used throughout, ie Mr John Smith when first used, then referred to as Mr Smith throughout the minutes. It would normally be appropriate to name individuals who:

- present a paper or report to the Board or a Committee.
- ask a specific question.
- make a particularly important or significant comment.
- are charged with specific actions or to whom responsibility has been delegated by the Board.
- have declared a potential or actual conflict of interest or similar.
- abstain from a vote or recuse themselves.
- request that their name be noted as dissenting from a particular decision.
- make a recommendation, provide information or answer a question based on their special expertise on the subject, for example the Chief Executive or Director of Finance
- are the subject of personnel issues under discussion such as appointments, reappointments or resignations, or of discussions on Board Effectiveness.

- **Not contain acronyms and jargon** – Unless clearly defined.

**Action Notes**

For some Group meetings which are less formal than Board or Committees the meeting secretary can produce action notes in replacement for formal minutes and a table of actions. The terms of reference (agenda and papers section) will set out the requirements, which is bespoke to each Group/Sub Group.

Below is an example of the headings used for action logs to record action points from meetings.

| AGENDA ITEM & TITLE | ACTION NOTES | ALERT[1] / ADVISE[2] / ASSURE[3] (delete as applicable) | LEAD | TIMESCALE | PROGRESS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Action notes are usually circulated within five calendar days to members of the meeting.

Action notes should:

- Include a short statement on each agenda item, record each action taken by the Group and a brief explanation of the rationale for any decision made.
- Where there is extensive deliberation before agreement is reached, the major differences of opinion can be summarised.
- Action notes should be edited to ensure brevity and clarity to ensure they are not overly lengthy and easy to read.
- The same tense is written throughout.

**Draft minutes /action notes**

For Board and Committees, a draft Table of Actions should be produced within 2 days to those identified at the meeting in order to for actions to be progressed in a timely manner.

The draft minutes/action notes should be clearly marked as ‘draft’ and circulated in accordance with the timescales set out in their Terms of Reference.

For Board and formal Committees, minutes should be reviewed by the Lead Committee Executive before sharing with members to check on the accuracy and completeness.

**Approval of minutes /action notes**

Following sign off by the Chair, the minutes should be marked as ‘Unapproved’ and uploaded to the Health Board’s website and presented to the next meeting for approval, after which point (and subject to any amendments agreed in the meeting) they are clearly recorded as the ‘approved’ minutes.

**Access to minutes /action notes**

The Health Board’s provides its auditors and regulators with full and unrestricted access to its meeting papers and minutes.

**Publishing minutes**

The Health Board provides complete transparency to Board and Committee meetings by publishing the papers and minutes on its website.