

PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE

MEETING

A meeting is a gathering of persons. Ways have been evolved for conducting meetings efficiently and a reasonably standard procedure has become traditional.

PROCEDURE

The procedure of a meeting is governed by a number of factors:

1. Statute law
2. The organisation's constitution
3. The organisation's standing orders
4. Resolutions passed by the organisation
5. Common law
6. Custom of the organisation
7. Custom of other organisations
8. Rulings by the Chairman

Each of these factors is subject to all those preceding it.

SECRETARY

It is usually convenient for the Secretary to sit next to the Chairman. The Secretary can then assist the Chairman in the effective conduct of the meeting. The Secretary is then also in a prominent position to make various official announcements during the course of the meeting.

AGENDA

It is essential to the efficient conduct of the meeting that the Chairman should have ready access to a detailed agenda paper at all times during the proceedings. This will greatly facilitate the subsequent writing-up of the formal minutes of the meeting. It is also desirable that the members present should have copies.

The agenda can serve both as a notice of meeting and the agenda paper.

FORMS OF ADDRESS

Remarks should always be addressed to the Chairman. The Chairman's title should be used (e.g. Mr President, Mr Chairman) and not his name. A woman in the chair is addressed as Madam Chairman. The audience is addressed as "Ladies", "Gentlemen" or "Ladies and Gentlemen" as appropriate. The singular of "Ladies" is "Madam". The singular of "Gentlemen" is "Sir". Members, if referred to in a speech, should be referred to by their titles.

MANNER OF ADDRESSING MEETING

Whenever a person addresses the meeting, whether to move or speak to a motion or amendment, to ask a question, to take a point of order, to deliver a report, or for any other reason, it should be done standing.

The Chairman need stand only when delivering a report or while introducing a guest speaker.

OPENING STAGES

As soon after the advertised starting time as a quorum is present, the meeting should be formally declared open by the Chairman. The meeting is then said to be constituted. A specific announcement in regard to the quorum is not essential, as the presence of a quorum is implicit in the actions of the Chairman. The Chairman should then welcome the members present, and either specifically or generally welcome visitors. The Chairman should introduce himself/herself and the persons sitting at the official table. If the meeting is to finish at a certain time, the Chairman should remind the meeting of that time limit at this stage.

Any challenge as to the validity of the meeting must be made at this stage.

POINTS OF ORDER

A point of order is taken when a person officially draws the attention of the Chairman to an alleged irregularity in the proceedings.

FORM AND PROCEDURE

The person drawing attention to the alleged irregularity rises and says "I rise to order" or "Point of Order", and then states the incident objected to and reasons for the objection. A point of order must be taken as soon as the alleged irregularity occurs and cannot be taken at any other time. A speaker who has the floor at the time will thus be interrupted.

MATTERS ARISING

Where items arising out of the minutes or the correspondence, or arising out of reports are likely to require detailed discussion they should preferably be listed as separate agenda items in their own right and dealt with at an appropriate later stage of the meeting.

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The agenda paper needs to list motions of which specific notice has been given.

If the proposer of a motion on notice is not present when the motion is reached, or if the proposer then chooses not to proceed with it, then some other person may move the motion. If no other person is willing to move the motion, then it lapses, unless the meeting by procedural motion determines to defer consideration of the matter to another occasion.

APOLOGIES

The Secretary should read out any apologies for non-attendance that have been received, and the chairman should ask whether any other members have sent apologies via those present. It should then be moved: "That the apologies be accepted". As the effect of this motion is to grant leave of absence to the members named, it is open to discussion when it has been seconded. If the meeting does not wish to grant this leave, then the appropriate motion is: "That the apologies be received."

MINUTES

The Secretary should read out the minutes of the last ordinary meeting, and of any extraordinary meetings held since then. It should be moved, separately for each set of minutes: "That the minutes be confirmed. Discussion is in order, but only as to the accuracy of the minutes and not as to the subject matter of the previous meeting. Once the minutes are confirmed they are prima facie evidence of the proceedings recorded. Minutes of general meetings cannot be confirmed by committee meetings and vice versa.

If it is possible to circulate copies of the minutes before the meeting, then this should be done in order to save time.

The confirmed minutes should be signed by the person chairing the meeting which passes the confirming resolution. Any alterations should also be initialled by the Chairman.

If, after minutes have been confirmed, a mistake is discovered, they must on no account be altered. A motion on the lines: "that the date '24 October 1994' on line 7 of the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 1994 be corrected to '24 September 1994' " should be carried and recorded in the normal way in the minutes of the meeting which passed it. A cross-reference should be inserted in the margin of the incorrect minutes.

All minutes must be available for inspection by any member at any reasonable time.

CORRESPONDENCE

The Secretary should read out the correspondence received since the last meeting. The motion "That the correspondence be received" should then be moved and seconded. The effect of this motion is merely to bring the correspondence officially before the meeting, and virtually no other motion is possible, although, in the case of a letter framed in offensive language or otherwise unacceptable, an amendment to the effect that the letter be not received could be appropriate and would serve to dispose of the letter permanently. Apart from such an amendment, no discussion should take place at this stage. The Secretary should also read out the correspondence originated by the body since the last meeting. No motion is required, although a motion approving or disapproving the sending of any of the letters involved would be in order.

Only non-routine correspondence should actually be read to the meeting. Routine correspondence whether inward or outward can be either tabled at general meetings or circulated at committee meetings. If leave of the meeting is given, the Secretary can, instead of reading out long letters in full, present just a brief summary of their main points.

BUSINESS ARISING OUT OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

If any action is required as a result of the correspondence then appropriate motions (separately for each item) should be moved. Mere receipt does not give rise to any change in status.

The Chairman can stipulate appropriate motions by asking, in respect of each letter: "What is the pleasure of the meeting in regard to this matter?"

TREASURER'S REPORT

At each meeting a brief financial statement should be given. The Treasurer should move: "That the report be adopted." This motion, when seconded, permits questions to the Treasurer as well as a general discussion on finance. An amendment to alter the motion to "That the report be received" may be in order.

ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT

Accounts requiring payment should be presented by the Treasurer or by some other member who has incurred or desires to incur liability on behalf of the body. The appropriate motion is: "That the accounts as presented be passed for payment". The minutes should set out details of the accounts concerned.

If it is desired to authorise expenditure for, say, a 12-month period, then a suitable budget should be presented to the meeting. Preferably such a document should be in writing and circulated in advance. The motion would be: " That the budget for the year ended 30 June 1994 be adopted." Such a motion, if passed authorises the incurring of expenditure up to the limit shown under each heading; further amounts would require further authorisation.

MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Motions of which notice was given should be moved in the order in which notice was given.

If the proposer of a motion on notice is not present when the motion is reached, or if the proposer then chooses not to proceed with it, then some other person may move the motion unless the rules specifically prohibit such a course of action. If no other person is willing to move the motion, then it lapses, unless the meeting by procedural motion determines to defer consideration of the matter to another occasion or to a time when the originator of the proposal will be present.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Any matter not otherwise dealt with can be raised under this heading.

MEETINGS BIND FUTURE MEETINGS

The decisions made by a general meeting of an organisation remain in force and govern future meetings, but only until varied.

CONTRIBUTIONS BY ABSENT MEMBERS

If members absent from a meeting desire to make their views known at that meeting then they should appoint a suitable proxy for this purpose. Alternatively, or in addition, they can send to the chairman, or to some other member, a letter setting out their views and requesting that the letter be read out at the appropriate stage of the proceedings. Such letters can, at the discretion of the Chairman, be read to the meeting.

MOTIONS

A *resolution* is a formal determination by an organised meeting. A *motion* is a proposed resolution before it has been adopted.

A *procedural motion* is one dealing with the conduct of the meeting itself. A *substantive motion* is one ordering something to be done by the meeting.

A motion must start with "That . . . ". A motion should not use the first person, nor should it contain more than one sentence. A motion can, however, consist of several parts, i.e. several actions. A motion must not be ambiguous. A motion must be within the power of the meeting to perform.

MOVER

A mover is always deemed to have spoken to the motion and cannot "reserve" a right to speak later. A substantive motion purporting to be moved by a person not having the call (recognition by the Chairman) is not valid.

If the motion is not on the agenda paper, then the Chairman should insist, unless the motion is formal or very simple, that it be in writing. This expedites procedure by ensuring greater accuracy of interpretation of the motion.

Motions, other than ones to receive or adopt an official report from the person occupying the chair should not be moved from the chair.

SECONDER

When the mover has concluded, the Chairman should call for a seconder. The purpose of seconding a motion is to establish that there is prima facie support for the proposal. If no seconder is forthcoming, then the Chairman must declare the motion lapsed for want of a seconder and proceed to the next business.

After seconding the motion the seconder can either speak in support of the motion immediately, or can defer their remarks by reserving their right to speak later. A seconder loses the right to move amendments.

OTHER SPEAKERS

The Chairman should next ask for a speaker against the motion and subsequently for alternative speakers for and against as far as possible. Not more than, say, two speakers for either side should be allowed.

REPLY

The mover may, if desired, speak a second time. In exercising this "right of reply" the mover automatically closes the debate. Other persons are not permitted to make more than one speech per question each. No new matter may be introduced in the reply.

PUTTING THE QUESTION

The Chairman must then put the motion to the vote.

REMARKS

The Chairman should ensure that all remarks are relevant to the motion before the meeting and are not substantially repetitions of remarks made earlier in the debate. All remarks should be addressed to the Chairman and should be loud enough to be heard in all parts of the meeting room.

AMENDMENTS

An amendment is an alteration or proposed alteration to the terms of a motion, designed to improve the motion without contradicting it. The amendment must be relevant to the motion. The amendment must not go beyond the scope of the notice convening the meeting. An amendment must not so alter the substantial nature of the motion that it results in a motion relating to an entirely different subject.

PROCEDURAL MOTIONS

Procedural motions deal with the conduct of the meeting itself. The meeting can have only one substantive motion under discussion at any one time. However, the meeting can also have before it a procedural motion, and, if that is moved, then it serves to interrupt the debate on the substantive motion, as procedural motions take precedence (Calls for a quorum, points of order and personal explanations can interrupt discussion on both substantive and procedural motions, as they take precedence over both.)

A person moving a procedural motion does not require the Chairman's call. The closure can be moved while a speaker has the floor, and so can motions affecting the speaker. Procedural motions cannot be moved immediately after the mover of a motion has exercised the right of reply or while a vote is being taken.

Motions to dispose of the business before the chair, other than motions to adjourn the meeting itself, can be moved only by persons who have not moved, seconded or spoken to the substantive motion or to any amendment thereto.

PROCEDURAL MOTION DISPOSING OF BUSINESS PERMANENTLY

"That the question be now put."

"That the meeting proceed to the next business."

PROCEDURAL MOTIONS DISPOSING OF BUSINESS TEMPORARILY

"That this matter be referred to a committee."

"That the question lie on the table."

"That the debate be adjourned."

ADJOURNING THE MEETING

The Chairman can adjourn a meeting without requiring a specific motion to that effect from the floor when:

- (a) All business has been concluded.
- (b) The time for adjournment has been reached.
- (c) The meeting is excessively disorderly and order cannot be restored.
- (d) The quorum lapses.
- (e) In order to take a poll (secret ballot).