

A BRIEF GUIDE TO COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

Many committees that have been established formally have their own Standing Orders for meetings. These set out the details of how meetings are conducted: eg how many people are needed for a quorum (for decisions to be valid); whether motions for debate have to be circulated in advance.

These notes cover some of the main points of standard committee procedure. There will be some additions for any given committee, depending on the committee's normal practice, or the detail of the Standing Orders.

Inquorate meetings

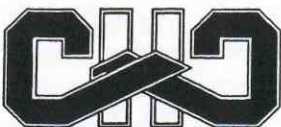
A meeting is inquorate if there aren't enough people there entitled to vote. If there are Standing Orders, these will specify how many this is: eg one-third of the members. Decisions made at an inquorate meeting don't have any validity. They can, however, be brought forward to the next quorate meeting to be ratified or changed.

If you have noticed that the meeting may be inquorate, and the Chair has not, you can raise this by a Point of Order.

Points of Order

A Point of Order is a way of drawing everyone's attention to the way the meeting is being conducted. It can be raised at any time, except when the Chair is speaking. Examples of valid Points of Order are: that there isn't a quorum; that the meeting shouldn't be discussing a particular point which is beyond its terms of reference (*ultra vires*); that the point being discussed belongs later on the agenda. A Point of Order can also be used by a member who feels s/he has been attacked and wants the right to reply.

You can raise a Point of Order simply by saying: "Point of Order, Chair," followed by a very brief statement of the point you're making. The Chair will rule whether it's valid.



Motions

When someone proposes a motion, s/he is asking the meeting to concentrate on a particular point, and vote on it. This is the main way of getting a formal meeting to make a decision.

All motions have to have a proposer and a seconder before they can be discussed. If the motion has been circulated beforehand, the paper will probably include the names of the proposer and seconder.

If it is proposed on the spot, the proposer will need to work out a form of words for the committee to vote on. S/he will read this out, and the Chair will ask for a seconder. If no-one seconds the motion, it falls.

Once the motion has been proposed and seconded it can be discussed. If the proposer hasn't given his/her reasons when proposing the motion, s/he can do so now. If there is an obvious 'opposition' (eg, another political party), they will then have time to oppose the motion. Then the debate opens out.

The debate may end with the proposer and opposer responding to what's been said; or it may go straight to the vote.

Amendments

An amendment is a change to a motion that's under discussion. Amendments can't be taken (discussed) until the original motion has been proposed and seconded.

An amendment has to go through the same process as the motion: proposed, seconded, discussed. If the amendment is complicated, the Chair or the proposer of the amendment may read out the motion as amended, so that everyone can understand what difference it makes.

The amendment is voted on before the motion. If it's passed, the meeting then votes on the motion as amended. If it fails, the vote is on the original motion.

The Chair may rule that something isn't an amendment, if it says the opposite of the original motion: ie, if the motion as amended would contradict what was first proposed.