

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

Executive Committee

Approved Minutes of Meeting
Friday 6th & Saturday 7th July 2012
Luther King House, Manchester

Present : Rev David Usher, Alison Thursfield, Rev John Clifford, Joan Cook, Robert Ince, Cathie Masztalerz, (from Session 2 onwards) Rev Martin Whitell (Convener)

In Attendance: Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute-taker)

Friday

Session 1

Friday Opening Devotions: Joan read an excerpt from Dawn Buckle, from the first edition of "From Hearts & Minds" – "Moving Spirit" – comparing meetings to dancing

1. **Apologies:** Rev Andy Pakula, Cathie Masztalerz (for Session 1)

2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 5th May 2012**

After minor corrections were made the Minutes were agreed and signed as a true record of the meeting held on the 5th May 2012

3. **Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later Discussion:**

- The Chief Officer had clarified that according to Guidelines the deletion of a Minister from the Roll is the responsibility of the Ministry Strategy Group.
- It was confirmed that the Rev Feargus O'Connor has accepted the position of the Anniversary Preacher at the 2013 Annual Meeting. It was noted that whilst there had been few responses to the Post Annual Meeting Survey the feedback from these responses was very positive. The contract for the 2013 Annual Meeting at Nottingham University had

been signed. The Unitarian Music Society were to be approached to co-ordinate the opening celebrations. The EC to identify workshops/plenary sessions as soon as possible. David Usher was asked to approach Robin Ince for the Social Evening entertainment on 12 April 2013. The EC agreed that Penny Quest would join the Annual Meeting Panel in a marketing capacity. Andrew Mason was pursuing options for 2014.

- Cathie Masztalerz and Dr Carwyn Tywyn (the Welsh Department Secretary) have collected some email addresses to add to Uni-news circulation.
- The Convenor had not yet communicated with the Ministerial Fellowship with regard to improving engagement with Ministers.
- The EC approved Indra Sikdar as a Board Member, with a focus on fund raising aspects for the 2020 Congregational Development Programme. The main Board was working hard getting the paperwork together, and applications to the Board will open early in 2013.
- Becoming a welcoming Congregation – the Chief Officer has communicated with Yvonne Aburrow regarding amendments.
- ICUU European Event – the Chief Officer to liaise with the Stephen Lingwood regarding a ministerial nominee.
- UKUnitarian TV – At the request of donors the donations have been returned to them.

4. Reports of Strategy Groups:

Ministry Strategy Group - noted with the following:

The Rev David Shaw will replace the Rev Chris Goacher on the Interview Panel.

It was **agreed** that the MinStrtGp could approach the person that they have identified with a view to joining the group and clarified that in future if there were vacancies groups could approach individuals to informally sound out if they would be willing to serve if nominated to and approved by the EC.

The EC are pleased to **approve** the following onto the Ministers Roll with probationary status:

- Sue Woolley
- Jim Corrigall
- Sheena Gabriel on completion of her academic requirements
- Nicky Jenkins

Annual Meetings workshop report back- it was noted that the overwhelming themes picked up at the meeting was "Spirituality, Community and a clear sense of Vision".

The question was raised by the group as to whether there will be a

maximum number of people who can be accepted for training. The EC reiterated that the Interview Panel should recruit on the quality of the application and suitability. In response to John Clifford it was noted that the financial implications would be reviewed as part of the budget process.

Local Leadership Strategy Group: no report received – no LLSG meeting held since the last EC Meeting

Visibility Strategy Group: no written report received

Dorothy Haughton had a conference call with David Usher and Andy Pakula and reported that two of the original group had resigned due to personal commitments. A number of people have been approached to join the group.

Mary-Jean left the room at this point.

Following discussion it was agreed that Phil Tomlin be appointed. The Chief Officer would be meeting Dorothy Haughton to discuss the work of the group.

Session 2

Cathie Masztalerz joined the meeting and Mary-Jean rejoined the meeting

5. Finance – Management Accounts – noted with the following:

Robert Ince (the Interim Hon Treasurer till April 2013) reported that income was falling and that this is partly due to a reduction in quota payments from congregations. The Chief Officer reported that we can expect another £5,000 from the known legacy of £45,000 already received but it had not yet been received. The new Head of Admin & Finance, Martin Sarbicki will be working on the new budget structure and this will reflect in the next Management Accounts

The format of the Directory was raised. The Chief Officer reported that he would be reviewing the relationship of the Directory to the previously published handbook and what information could be placed on the GA website.

6. Bowland Trust Priorities – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer reported on discussions with the Bowland Trust on the priority list for contributions and matching funding. It was noted that the most significant change was that donations to the GA for the Nightingale Centre will no longer be eligible for matching. It was **agreed** that this document will be included in the Induction Pack given to new EC Members.

Grateful thanks to the Bowland Trust for their continued support of the GA.

7. Unitarian College Manchester Funding Application:

A request for financial support was received from Unitarian College Manchester. There was a lengthy discussion with regard to this application and it was considered that the Unitarian Ministerial Students Fund (USMF) was not the appropriate source for this type of funding as this should focus support on individual students not institutions.

It was proposed that the £5,000 legacy which was awaited (which will be Bowland doubled to £10,000) be utilised to fund this application. This approach was **agreed** by the EC with the proviso that the UCM are notified that this will be for this year only and not set a precedent for the future and that they should work with the Ministry Strategy Group to address the wider issues raised which affected the viability of the College and how future provision of training might be structured and funded.

It was **agreed** that in future students should be actively encouraged to approach government agencies for funding.

8. Millennium Fund Application – Bury

An application for funding from the Millennium Fund was received from Bury Unitarian Church. It was **agreed** that the Chief Officer would contact the Church and seek further information on finances and ascertain if the District had yet agreed to support the scheme.

Session 3

9. Risk Progress Report – noted with the following:

Robert reported that most issues had moved forward in a very positive manner on the Risk Register with work on risks continuing.

Safeguarding – considerable work had been carried out on the policy, internal arrangements and on awareness & training, with two training sessions taking place in the summer. The safeguarding Policy would be presented to the next meeting. The matter of **fraudulent activities** in a congregation required further work.

If there are congregations who are not willing to take part in the training or to meet the minimum standards, then the GA needed to ensure proper records were kept should their subsequently be a problem with the authorities and its actions were questioned. The risks to the reputation of all congregations and the Unitarian Movement as a whole if one congregation had problems, for example, in relation to safeguarding or fraud, was highlighted.

Congregation Accounts - Letters to be sent to congregations with "excepted status" to remind them that it had been agreed with the Charity Commission that they should send their accounts to the General Assembly.

GA Income: - this is in the high risk category due to falling Quota payments. The USMF and the 2020 Congregational Development Fund would also need resources. It was considered that not enough was being done to promote Associate Membership and the EC should be seen to support Associate Membership. The Unitarian Movement needed to celebrate generosity.

Session 4 Mary-Jean was not present during this session.

10. EC Communications

Joan Cook reported that a letter to Districts on the proposed event had had a few replies.

Arrangements for the event were finalised. 1.00 – 4.00pm on Saturday 17 November at Cross Street Chapel. Chief Officer to source an external facilitator. Strategy Group chairs to be invited. Allocation to any sub-groups to be on basis of prior registration. EC to meet immediately after the event to progress the matters raised.

The proposed outcomes were discussed at length. These included:

- Delegates being heard and all willing to listen. No requirement for immediate response
- Gathering information and an opportunity to consult
- Address real issues that the EC is grappling with (from risk register?)
- Who we are and where we are going?

A planning group was established (John Clifford, Cathie Masztalerz, David Usher and Chief Officer) to meet with the facilitator on 31 August 2012.

Friday Closing Devotions: Robert Ince

Saturday

Saturday Opening Devotions : Cathie read from a poem by Theodore Parker

Risk Progress Report continued:

Further discussion took place on the issues list and Risk Register. Pension issues for Ministers and staff raised huge potential financial risks. Business continuity planning would be reviewed, however, this was different from crisis management arrangements which embraced a wider number of issues and required further work.

The Chief Officer and Robert were thanked for their work in this area.

11. Chief Officer Report – noted with the following:

Arrangements for the EC elections were a priority for the Chief Officer. Joan proposed that the EC delegate the position of recruiting for Electoral Panel Members to the Chief Officer, and this was **agreed**. The Chief Officer will start looking for Electoral Panel Members as a matter of urgency. Five positions were up for election, of which one was for two years only. The latter would be determined by lot after the election.

The Chief Officer announced the appointment of the new IT/Communication Officer, Aniuska Dominiguez and the new Head of Finance and Administration, Martin Sarbicki. Due to the high level financial input now available at Essex Hall with Martin now in post this will alleviate the burden on a Hon Treasurer position and hopefully should make it easier to recruit. As yet no one had come forward.

The Rev's John Harley and Linda Phillips and the Chief Officer met with regard to Safeguarding and it has been **agreed** that Rev Harley will look after the Youth CRB checks with the Rev Phillips looking after those for Ministers and Ministerial students. The Rev Harley has successfully completed an online CRB application which will reduce administrative burdens in future. Joan highlighted issues raised in Scotland regarding the role of the General Assembly with the Scottish safeguarding arrangements. The SUA may have to play this role and they should contact the Director of Ministry. The storage of the CRB register has been highlighted as a risk area.

The Chief Officer announced the retirement of Howard Hague (administrative assistant at Essex Hall) and thanked him for his hard work over the past 7 ½ years. Howard will however still come in occasionally as a volunteer to attend to the archives until his move to Hinckley.

The letter to Districts seeking a Vice-Presidential nomination had been circulated.

Session 5

12. Other Reports – noted with the following:

Nightingale Centre:

Arrangements for appointment to the Management Committee was raised– is it by invitation or is there any democratic process? Robert to take the question to the next Nightingale Centre meeting.

The EC **approved** the appointment of Colin Partington as Treasurer at the Nightingale Centre.

The discussion regarding the tax position was noted. It was **agreed** that the EC should seek a response setting out the correct tax position with regard to V.A.T., Income Tax and Rates. The Chief Officer was asked to liaise with the Centre in this regard.

13. Key messages:

As circulated

14. Arrangements for future meetings

Sept 1st 9-5 pm – London

Nov 16th 2-6pm – 17th 9- 11.30am – LKH, Manchester (with visit to Cross St Chapel on Saturday afternoon 1 – 5pm for meeting with Districts)

Jan 4th 9-5 & 5th – London 9-12pm

March 2013 – to be agreed

15. A.O.B.

It was noted that the Scottish Consultation on equal marriage would finish at the end of July with the vast majority of MSPs in favour

The InferFaith Network AGM had seen serious issues raised about the current unfair restriction on membership to nine faith groups and this was likely to be changed as a result of a major strategic review that had been launched.

Session 6

16. Confidential Items – Mary-Jean was not present at this session

It was agreed that as part of the EC efforts to improve communication that a meeting be arranged with staff after the summer break.

It was agreed that work be initiated on a Volunteer Policy.

17. Non-responsive check out

Saturday Closing Devotions: David Usher

