



How you can influence committee meetings

Paul Worster, recently elected onto the board of FEGGA, takes a look at Golf Club Committee Meetings and states how, by helping to steer them, the Greenkeeper can become more central to the needs of the golf club business in today's difficult times

Recently, I've heard of many greenkeepers coming under severe pressure or even being made redundant, but I want to see the greenkeeper increasingly becoming regarded as the most important figure in the club structure; the person to who the club look to for leadership, especially in difficult times.

I'm aware of what can sometimes go wrong in Committee and Board Meetings and I'd like to look at how the Greenkeeper/Manager can not only avoid the pitfalls, but start to take charge.

Last year, I attended an evening to recognise the environmental success achieved by a famous club in the South of the UK. About 40 delegates enjoyed several presentations charting the progress of various environmental initiatives and discussed the issues encountered along the way.

However, during the Q&As a visiting Secretary stood up. "This is all fine and good" he said, "but it's only working well here because this club wants it to work. At my club, I've spent six months working with my Course Manager, Catering Manager and Pro to form an Environmental Policy for our club.

We dealt with everything; wildflowers and composting, re-use of waste cooking oil, disposal of cardboard and stationery, energy, lights - the whole lot. I presented it to the Committee, who gave it a quick two minute reading and then threw it out with the comment "the ruddy staff are starting to run this place".

Another Secretary added: "That's because some clubs are still not being run as proper businesses.

He added: "At my Board meeting last week we had a twenty-five minute debate on the appropriate length of socks to be worn on the course this summer. Long socks, short socks, football socks, nylon socks, red socks, white socks - the list was endless - I

tried to minute it, but we didn't reach any firm conclusions.

"The next item on the agenda was the purchase of a £26,000 tractor, and that went through in less than a minute".

Now this all set me wondering...my experiences as a volunteer director taught me that meetings don't just happen. The Chairman and Managers' inputs into the agenda are vital, and the agenda is the most important document.

Preparation is everything and disputes and discussions around anything remotely sensitive or controversial need to have been resolved well in advance. In other words, individual members of the committee often need to have been won over sensitively outside of the meeting by lobbying and discussion.

Let's take another look at those two examples. It's not realistic to expect a far-reaching Environmental Policy be accepted and embraced by volunteer committee members 'on the hoof'. This laudable policy making should, right at the outset, have involved the input of the Chairman of the Committee.

He must run it by every single member of his committee in advance of the meeting and iron out any sticking points or concerns. It should not have been included as an agenda item even for discussion, never mind a vote, until the Chairman was assured of the support of the meeting.

Likewise the socks issue is not an appropriate matter for a Board of Directors to waste valuable time debating at length during a formal meeting. The Chairman should have asked for notification on any issues which may require attention at least a month in advance.

When the dress code issue was flagged up,

he would have had time to refer it straight to the General Manager, who would then be able to confer with a couple of other local clubs and source an appropriate existing policy. The easily reworded document is then circulated well in advance of the meeting for comment. Come the actual meeting, a new policy for the club, previously agreed and proven to have worked in a similar background, can be formally signed off without any undue delay.

Relieved of lengthy discussions over trivia, the Board then has the sufficient time and energy to properly consider the important tractor purchase. To summarise - the input of General Manager and Greenkeeper/Course Manager into the meeting agenda is vital.

"A secretary told me of a board meeting which featured a 25 minute debate on the length of socks to be worn on the course. The next item on the agenda was the purchase of a £26,000 tractor, and that went through in less than a minute"

Setting a suitable well-researched agenda with well-presented supporting information is critical to the smooth running and positive outcome of any Committee Meeting.

Discuss and resolve any remotely controversial matters with all committee members prior to the meeting to ensure there are no lengthy debates or nasty surprises.

We, the greenkeepers, need to identify our professional objectives for the meeting and work to achieve them. The Chairman will very soon recognise us as the professionals - because we make his job easier.