

**General Assembly of Unitarian  
& Free Christian Churches**

**Executive Committee**

**Approved Minutes of EC Meeting Friday 16 & Saturday 17 November  
2012**

**Luther King House, Manchester**

**Present:** Rev Martin Whitell (Convenor), Rev David Usher (for Friday session only), Joan Cook, Rev John Clifford, Robert Ince, Alison Thursfield, Cathie Masztalerz (from 3.30pm Friday afternoon)

**In Attendance:** Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute-taker), Dorothy Haughton (Chair Visibility Strategy Group for session on Visibility Strategy Group Report)

**Friday**

**Session 1**

*Opening Devotions: Joan read a prayer for those gathered in Worship from "Morning Watch"*

- 1. Apologies:** David Usher for Saturday session
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 1st September 2012**  
The Minutes were agreed and signed as a true record of the meeting held on the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012
- 3. Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later Discussion**
- 4. Reports of Strategy Groups**

**4.1 Visibility Strategy Group - noted with the following:**

The Convenor welcomed Mrs Dorothy Haughton to the meeting in her capacity as Chair of the Visibility Strategy Group and expressed the thanks of the EC to her for taking on this role.

Dorothy acknowledged that this is a challenging task to take on and that there remained one vacancy on the group; however, the volunteers that are on the VSG are enthusiastic and ready to take up the challenge.

Progress was being made on various projects such as Media Skills Training which although it could be a costly exercise it will mean that the Movement will have a body of people with media skills and can look at expanding from local into national radio.

The VSG feel that a single Social Justice theme for all congregations was not feasible or desirable, but, if a motion is passed at the GA and there is a call to action, it may encourage people to get behind it. There is a database of GA Resolutions in existence which provides an account of where Unitarians stand on various issues and this was being made available to the group. One of the issues that the VSG could support is Assisted Dying as the Unitarian Movement is already considering the issue. Dorothy agreed to formulate an article for The Inquirer with the VSG points of view with regards to calls to action on motions passed at Annual Meetings. There will be a Steering Group Meeting in York in January with advice about Motions and it may be useful for the VSG to attend this meeting.

Dorothy discussed the possibility of setting up an "Events web-site" which would have the potential to create a "picture" of the Movement and which congregations could share good practise and generally make connection with each other, such as the Shropshire County website.

Dorothy agreed to take forward with some urgency the proposal for a strap-line for the Movement. She stated that this would have to reflect reality yet be aspirational, and that people need to feel that they own it and concur with it – and bring proposals back to the EC for approval.

The Convenor thanked Dorothy for her time and wished her well with the valuable work that the group is doing.

#### **4.2 Ministry Strategy Group – noted with the following:**

The EC approved the admission of Rev Sheena Gabriel to the Roll of Ministers and Lay Pastors.

John raised the issue of funding for ministerial training and what progress was being made on the overall review. The Chief Officer informed the EC that a meeting is taking place at Essex Hall on 22 November between the Ministry Strategy Group and representatives of Unitarian College Manchester. The Chief Officer reported that a consultation had been launched on competencies which would shape how training would take place in the future. A decision would be reached by summer of 2013 and recommendations from the Ministry Strategy Group about how to move forward on this issue were awaited. It was understood that the categories had not yet been considered due to other priorities.

The Convenor congratulated the Group on their commitment and progress on the Strategic Priorities.

**4.3 Local leadership Strategy Group** – noted with the following:

The LLSG have submitted a comprehensive report and are proceeding with their objectives, however the need for a more strategic approach was highlighted as to the longer-term impact.

**5. 2020 Congregational Dev Programme** – The Convenor gave a verbal report -

It was noted that Yvonne Aburrow and the Rev Daniel Costley had resigned from the 2020 Board. The remaining Board members are committed to the programme and although the work has slowed down slightly due to the resignations, the web-site is almost ready to be launched and the hope is that the Board will be able to call for first applications January 2013. With current funding it is likely that only one congregation would initially be supported.

**6. Vice –presidency 2013 – 2014**

Mrs Marion Baker was approved as the nominee for the General Assembly Vice-Presidency for 2013-2014.

## Session 2

**7. Financial report** - noted with the following:

The management accounts for the year to 30 September 2012 were received. The Chief Officer, Martin Sarbicki and Robert to be thanked for their work. Expenditure was under control which would feed through into the budgets for 2012/13. It is clear that any additional future spending by the General Assembly would require additional live giving as other income streams were constrained. The Chief Officer was congratulated on the efficient management of Essex Hall budgets.

**8. Sustentation Fund Annual Accounts** – noted with the following:

It was noted that two Executive Committee members would need to be appointed as trustees in May 2013.

It was reported that the applications for the current year had revealed the difficulties faced by many congregations in funding ministry and that the Fund would be holding an additional meeting in May 2013 to review the criteria it used to consider applications. A clear message would be sent out that if congregations are not prepared to adequately support their own Ministers, they should not expect the Sustentation Fund to give a grant. The Sustentation Fund was given the full support of the EC on this matter.

Robert raised the matter of consolidated accounts and reported that discussions continued with the Auditor and a final decision would be reported to the next meeting.

#### **9. Millennium Fund Bids:**

Robert Ince declared an interest in 9.1

##### **9.1 – The Old Chapel, Great Hucklow**

It was agreed to award the sum of £1,000

##### **9.2 – Bradford Unitarians**

It was agreed to award the sum of £500. The District was encouraged to give additional financial support for the proposal.

##### **9.3 – Ullet Rd Church, Liverpool**

It was agreed to seek further information for the next meeting.

#### **10. Report on Proxy Voting – noted with the following:**

The report of the Constitution Review Group was presented. The Group were commended and congratulated on a thoroughly researched report. The recommendations of the report were considered and supported.

The process for dealing with the report in light of the decision of the Annual Meeting in 2012 was reviewed. It was agreed that the Executive Committee present a motion to the 2013 Annual Meeting asking for the report to be accepted. This would have the effect of negating the Resolution.

#### **11. Annual Meetings Panel 1. – noted with the following:**

David informed the meeting that he was aware that Rev Dr Terasa Cooley would be in Europe during this period and she would be willing to speak to the Annual Meeting. This offer was welcomed and he would liaise with her and confirm with the Chief Officer whether she will accept. The EC confirmed that they will have double session workshop as in 2012 which would run concurrently with other programmes.

### **Session 3 – Mary-Jean was not present for this session**

#### **12. Risk Management**

It was reported that there had been press coverage the previous day of allegations involving Sir Cyril Smith and arrangements to handle the incident were being put in place by the Chief Officer.

#### **13. Review of IT**

The report of an independent review of Information Technology was presented with technical and managerial recommendations for a way

forward. Investment in new IT had the potential to benefit the GA in a number of areas. Setpoint Consulting and Martin Sarbicki were thanked for progressing with the review.

It was suggested that the telephone system could also be included along with video conferencing facilities. Improvements to the website were seen as a priority.

The recommendations were agreed in principle and the Chief Officer was authorised to proceed to the next stage which would involve preparation of a detailed plan. Authority to commit up to £3500 was given. It was agreed that a working group consisting of John Clifford, Robert Ince, Derek McAuley and Martin Sarbicki be established.

#### **14. Preparation for district meeting**

The preparations for the district meeting the following afternoon were reviewed. It was hoped that the outcome would be a shared understanding of the key issues facing the Movement and of the need to move forward together.

#### **15. Non-responsive checkout**

*Closing Devotions: Cathie Masztalerz*

### **Saturday**

#### **Session 4**

*Opening Devotions: John read an excerpt from his 2003 Anniversary Service and followed that by reciting a Sufi parable*

#### **16. Annual Meetings Panel 2.**

Further discussion took place on arrangements for the Annual Meeting. Consideration was given to how the Assisted Dying issue would be dealt with given its sensitivity as an issue. It was agreed that a short 10 minute report on the consultation process would be presented early in the meeting followed by a longer session for consideration of a Motion. A 40 minute information workshop would also be programmed by EC.

It was reported that Julian & Christina Smith from Belper had agreed to organise the Opening Celebrations. "Live" streaming had been suggested, however the Panel was not convinced that the time was right given the technical and timescale requirements for what was one of the most significant events in the GA's calendar. John Clifford asked that this be looked at for the future.

The Acting Treasurer raised a number of issues relating to the annual report. He would like to further promote Associate Membership which

was a way to develop support for the national movement and a valuable income scheme. Generally the message on finance was positive but the Assembly need to be made aware that unless things improve the future was still difficult. He was looking at a financial summary with a general overview of what we need financially and how we will spend funds raised. Funding awarded to congregations would also be included the Annual Report.

The Annual Report and presentations should reflect the progress of the Strategy Groups as well as other work in the priority areas. Further discussion would take place at the January 2013 EC meeting.

**17. Chief Officer report** - noted with the following:

The Chief Officer presented a report on key priority areas including support for congregations and work to enhance visibility both internally through Unitarian publications and externally. Progress on safeguarding was outlined and he was regularly meeting with John Harley and Linda Phillips on this issue.

The Chief Officer to write to the Bishop of Durham to congratulate him on being appointed the next Archbishop of Canterbury.

The requirement for congregations that were "excepted" charities to provide a copy of their Annual Report and Accounts to the General Assembly was discussed and the Chief Officer was asked to review processes and address the specific case raised. Further discussion would be required on more general issues of congregational responsibilities for compliance with statutory requirements.

**18. EAP report** - noted with the following:

The Chief Officer was asked to enquire as to a feedback system on how successful the counselling received by members of the programme had been

The Chief Officer was asked to investigate if the insurance covered volunteers with regard to access to legal costs.

**19. GA President/Vice-President's reports**

**President's Report – Noted**

**Vice-President's Report – Noted**

It was noted that both the President and Vice-President felt that there should be some mechanism to enable the experience of recent past-presidents to be utilised. It was suggested that former Presidents' could be drawn upon for specific tasks, as for example is the case with the Annual Meetings Steering Group.

## **Session 5**

### **20. Key messages**

Agreed.

### **21. Arrangements for future meetings**

January 4<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 5.00pm – 5<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 1.00pm – London

Apologies from David Usher

February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2.00pm to 9.00pm – 23<sup>rd</sup> 9.00am to 3.00pm Manchester

May 17<sup>th</sup> 2.00pm – 6.00pm – 18<sup>th</sup> 9.00am – 4.00pm - London

### **22. A.O.B.**

Youth Panel – A request had been received from the Rev John Harley & Vanessa Rothwell to attend a future EC meeting to discuss the movements of the Panel and it was agreed to invite them to the January 2013 EC meeting if they were available.

Induction Pack – It was agreed that the Induction Pack for new EC members would be reviewed at the next meeting.

### **23. Confidential Items – Mary-Jean and the Chief Officer left the Meeting at this point.**

Chief Officer's Appraisal

### **24. Non-responsive check out**

*Saturday Closing Devotions: Robert Ince*

