

PART VI

CONCLUSIONS AND MINUTES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. These notes are prepared for the guidance of those upon whom may fall the responsibility of preparing minutes of official meetings and to indicate to members of such meetings the principles behind the preparation of the minutes. They are intended mainly for those concerned in the preparation of Conclusions of Cabinet and minutes of Committees of Cabinet but they are to a large extent applicable to the preparation of the record of any official meeting.

2. As stated previously, the decisions of Cabinet are called "Conclusions" and minutes of Cabinet Committees are called "Minutes", though in this note the word minute is used from time to time in reference to Cabinet Conclusions for simplicity, particularly where it is necessary to differentiate between the discussion on an item and the actual Conclusion on which action is to be taken.

3. That the value of a meeting depends on the decisions reached at it, is particularly true when the meeting is responsible for some aspect of Government administration. The time and effort of important busy people attending such a meeting can be wasted if the decisions reached are not adequately recorded and follow-up action ensured. There can be other forms of meeting held for the purpose of exchanging views or to clear up misunderstandings. These notes are not concerned with such meetings but are for the purpose of assisting in the process of good government by meetings of persons who have a public duty to perform.

4. A good minute should be:
- (a) brief
 - (b) self-contained
 - (c) in the main impersonal, and
 - (d) decisive

5. Brevity should be sought in two ways. First, a minute should be selective. It is not a substitute for a verbatim record and should not attempt to reproduce, however summarily, what speakers said. It should record only the essence of the discussion picking up the main threads which lead to the Conclusion. Secondly, the points selected for inclusion in the minute should be recorded as briefly as possible. Any striking phrases used in the discussion may be recorded as this will help to reflect the tone of the meeting but no attempt should be made to set out the course of the arguments as they are put forward by the speakers, as this will tend to an unnecessarily diffuse style.

6. A minute should be self-contained as regards each particular item so that an official receiving an extract of that item, read with the memorandum on which it was based, will know clearly what action to take.

7. To the fullest extent permissible a minute should be impersonal. This applies especially to Cabinet Conclusions because Cabinet is collectively responsible for the decisions it reaches but at the same time Ministers must be able to air their views freely for and against a course of action, if need be, while the subject is under consideration.

8. A minute should be as crisp and decisive as possible. This is specially important for the Conclusions but applies also to the record of the discussion. The essential core of the discussion should be recorded as briefly and as clearly as possible.

11. Structure of a Minute

9. The first purpose of a minute is to set out the conclusions reached so that those who have to take action will know what they have to do. The second is to give the reasons why the conclusions were reached. A minute on any item should, therefore, fall clearly into three parts:

- (a) the statement of the problem
- (b) points in discussion
- (c) conclusion

10. A Secretary has a duty not only to record but to clarify the results of a meeting. In drafting minutes it is a good rule to work backwards and to set out first the conclusions reached. Even if a discussion may have been somewhat rambling and precise decisions were not expressed in so many words it is the Secretary's responsibility to interpret the intentions of the meeting. It is only after the decisions have been set down in a precise form should the Secretary how much of the discussion needs to be recorded and in what order it can best be arranged.

11. The essential aspect of a minute on any subject takes the form of the inset conclusions at the end of the item. These conclusions must not only set down crisply the decisions but must indicate the Minister or other person responsible for carrying them out.

12. A style to be avoided is one in which decisions are lost in a discursive manner within the narrative. Decisions reached must be pulled out and set down as conclusions in the manner indicated so that there is no doubt about what action should be taken and by whom.

There may be occasions when separate aspects of a problem are dealt with serially. In such a cast it may be found convenient to set down a brief narrative, then an inset conclusion, then narrative and conclusion and so on, instead of having all the conclusions grouped together at the end of the item.

III. Statement of the Problem

13. Subjects taken in Cabinet are, with rare exceptions, considered on the basis of a memorandum by the responsible Minister setting out the basic facts and arguments, points for consideration and usually with a recommendation for action.

14. The minute on each item should begin by recording the memorandum or memoranda under discussion, thus

"Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Minister of Transport (CO (95) 102",
or, if there were in addition a related memorandum it could be

"Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Minister of Transport, (CO (95) 102 and had before it memorandum by the Minister of Public Works, CO (95) 119".

If there were several memoranda on a complicated subject, which were considered together, they could be listed thus

"Cabinet had before it the following memoranda on the development of the Family Islands:"

CO (95) 106 Memorandum by the Prime Minister

CO (95) 109 Memorandum by the Minister of Transport

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CO (95) III Memorandum by the Minister of Public Works

CO (95) 113 Note by the Secretary circulating a Report by Messrs. Alpha, Beta and Gamma".

15. In preparing the Minutes of a Committee, when a subject is considered without the benefit of a memorandum and also when this occurs on rare occasions in Cabinet, the record should begin with a brief statement showing what the discussion was about. When there is no memorandum, particularly at a committee meeting which is exploring a subject, the record of the discussion may well have to be much longer than would be usual in Cabinet which is setting out to reach decisions.

IV. Points in Discussion

16. Most discussions begin with a statement by the author of the memorandum under consideration, who either summarises or enlarges upon his memorandum. It is unnecessary to record statements and arguments which are set out in the memorandum, but any additional facts of importance put forward verbally should be recorded.

17. It must be remembered that a Cabinet, or a Committee or a Government Board, is not a public debating chamber, in which members seek to edify or impress the outside world with information or views; it is a group of persons seeking, in an informal manner, to reach solutions to problems.

18. The ideal minute, on a complicated subject, after stating the problem for discussion, should proceed:

"The following points were raised in discussion:

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

and will set out, in separate lettered paragraphs, a concise summary of the various points made before the conclusion was reached.

19. The style "A said ____, B replied ____, C then pointed out" should be avoided at all costs. To the fullest extent possible this part of the minute should be impersonal. The main reason for this rule is, that the responsibility of Cabinet is collective and all Ministers must uphold a decision once reached but be free to put forward any views in the search for a solution. Secondly, it makes for brevity, and a point can usually be recorded more concisely in an impersonal form. Thirdly, a point raised by one speaker is often taken up and developed by others; in an impersonal minute it need only be recorded in its final form. If it is attributed to the original speaker it will have to have the comments added and be restated. Fourthly, it is often convenient to weld together into a single paragraph a number of points made by various speakers. Finally, a statement attributed to a particular speaker may invite requests for additions or modifications to the minutes which are not strictly necessary for the purpose of the conclusions.

20. As an alternative to the listing of points made in the manner suggested above the discussion could be recorded on the following lines:

"On this question there was some difference of view. Some members felt that ____:
others took the view that ____"

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or the discussion may conveniently be recorded on this basis:

"In support of this proposal the following arguments were used:"

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(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

On the other hand it was pointed out that:

(d) _____

(e) _____

(f) _____

21. It is often inexpedient to reproduce the points in discussion in the order in which they are made. The points in discussion should be arranged in the logical order in which they lead up to the conclusion. The irrelevant and the non-essential should be discarded. Much said in a discussion need not be recorded.

22. Other useful phrases are "Cabinet then discussed _____ ; Cabinet then considered _____"; "In a short discussion doubts were expressed _____ "the general view taken was that _____"; "In discussion attention was drawn to the need _____";

23. In a straightforward matter in which a Minister's recommendations in his memorandum are accepted there is usually no need for any record of the discussion to be set down. The same thing applies to a complicated matter in which the arguments for and against are fully set out in the memorandum and the discussion consists of a thrashing out of those arguments.

24. There are occasions when it is necessary to attribute views to persons. So far as Cabinet is concerned this would apply when the author of a memorandum under discussion provides additional information which would be of value to record; when a Minister, not the author of a memorandum needs to put forward the official or technical views of his Ministry on a subject; and on the occasions in which Cabinet invites some outsider to attend and express his observations.

25. The impersonal form would not always be suitable for the minutes of a meeting of a negotiating committee or of a conference.

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26. General speaking, when a subject is discussed on a properly documented memorandum and the conclusions are full and have been carefully drafted, points raised in discussion need only be recorded if new facts which are worth setting down are brought forward; or if the discussion would help the persons responsible for carrying out the decisions; or if it appears desirable to show for future reference. the arguments that lead up to the Conclusions.

V. Conclusions

27. A minute on each item should end with conclusions which are clear and precise so that those who have to act on them know exactly what to do. Decisions reached may at times be perfectly clear but on other occasions, when there has been a long and diffuse discussion it may not be so and it is the duty of the Secretary to draft a set of Conclusions which expresses the sense of the meeting. In carrying out his duty to clarify as well as to record the results of a meeting a Secretary has the obligation to interpret the intentions of the meeting. Secretaries should not shirk this function, which is a valuable administrative duty, but neither should they frame Conclusions which go beyond what is implicit in the discussion. When in doubt reference can always be made to the Chairman. It is, for example, not easy to draft a form of words around a table and unnecessary time can be taken up attempting to do so but the Secretaries can put what is needed into words immediately after the meeting. In preparing the Conclusions it is most important to check with the memorandum under discussion to make sure that all the points raised in it requiring a decision are covered.

28. Where action is required the Conclusion should place the responsibility clearly on the Minister or official who is to carry it out. If several persons or departments are concerned the Conclusion should name them all but be careful to indicate with whom the initiative should rest.

29. To make them stand out as clearly as possible it is usually convenient to divide the Conclusions into their constituent parts, putting each into a separate paragraph. The following are examples:

"Cabinet

- (1) authorised the Minister of Finance and Planning to
- (2) invited, the Minister of Health and Environment to
- (3) requested the Attorney General to draft
- (4) instructed the Secretary to arrange
- (5) invited the Minister of Education and Training, in conjunction with the Minister of Public Works, to examine and to put forward recommendations to Cabinet for _____
- (6) appointed a committee composed of
 - (a) Minister of Youth and Culture
 - (b) Minister of Social Development
 - (c) Minister of Health and Environment
 - (d) Minister of Transport

with the following terms of reference

- (i) _____
- (ii) _____
- (iii) _____

VI. Notation of Minutes

30 Each item will be separately numbered 1, 2, etc. Ordinary paragraphs setting out the discussion under each item will not be numbered. Conclusions, within one item, should be numbered (1), (2), etc. If a subdivision is needed under one conclusion small Roman numerals should be used (i), (ii), etc. Thus will be provided a clear notation of decisions reached at any one meeting.

31. Points raised in discussion should be lettered (a), (b), (c) as indicated in paragraph 21 above. The lettering should be carried on consecutively throughout the discussion of one item.

32. A Committee would be allocated three letters for reference and a similar notation would apply, e.g., SAC (95) 17th Meeting, Minute 5(3).

VII. Extraneous Subjects

33. If a matter quite irrelevant to the subject under discussion is raised there is no obligation to record it because it can only cause confusion. Also, if the practice is followed it is not helpful to the Chairman as it can lead to the encouragement of the introduction of extraneous subjects not on the Agenda without the opportunity for consideration of all the facts.

34. Occasions do arise, however, when, as quite a genuine outcome of a discussion on one subject, a definite decision is made on a different subject which should be recorded. When that happens it can usually be of advantage to set the decision down quite separately under its own heading as another item in the Conclusions. This makes the extract simpler to produce and makes indexing easier for future reference.

VII. Voting and Dissent from Decisions

35. Cabinet reaches decisions by informed discussion and, because of the collective responsibility of Cabinet, all Ministers must publicly support any decisions reached. Conclusions are therefore arrived at on the basis of the general feeling of the meeting and voting should seldom be necessary. Should, on rare occasions, the Prime Minister decide to take a vote to avoid a deadlock and get on with business, the Secretary would not record the vote but merely record the decision reached and without indication that it was reached by a majority.

36. Similarly, should a Minister disagree with a decision of Cabinet, he has no right to have his dissent recorded because that would be incompatible with collective responsibility. He must accept the decision of the majority or resign. The Minister may, on resignation, wish to ask the Prime Minister's permission to explain his disagreement and the reasons for his resignation to Parliament.

IX. Headings

37. Each subject discussed at a meeting should be recorded under a separate heading. When a subject is discussed on the basis of a memorandum the heading would normally correspond with the title of the memorandum but this need not necessarily be so. The heading should be chosen by thinking of the title a person might be expected to look for when searching the record in the future. The proper criterion in choosing a heading for a Cabinet Conclusion is "How will the conclusion best be entered in the index and be most easily traced in the future?"

38. The main subject of discussion should be set out in block capitals. If necessary, a short description of the special topic may be added, not in block capitals, for example:

HARBOUR DEVELOPMENT: Extension of dredging area

39. Occasionally when two matters have separate titles but are related, it is found convenient to take them together. Then the minute could have two headings.

40. Although a Bill should, generally speaking, be most conveniently referred to by the short title, e.g., Quietening Titles Bill, when a draft Bill is before Cabinet it is useful to put

the word Bill first in the heading so that it stands out for subsequent action in getting the Bill introduced into Parliament, thus

BILL TO AMEND THE TRAFFIC ACT (CH-204)

Whenever an Act is mentioned in a heading or for the first time in a document it should be given its Chapter number, if it is in a bound volume, or its number and year if enacted subsequently to law revision. This saves the time of anyone who wishes to refer to the law.

41. Cabinet Conclusions would never have headings such as "Other Matters" "Matters arising from minutes of previous meetings". Apart from other objections, this makes difficulties for the indexer and even greater difficulties for anyone who tries to search for a reference without access to the index. In any case, no such titles would ever appear on the Agenda.

42. The number of the file from which the Memorandum under discussion was prepared would be quoted immediately below the title in the heading. This helps to ensure that the extract gets into the right file. At times, it may be helpful to quote more than one file.

X. Previous References

43. A reference to a previous decision on the subject by the Government in office should always be quoted, if there has been one, immediately below the heading. This assists indexing and subsequent reference to the Conclusions as a permanent record and helps in the logical follow-up of action on the particular subject. The reference will always be to an earlier Conclusion rather than to an earlier memorandum because it is the decision that matters. A previous memorandum can always be traced from a previous Conclusion but not the other way round. Also decisions in the Conclusion may have differed from recommendations in the previous memorandum.

44. If Cabinet considers the report of a Committee of Cabinet and the minutes of that Committee have been circulated and given reference numbers the relevant notation of the Committee minutes could be quoted as previous reference in the Cabinet Conclusion.

XI. Front Page

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45. The front page should contain the meeting reference number, the time, date and place of the meeting, a list of the members present, the names of the Secretaries and the names of persons who may have been invited to be present for particular items.

46. The title of the Prime Minister, or Chairman, would be shown at the top Centre of the list of those present followed by the name and office of members in two columns in order of precedence. With Ministers, the name would be put first, followed by their office; with officials the office would be put first then the name. Decorations are not added in minutes of Cabinet or of a Committee though they would be in a list of those attending a more formal meeting such as a Conference.

There is no need to record the names of persons absent; though if a member is present for only part of a meeting it would be noted against his name, thus: (items 5 to II).

Xii. Contents Table

47. The headings, excluding the previous references, of the various items in a set of Conclusions should be brought together into a Table of Contents which should form the second page of the Conclusions. If only a few items are considered at a special meeting or at a meeting of a Committee the list of contents could appear at the bottom of the first page.

CONTENTS

Item	Subject	Page
1.	Bill to Amend the Customs Acts	2
2.	House of Assembly Business	3
3.	Hospital Extension	5

The inclusion of such a Table of Contents makes it much easier to find a subject dealt with at a meeting.

48. The number of the meeting in the year, e.g., "5th Meeting", should be reproduced at the top right hand corner of every page so that when a search is subsequently made the record of the meeting that is sought can easily be found when flipping through a bound volume of Conclusions.

XIII. Production of Minutes

49. The aim in the production of minutes should be to ensure that they are prepared and distributed as quickly as possible after a meeting. Secretaries should take the attitude that the meeting and the preparation of the minutes are all part of one continuous process. First, there are occasions when early action is necessary on Cabinet decisions that cannot properly be taken until the Conclusions are circulated and extracts made. Secondly, it is important to put decisions and arguments on record while the matter is fresh in the mind. Brief notes taken at a meeting can have immediate meaning directly after a meeting. Any delay between a meeting and the drafting of the minutes can mean that important points may be lost or even extraneous ideas may intrude. Thirdly, it can happen that persons present at a meeting can unconsciously have after-thoughts in terms of their own view- points which may become crystallised if there is a delay before they see the minutes. Also, an early distribution of the minutes gives members an opportunity to verify the correctness of the record while the particular meeting is still fresh in their minds.

50. Immediately after a Cabinet meeting, work in the Cabinet Office in the preparation of the Conclusions must take priority over all other business. This applies to the secretaries and to all persons engaged in the reproduction and circulation of the Conclusions and subsequent distribution of the extracts to Ministries. Any delay in the completion of the Conclusions and issue of the extracts holds up the process of important Government business.

51. The Conclusions of Cabinet are issued on the responsibility of the Secretary and are taken as final unless a member of Cabinet makes a request to the Secretary within 48 hours for addition or amendment. If an amendment is found to be needed a

corrigendum will be issued. In case of doubt or disagreement the Secretary will take the instructions of the Prime Minister or the Chairman of the meeting. Minutes are not brought up for confirmation at the next meeting; that wastes time, invites a rehash of old arguments and in any case in important urgent matters the responsible Minister will probably have taken action before the next meeting. If there is serious disagreement about a Conclusion of Cabinet the subject should be considered on its own as a separate item on the Agenda of a subsequent meeting on a substantive memorandum.

52. These principles apply, though to a less rigid extent, to the minutes of a formal Committee of Cabinet because a Cabinet Committee would normally be meeting with the object of making recommendations or of submitting a report to Cabinet.

53. The Secretary to the Cabinet, though he may not have been present at a meeting of a Committee of Cabinet, should scrutinise the minutes prepared by a Committee of Cabinet before circulation.

XIV. Preparation for a-Meeting

54. The Secretary should have prepared for himself and for the Chairman sets of memoranda for a meeting. There is much advantage in using a plain manila folder for each item which can contain the memorandum and any previous papers, maps, minutes or a file that may be required for that subject.

55. A Secretary can only be of value if he knows as much as possible about the subjects to be discussed; only thus can he spot what is pertinent and relevant, intelligently interpret the discussion and disregard what is irrelevant.

56. A Secretary going into a meeting of Cabinet should have as much of the routine necessary for the preparation of the minutes ready in advance. For example, a copy of the Front Page should be at hand; it will only need brief amendment if a Minister is absent or if an official is invited to attend for a particular item. The headings, with previous references, for each item should be prepared beforehand to save having to prepare and check such details afterwards. The more that can be done in this respect in preparation before a meeting the less time is wasted after a meeting over the drafting of the Conclusions by having to deal with routine matters.

57. The Secretary should ensure that there is available for easy access at any Cabinet Meeting an up to date set of the Laws (preferable two sets), copies of the Constitution, General Orders and a calendar.

58. The Prime Minister would sit at the centre of one of the long sides of the table as that enables him to have closer contact with a greater number of Ministers than he would have if he were in relative isolation at one end. The Secretary sits on the Prime Minister's right so that he can, if necessary, draw the Prime Minister's attention to any relevant matter without openly joining in the meeting and be in an easy position to hear what is going on. The Secretary is the one person who should not be disturbed in order that he may give his whole concentration to what is discussed and not miss anything that may be relevant to the issue. He would always have at least one assistant with him so that they can check their results afterwards and speed the production of the Conclusions and so that, at the meeting, if anything needs to be fetched or a message brought in, the trend of the discussion is not broken by the temporary absence of the Secretary.

XV. Conferences and Other Committee Meetings

59. The foregoing guide applies primarily to Cabinet and to Cabinet Committee§ but much of it is applicable to the preparation of minutes of other Government meetings. There may, however, be a need for a particular modification in regard to attributing views to individual speakers. A statutory board or a committee is not collectively responsible and therefore the principle of the impersonal style in recording a discussion may in parts have to be abandoned.

60. The Cabinet Office staff might, for example, have to serve as the Secretariat for a conference which does not have collective responsibility but which is a meeting place of persons representing conflicting views seeking to reach a solution to problems affecting the community. The format and method of notation of the minutes of such a conference could follow the patterns set out above with the exception that, where advisable, views should be attributed to individuals. Also Cabinet principle of not recording dissent would not apply.

61. A note of the names of those present, the discussion and conclusions reached at any form of official meeting should always be recorded in writing. If the meeting is with officers of the same Ministry or Department, it may be sufficient merely to make a note of the meeting by a Minute on the relevant file. Should the meeting be attended by officers of other Ministries or Departments or by other persons, brief minutes should be recorded and be distributed to those attending and to any other persons who may require to be informed.