



## JOINING THE CLUB COMMITTEE

This article has been sent to us by a club member who wishes to remain anonymous in his first year of being elected to his Club Committee. It gives some insight into what a member may see and hear when joining the committee and above all spotlights the help given by the Secretary of his Club.

Secretary At Work: February 1998 *(reviewed August 2011)*

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My first session as a committee member was some fifteen years ago which lasted precisely two years and left me very disillusioned with committee life. So when I was approached by the Club Chairman and asked if I would consider letting my name go forward for election to the committee my initial reaction was to say “not at any price”. However because the Club Chairman was a personal friend and he assured me that things had changed I felt I should at least make some enquiries as to what happened these days.

My previous spell had encountered committee meetings starting at about eight and finishing beyond midnight, with very few decisions ever made and the club going from crisis to crisis. Over the past seven years however, since the committee size had been reduced along with the appointment of a full time Secretary/Manager, there had been not only a period of stability within the Club but also a general feeling of well-being. Improvements to both the course and clubhouse during this period plus the fact that subscriptions had not risen out of proportion suggested perhaps that the problems I encountered some years ago no longer existed.

My first visit was to the Secretary’s Office to ascertain some facts. This resulted in me being given a paper explaining the duties expected of a member of the committee and short précis as to how the committee system operated. The Management Committee now consisted of nine elected members who served three years before having to seek re-election plus the three Officers of the Club namely the Captain, Vice Captain and Hon. Treasurer. There was no limit on the number of years committee members could serve other than they had to seek re-election every three years. Hence the current Club Chairman would soon be starting his fourth year as Chairman and sixth year on the Committee. The Club had two sub-committees namely Green and House and in both cases the Chairman had served three and four years.

Management meetings were held every two months making six during the year and the sub-committees met quarterly. Apart from any emergency meetings I would be expected to attend

some ten meetings during the year. Dates of all meetings were fixed at the first meeting so that one could plan ahead as each member was expected to, at the worst, miss no more than one meeting. Also as a committee member one was expected to attend at all main events at the Club such as the Annual Club Dinner, Captain's Dinner, Club Championship, Open Meetings and Annual General Meeting etc. In the event of the Club staging a National/County meeting Pro Am then committee members would be expected to help out in the capacity of starters, referees, stewards etc.

I found the Secretary most helpful in my quest for information and my general impression was that the Club was run in far more professional manner than it was some ten years ago. So consequently I allowed my name to go forward and was duly elected at the Annual General Meeting.

The first meeting of the Committee was held two weeks after the AGM and after re-election of the Chairman the appointments were made to the two sub-committees. I found myself a member of the Green Committee which suited me as I felt I could contribute more in this area than House. Prior to the first meeting of the Green Committee the Secretary sent me copies of minutes of meetings for the past year along with a copy of the Course Policy Document. I remember this being introduced soon after the Chairman was appointed but must confess I did not attend a meeting of the Club Members when it was approved.

This document laid out the policy for the course and had the great advantage of preventing future Captains or Committees making unilateral decisions on the golf course without getting the approval of the membership. Certainly in years gone by the Club had suffered as the result of decisions taken on the course without going into the matter properly. It also made quite clear that the day to day decisions on the course would be taken by the Course Manager and the Secretary who would only refer to the Green Chairman when matters dictated this. None of the committee members were allowed to give any directions to the staff and could only make suggestions through the Chairman of the sub-committee. This avoided situations which had arisen in the past when staff never knew from which direction instructions might come and these could often be countermanded by the next person.

The first meeting of the Green Committee was duly held and the Agenda was conducted along the following lines:

- ⌘ Approve Minutes of previous Meeting
- ⌘ Matters Arising
- ⌘ Course Manager's Report
- ⌘ Secretary/Manager's Report
- ⌘ Chairman's Review of Course Budget
- ⌘ Any other Business

What impressed me greatly straight away was the professionally produced reports from the Course Manager and Secretary. These covered all the work carried out on the course and other

matters in a most thorough manner. They included a brief summary from the time sheets of work done and time taken and differences due to climatic conditions. Such was the technical matter that I found most of the points I wished to raise had been covered.

The Chairman reviewed the current budget and also pointed out expenditure which would be incurred over the next few months. He also covered major items on the course which might be incurred in future years and asked for our views at future meetings on priorities.

Another item that had changed over the years was that competitions and social events were the responsibility of the Captain, Vice Captain and Ladies Captain who co-opted members onto their committee to help out. This had the effect of removing these items from the responsibility of the Management Committee who could then concentrate on management of the club and not get way-laid by these items.

The Chairman, since taking over some five years ago, had introduced a committee rule that no decisions were made except on items actually on the agenda. Any matters brought up under any other business or at any other point in the meeting were referred to the appropriate sub-committee for their next meeting. This greatly reduced the possibility of bad decisions being made late at night when everyone was tired and just wanted to get home. During my first year back on the committee the longest meeting I attended lasted just five minutes over two hours and the average was about one hour and forty five minutes. With the meetings starting at 6.00 p.m., this meant I could comfortably arrange for my wife to have our dinner ready for 8.30 p.m. knowing I could make it with ease. I found the whole atmosphere at committee meetings businesslike but relaxed and everybody seemed to be working for the overall benefit of the club rather than the interests of certain sections of the club.

Like many private members clubs we had suffered a drop in green fees when new clubs built in the area opened for play. This had also initially cleared our waiting list but applications for membership had started to increase with many applications coming from those at nearby proprietary clubs who felt that they would like to join a private club. Through a tight but sensible control of finances the club had not suffered as a result of this loss of income, part of it had been overcome by a small rise in members. The agreement to increase the limit by 40 more members, which had taken some two and half years to achieve, had meant that now our subscription income was some £25,000 above the level it would have been had we kept the membership at the previous level. Although this move, when it was decided some two and half years ago, had provoked some criticism from members its impact on the course had been minimal.

The club now has just over 700 playing members of all categories and apart from competition days does not need to operate a starting sheet. It has also phased out the discounts given to both retired members and ladies. All full playing members regardless of age or sex pay the same which, according to the Secretary and Treasurer, has resulted in the subscriptions being some 10% lower for full members than they would be under the old system. The vast majority of members had accepted this and in the case of the ladies they still played their competitions with tee reservations on a weekday and accepted that when the men had a competition at the weekend

they had the tee reserved. One result of this was that there was a better mixing of the members and many of the competitions we played allowed entries from both sexes.

To sum up my first year, I would suggest that the actual size of the committee is not necessarily the be all and end all. You need to have a clear cut management policy at the club starting with the Secretary/Manager and Heads of Department. With that in place, the actual committee members themselves are able to concentrate on the future planning and keeping an overall eye on the club.

The selection of the Club Chairman is most important you need a person who can control and chair meetings without being a dictator. Once you get the right person then try to avoid changing too often and follow the same pattern for the sub-committees. Working right, no committee meeting should ever exceed two hours and certainly should finish comfortably inside that time. Avoid meetings late at night because people get tired and argumentative and never allow alcohol at meetings. The more of this consumed the longer the meeting takes and worse the decisions taken become.

Never allow a vote on any matter that has not been through the correct procedures. See that for the golf course you have a Course Policy Document in place and that everybody knows this and ensure that it is adhered to. Follow these guidelines and your time on the committee will not only be enjoyable but will bring benefit to the club.

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