



Allied Masonic Degrees
District of London

Secretary's Handbook

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Introduction

Welcome to the first edition of our District's handbook for Secretaries!

The role of Secretary is so fundamental to the success of a Council and the happiness of its members. Everyone – from the Master down – will be looking to you for support and guidance.

Within the District of London, we try to keep the amount of administration required of a Secretary to the minimum. But there are some basics that are non-negotiable, and this Handbook is here to help you understand your responsibilities and accountabilities as a Council Secretary.

Although a number of experienced brethren have contributed to this Handbook, it's not comprehensive and so if you feel something is missing or needs further explanation – or if there is some best practice you feel is worth sharing – then please do get in touch with me.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. M. Criddle', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard Criddle
District Grand Secretary

Handover from your Predecessor

Hopefully you will have had a thorough handover from your predecessor, or perhaps you may have had a box of papers just handed to you! The list of subjects below is a useful checklist to ensure you have what you need to get started as a Council Secretary.

Minutes

You should have been given the minute books (or copies of the minutes) of all the previous meetings of the Council. These may be in paper form or could be electronic.

Past Summonses

You should have also been given hard or soft copies of all the previous summonses.

Locker Key

Please ensure that you have a key to the Council's locker at Mark Masons' Hall.

Keystone Online (KOL)

When you are invested as Secretary, and your predecessor has updated KOL following the Installation meeting, either he or you should contact Mark Masons' Hall to obtain read/write access to the Council's records in KOL. Alternatively, the District Grand Secretary can grant you the appropriate access.

Constitutions & Regulations and Council By-Laws

It is essential that you have a copy of the Constitutions & Regulations of the Order, as these will be a crucial guide. An electronic copy can be downloaded from the Mark Masons' Hall website (<https://www.markmasonshall.org/orders/amd>). Likewise, please ensure you have a copy of your Council's by-laws. You will need to familiarise yourself with both documents.

Summonses

When trying to determine the start time of the meeting, it is sometimes useful to check back on previous summons and the associated minutes to see how long certain ceremonies/meetings have taken to complete.

Ensure that any brethren who may have passed to the Grand Council Above since the last meeting are removed from the list of members. Also ensure that there is an In Memoriam for him at the top of the agenda page.

Grand Lodge etiquette states that ranks should use full stops (so Dist.G.Stwd rather than DistGStwd and W. Bro. rather than W Bro) and that if a Brother has a Grand Rank (Past or Active) and a Past District Rank then only his Grand Rank is shown. If a Brother has a Grand Rank and an Active District Rank, then both are shown.

When constructing the agenda, experience shows that the use of a table in Word makes the process of formatting much easier. If you need assistance with this, then please contact the District Secretariat.

Before your summons can be issued to your members, it does need to be examined to ensure it complies with the Constitutions & Regulations (eg correct ranks are used) and that it contains the information required by the District (such as the dates for the District Annual Meeting, the 2 District social evenings, and the New Members Dinner). There should also be mention of the Council of Improvement.

The District examiner is John Waggott, and your draft summons should be emailed to him (jlw.adj@btinternet.com) ideally 4 weeks prior to the meeting. Once he has “signed off” the summons, they can be distributed to your members.

The District examiner will then post a redacted front page of your summons on the District’s Facebook page drawing the attention of the District membership to which ceremony your Council intends to conduct. A copy of the full summons is also emailed to the entire District membership. Both activities are there to encourage inter-visiting between Councils.

Meeting Requirements

In readiness for every meeting, you will need to:

- Double-check that the appropriately-sized meeting room is booked
- Liaise with the Escorting Officer if an official visit is planned (if you are unsure please contact the Assistant District Grand Secretary)
- Double-check the Tyler is booked
- In the event of a member's passing, determine who will give the eulogy at the meeting
- Book the dining meal (having previously agreed the menu with Mark Masons' Hall)

Below is a suggested timeline for preparing for a meeting.

5 weeks	Draft the summons
4 weeks	Send the draft summons to the District examiner
	Liaise with Mark Masons' Hall to agree menu and cost (if bespoke), and the time of dining
	Inform the Comms team (Steve Roberts) which ceremony your Council will be conducting so that he can update the District website
3 weeks	Issue the approved summons to your members (include menu details, cost, booking procedure, deadline for responses)
	Distribute the minutes of the previous meeting for comments by the members
2 weeks	Issue reminder to those members who have not yet booked in/apologised
1 week	Inform Mark Masons' Hall of approximate dining numbers + any dietary requirements
	Issue final reminder to those members who have not yet booked in/apologised
3 days	Inform Mark Masons' Hall of final dining numbers + any dietary requirements
Day of the meeting	Bring with you:
	- List of those attending/dining/apologised
	- A copy of the minutes (incorporating any member feedback) from the last meeting for signing by the WM (and the official visitor if present)
	- Any proposals for membership
	- Any completed membership forms for signing by the proposer/seconder
	- Toast list (downloadable from the District website)
	- List of any Officers not yet invested
	- Copy of the Council and District by-laws (for Admissions, foreign joiners or Installation)
	- Notes of any matters to bring before the Council under the Risings
	- Optional: printed copies of the summons or just the agenda page

If the forthcoming meeting is to be an Installation, agree with the Master Elect (and/or Council committee) some months before the meeting who the Officers will be for the year. Decide who will contact those members to offer them the Office.

During the meeting, you will need to:

- Make a note of the start and end time of the meeting
- Take a photograph of the signing-in book (for the minutes)
- Make a note of who does what work during the ceremony (it's not always the designated Council Officers - quite often there are stand-ins or visitors help out)
- Any expressions of thanks by the WM to those who take part in the ceremony
- Any propositions or Notices of Motion
- Anything raised in the Risings, other than by you

After the meeting, you will need to:

- Write up the minutes as soon as possible after the meeting. Try not to rely on your memory several weeks afterwards!
- If a candidate has been Admitted, submit the completed application form (either scanned via email or posted) **along with proof of payment of dues** to Mark Masons' Hall within 2 weeks of the meeting. You will need to liaise with the Treasurer for the proof of payment. Experience shows that it is causes less confusion at Mark Masons' Hall if one person (ie the Secretary) submits both pieces of information, than the Secretary submits the form and the Treasurer separately submits proof of payment. **There is no need to submit a copy of the completed membership application form to the District Secretariat**
- If the Treasurer has presented the Council accounts, ensure a copy is submitted to the District Treasurer
- If the meeting was an Installation, ensure KOL is updated with the new Officers. The District Secretariat can help you with this if you need guidance. **There is no need to submit an Installation Return to the District Secretariat**
- After every meeting, submit to the Assistant District Grand Secretary a completed MUS (Membership Update Sheet). This can be downloaded from the District website

Dispensations

All requests for dispensations (temporary change of meeting date, meeting without a Warrant, Master for more than 2 consecutive years) should be made to the District Grand Secretary. Dispensations are required to be referenced in your summons and read by you after the opening of the Council.

Dining

The importance of getting this element of the meeting right cannot be overstated, and requires good planning.

Whether your Council dines from the standard menu or agrees a bespoke menu and wine package with the Mark Masons' Hall hospitality team, it is vital that this is done in good time (recommendation is minimum 4 weeks before the date of the meeting). Ideally, when you issue the summons and previous meeting's minutes, you should also be sending out details of the meal (menu and cost).

When it comes to managing the bookings, different Secretaries have different approaches depending on their technical ability and number of members. Some Council Secretaries set up on an online form (eg Google Form) to capture bookings and apologies. Other Secretaries are happy to simply work from emails.

Whichever way you choose to take bookings, experience shows that having a tracker (usually in a spreadsheet) is a great way to manage those bookings – especially as it can be printed out and taken to the meeting to address any queries from members and/or guests.

Typically a tracker (and there is a template available from the District Secretariat) will record:

- The name of the brother
- The Office they hold (this is useful for the DC to be able to spot gaps)
- Whether the brother is attending
- Whether the brother is dining
- Whether the brother is not attending (ie an apology)
- Whether the brother has paid (try to avoid taking payments on the night)
- Any dietary requirements

You can use formulae in the spreadsheet to report on number of attendees, diners, how much money has been taken, etc.

The tracker is also a useful tool to refer back to when discussing succession planning in the Council, as it will give an indication of a brother's track record when it comes to attendance. Likewise, having a view of someone's track record enables you to then contact a brother if he hasn't attended for a while to determine if there is an underlying reason that could be addressed by the Council.

Forms

Membership Update Sheet: this form (downloadable from the District website) needs to be completed by you as soon as possible after the meeting and sent to the Assistant District Grand Secretary. This form serves several purposes:

- It provides useful input into the Honours evaluation process
- It helps the District Secretariat to determine which ceremonies a new brother has not taken, thereby enabling the Secretariat to send targeted communication to the brother advising him of Councils about to work the degree or degrees he has yet to take
- Sometimes a member of your Council will forget to tell you he has taken a degree in a different Council. The MUS helps act as a check, so that the District Secretariat can alert you to the need of a Grand Council Certificate once that brother has completed all his degrees

Grand Council Certificate request: once a brother has completed all his degree, you need to complete a Grand Council Certificate request form and send it to the District Grand Secretary. Mark Masons' Hall will then post the certificate direct to you for presentation at the next meeting. You can download the form from the District website.

Candidates

The Membership Application Form can be downloaded from the District website, and can be completed electronically. Unlike in Craft Lodges or Royal Arch Chapters, you are not obliged to announce that you have a membership application at the meeting prior to Admission. You can simply record on the summons (as per Rule 97 of the Constitutions & Regulations) that the Council will be Admitting the brother subject to ballot (you do need to include his details, though).

Before the candidate arrives at the meeting for his Admission ceremony, it is good practice to write to him with the details of the meeting, dress code, dining and payment details etc.

Honours

The Honours process, be it for Grand Rank or District Grand Rank, is run by the District Grand Prefect in conjunction with the Deputy District Grand Prefect and with support from the District Grand Secretary. There is no formal nomination process for the Secretaries to follow. Keystone Online is an important source of information, and information provided in a Council's MUS can aid in the preferment discussion.

Membership Records Management

Keystone Online (KOL) is the source of all master data on members of the District. It is therefore very important that it is kept up to date - an accountability of the Secretary.

Degree tracking: it is recommended that you keep a track of which degrees your new members have taken so that you are able to apply for a Grand Council certificate (downloadable from the District website) when all 5 degrees have been taken.

Attendance tracking: keeping copies of your dining booking sheet (see Dining section above) is a good way of recording the attendance of members at meetings. They can also be used to determine which meetings are generally better attended than others (when it comes to booking appropriately sized temples), and attendance trends over time. Keeping track of a member's attendance can also help with retention; if they have not been seen for a while either the Secretary or Almoner can then make contact to determine any underlying issues.

Clearance Certificates

Members of the Order often enjoy their Allied masonry so much that they want to join other Councils. Before they can join another Council, they have to request a Clearance Certificate from you to prove that they are not in arrears. If you receive such a request, you will first need to check with the Treasurer that the brother in question is fully paid up. If this is the case then you can issue a Clearance Certificate, typically done as a letter attached to an email.

The certificate should have the Council's logo at the top and should state:

- The brother's name and ideally Grand Lodge number (taken from KOL)
- The brother's date of joining your Council (taken from KOL)

Typically the letter might read:

To whom it may concern

Re: W. Bro. Joe Bloggs (1244110)

I write to confirm that Joe Bloggs joined Council Name No. XY on DD.MM.YYYY and is in good standing.

Sincerely & fraternally,

Useful Contacts

District Grand Secretary: r.criddle@amdondon.org / 07900 225671

Assistant District Grand Secretary: s.schofield@amdondon.org / 07979 964327

Mark Masons' Hall Registrations: registrations@mmh.org.uk / 020 7747 1173

Mark Masons' Hall Finance: finance@mmh.org.uk / 020 7747 1169

Mark Masons' Hall Tylers: tylers@mmh.org.uk

Mark Masons' Hall Hospitality: michael@86stjames.com / 020 7747 1181