

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

Executive Committee

Approved Minutes of Meeting

Saturday 1st September 2012

Essex Hall, London

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

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

Saturday

Session 1

Saturday Opening Devotions: Martin read from a Benedictine Prayer Book - a prayer for leaders & group leaders

1. **Apologies:** Rev Andy Pakula
2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 6th & 7th July 2012**

The Minutes were agreed and signed as a true record of the meeting held on 6 & 7th July 2012

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

7. Unitarian College Manchester Funding Application

A letter of thanks had been received from the College Principal and Management Committee.

10. EC Communications

Cathie noted that she had been unable to attend the planning committee due to travel arrangements.

4. **Reports of Strategy Groups**

4.1 Local Leadership – noted with the following:

The Convener congratulated the LLSG on the progress being made by the group. It was noted that during the congregation telephone

survey (Big Red Phone Survey) there were a few incorrect telephone numbers and some of the data from the Directory was out of date, however, that staff at Essex Hall rely upon congregations for updates and changes.

There was a question raised about a possible further Safeguarding Training day in Bristol, it was confirmed by the Chief Officer that there was funding for training to take place, however there is a question about whether there would be enough people willing to attend. The issue is still being discussed by the LLSG and if it is to go ahead, it will be in the New Year [subsequently confirmed by LLSG].

The LLSG has agreed that none of their courses should run for a period of more than 3 years without revision. It was observed that the ambitious programme would pose significant pressures on capacity for delivery. There was also a need for the LLSG to look at how they are going to fund programme - contributions from local congregations as well as individuals to be encouraged. The LLSG should be careful not to build expectations and then not be able to follow them through because of lack of funding.

4.2 Ministry - noted with the following:

It was noted that "ELGMT" was an acronym for the "Ecumenical Liaison group for Ministerial Training" which was proving valuable in accessing information on the rapidly changing situation. The work on ministry training was welcomed and the group were encouraged to be bold and imaginative. The focus on competencies was also supported and John asked that the dimension of "collegiality" as a body be addressed which required face-to-face contact.

It was noted that there should be a distinct line at the cross over point between Local Leadership and Ministry.

The appraisal of Ministers was discussed and the point was raised, should it be ministry rather than the individual ministers who are being appraised?

The Convenor indicated that the Executive Committee was pleased to receive such a positive report. The Chief Officer will report feedback to the Chairs of the LLSG & the Ministry Strategy Groups.

4.3 Visibility

The Chief Officer gave a verbal report on a meeting that he had with Dorothy Haughton, the Chair of the Visibility Strategy Group, on the 17 August 2012. They discussed the following topics:

- Visibility Group membership

- What the original objectives of the group were
- Future plans
- The Visibility Strategy Group budget
- Recording of group meetings

The Chief Officer has shared previous documents of the Communication Commission and Visibility Strategy Group with Dorothy to enable her to get a sense of the projects that were undertaken by them.

It was suggested that Penny Quest be invited to address either the EC or the EC and the Visibility Strategy Group on Marketing.

Dianne Bennett was approved as a group member to join:
Dorothy Haughton (Chair)
Phil Tomlin
Angela Maher
And one other member who is still to be approached.

It was agreed that the EC invite Dorothy to attend part of the November EC meeting – the Chief Officer to agree the time.

The good link between Local Leadership and Ministry strategy groups was noted and links between them and the Visibility group was encouraged.- the Chief Officer to initiate.

It was agreed that the three Strategy Group Chairs would be invited to attend the March EC meeting to discuss strategic plans for 2013/14.

5. 2020 Congregational Development Programme

No written report had been received. The Convenor reported that things were moving forward and the Board members were in the process of producing a Worship Package and the web-site was almost ready to go live.

Daniel Costley has written a discussion document with regard to the 2020 vision and objectives. The key points included:

- 2020 is looking to help start and renew [20] Unitarian or Free Christian Congregations by 2020
- 2020 is seeking to reverse the current decline in Unitarian membership through the establishment of new congregations to meet local needs, and through support to existing congregations who are committed to renewal and growth
- 2020 will seek to raise a total of £1.3m from individuals, congregations and District organisations over the next five years to support its mission
- 2020 is not about supporting the status quo. It looks instead to renew and revitalise our liberal faith to meet the needs of society at large
- 2020 will draw no distinction on the “type” of Unitarian congregation it will support – rather it will seek to establish congregations and

fellowships that are open to all who seek truth according to Unitarian principles

- Need to get wider buy-in from the Unitarian Movement

It was noted that the 2020 Board were about to launch the programme with information to promote 2020 based on high quality work. Further delay and uncertainty would be detrimental to the programme. It was hoped that this would engender support across the Movement. It was agreed that further information on progress needed to be circulated via Uni-news and Denominational press. It was re-emphasised that funding for 2020 was ring-fenced. The Convenor will respond to Daniel Costley.

It was agreed that a written report from the 2020 Congregational Development Programme will be presented to the EC at their November meeting.

6. Millennium Fund – Bid from Bury

The EC had received the requested information. It was agreed to award the sum of £500 to Bury Unitarian Church from the Millennium Fund - the Chief Officer to inform Bury about the decision.

7. Unitarian Investment Panel Notes – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer provided a short update on ethical investment and the GA's policy. The Chief Officer and Mike Tomlin were drafting a response to an article in The Inquirer on ethical investment. The Convenor would inform the Minister's Chat line of the current position.

The Chief Officer was asked to ascertain the policy of the Minister's Pension Fund Policy on Ethical Investment.

Session 2

8. Finance – Management Accounts and Budget Proposals 2012/13

The Management Accounts to the end of July 2012 and Draft Budget for 2012/13 were received. The Acting Honorary Treasurer, Head of Finance and Administration were thanked for their work.

It was noted that the Management Accounts had been reformatted to make them more accessible. This included the Youth Programme to make the budgets clearer for each activity and emphasised how much was spent on supporting youth. Further work on a high level summary would be produced to indicate where money is being spent across all programmes. It was highlighted that income was down, therefore directly affecting levels of Bowland Trust funding. It was noted that Associate Membership was stable and that there was potential to produce more income

It was emphasised that expenditure has been controlled, particularly those relating to staffing following the changes. The overall financial challenges were the result of income not meeting anticipated levels. (if the significant legacy was excluded).

The Draft Budget for 2012/13 resulted in a deficit of £71k which was not sustainable. The Chief Officer distributed a paper with a number of proposals for the Executive Committee to consider which bring the budget into near balance. It was stressed that these included some assumptions which had risk on non-delivery.

The Budget as amended, based on the proposals of the Chief Officer was approved.

David suggested that people will only donate to an institution or project that they believed in and are inspired by. This required clarity regarding the vision for moving forward. It was thought that a special one day session would be valuable to initiate this conversation and agreed that the Convenor liaise with the Chief Officer on the arrangements.

9. Safeguarding – Manual and Policy -

A revised safeguarding manual was presented. Rev John Harley was thanked for all the work he had undertaken on the document.

The EC has approved the policy in principle and delegated to the Chief Officer the authority to approve the final version.

Cathie introduced a number of amendments which would be forwarded to the Rev John Harley by the Chief Officer.

It was suggested that the policy statement need to make clear that it was designed to protect vulnerable children and adults and also those who work with them. It also needed to be emphasised that the policy applied to ALL congregations.

It was agreed that when circulated that a letter would be sent to all congregations asking them to confirm they had received the manual and policy and have a Safeguarding Policy in place. This will also go on Uni-news. At a date to be determined an audit of practice would be required to ascertain levels of compliance.

10. Annual Meetings Panel 6 July and 30 August 2012 notes - noted with the following:

In relation to 2013 Plans for the opening ceremony had not come to fruition and an alternative was being pursued. Penny Quest joined the meeting on the 31 August for the first time and made a useful contribution to improving the marketing of the event.

It was confirmed that the EC would be holding a workshop as in 2012.

Andrew Mason and the Chief Officer had visited Whittlebury Hall, a four star hotel accommodation with a view to the venue for 2014 – with a favourable outlook.

Session 3

11. EC Communication – report from sub-group on District meeting

It was reported that the Chief Officer, the Convenor, Robert, John & David had met with Simon Wilson an external facilitator on Friday afternoon 31 August 2012 with regard to the meeting between the EC and the Districts in November 2012.

The focus would be on strategic objectives of the EC for the Unitarian Movement and issues of concern to districts and what can be done to work together to address both. The goal would be to improve collaboration and communications on the issues faced by the EC.

A survey is to be set up for contributions on issues to be discussed. There will be clear advertising before the event with letters of invitation to be sent to all the Districts to send between 3 and 5 people to the meeting

The Rev Jane Barrouclough to be asked to perform the opening and welcome and then Mr Wilson would facilitate the meeting. A District member will be asked to close the proceedings.

It was agreed that in order to increase communication between the Strategy Groups and the Districts that they would be asked to produce a report for general publication on Uni-news.

Session 4

12. Chief Officer's Report – Noted with the following:

The Chief Officer reported on his contacts with congregations, including a visit to the 100th Anniversary Service at Doncaster, and work on visibility including an invitation from the Prime Minister to attend a Reception at 10 Downing Street. He had attended the AGM of the Inter-Faith Network and the IARF European gathering. Staff had worked to support Fulwood congregation and Robert Ince with preparation and circulation of the discussion document on assisted dying.

He reported on the work of the Electoral Panel which had convened on 29 August 2012. Details of the arrangements for the EC elections would be placed on GA website and advertised via Uni-news and Denominational press. These would include the criteria for becoming a member of the

Executive Committee and what being a member of the Executive Committee involved in terms of commitment.

It was noted that the Charity Commission had a sign-up form for new trustees and this would be investigated.

13. Pension Trust Arrangements - Mary-Jean was not present for this discussion

The Chief Officer presented proposals arising from changes to the Pensions Trust provision relating to staff pensions. It was noted that Growth Plan series 3. would no longer be available from 30 September 2013 and agreed that the Chief Officer consult staff and report back to the next meeting. New members of staff would be offered an opportunity to join series 4.

14. Other Reports - GA President's report - Noted

15. Key messages

As circulated.

16. Arrangements for future meetings

November 16th 2.00 -6.00pm plus post dinner session until 9.pm – 17th 9-11.30am – LKH, then travel to Cross St Chapel for 1.00pm to 4.00pm for meeting with District representatives. Short follow-up meeting.

January 4th 9.00am – 5.00pm – 5th 9.00am – 1.00pm – London

Apologies from David Usher

February 22nd 2.00pm to 9.00pm – 23rd 9.00am to 3.00pm Manchester

17. A.O.B.

18. Confidential Items – Mary-Jean was not present for this Discussion

18.1 Letter of Resignation

A letter of resignation had been sent by Rev Andy Pakula which was received with regret. It was noted that he had intended to be present but had another congregational commitment. He was thanked for his work as a member of the Executive Committee since 2009. It was agreed that there would not be a co-option given that the position was up for election.

18.2 Chief Officer's Appraisal

It was agreed to use the same process as in 2011 and would be undertaken by the Convenor and David Usher.

18.3 Vision

The opportunity was taken to begin a discussion on the future and how the EC's might begin to review and explore its vision for the General Assembly and the wider Unitarian Movement (see above). This included questions around:

- What would we do differently? New? Exciting?
- What outcomes for the Unitarian Movement are we seeking to achieve, such as Inspiring congregations?
- Who are we?
- Importance of self-confidence and of our image of ourselves
- Damage caused by divisions
- What do we have to offer that is different from other churches or faith groups?
- How do we avoid a "me, me, me" and look outside to make the world a better place.
- What is our message?

19. Non-responsive check out

Saturday Closing Devotions: Alison Thursfield