

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

Executive Committee

**Approved Minutes of Meeting
Friday 24th & Saturday 25th February 2012
Luther King House, Manchester**

Present : Rev David Usher, Alison Thursfield, Rev John Clifford, Robert Ince, Cathie Masztalerz, Rev Andy Pakula, Rev Martin Whitell (Convener), Huw Thomas (Hon Treasurer) - for Saturday Session

Present for part of Friday 24th : The Rev Dr Ann Peart (GA President), Lis Dyson-Jones (GA Vice-President)

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

Session 1

Friday Opening Devotions: Robert read from a book by Penny Quest – “Never a Moment”

- 1. Apologies – Joan Cook for both days, Huw Thomas (Hon Treasurer) for Friday Session**
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 6th January 2012**

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

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

3 (c) Volunteer Committee

The Chief Officer reported that Dawn Buckle and Dorothy Haughton had agreed to serve and these appointments were **approved.**

4. Annual Meetings

The Convener welcomed the GA President and the GA Vice-President to the session and papers were distributed with regard to the forthcoming Annual Meetings to be held at Keele University from 3 – 6 April 2012.

The Chief Officer reported that as of Friday 24th February 2012 the numbers attending the Meeting are as follows:

- Tuesday 3rd April - 271 attending with 266 B/B
- Wednesday 4th April - 283 " " 265 "
- Thursday 5th April - 263 " " 247 "
- Friday 6th April - 237 "

There is a slightly lower than hoped but more bookings were anticipated and there should not be major financial implications.

Andy reported that the plans for the Opening Ceremony are moving along and he is liaising with Andrew Mason at Essex Hall. The theme will be celebratory, moving toward a brighter future. The GA President and the Chief Officer will work together on the Ceremony of Recognition as part of the Anniversary Service. The band has been booked for the Social evening. The Volunteers will be co-ordinated by the East Cheshire Union. Chalice Lighting still to be discussed and agreed.

The draft Agenda was discussed in detail and it was **agreed** that those wishing to ask questions be requested to submit these in writing to the Chief Officer in advance of the appropriate Plenary Session or EC workshop.

There will be an opportunity to acknowledge and thank the members of the former Commissions and Panels for their hard work in the past. The EC Report, Commission reports and questions will be taken in the opening session.

Presentation of the current work and plans for the future from the three Strategy Groups (Local Leadership, Ministry and Visibility), will follow on the second morning. Each Chair will give an introduction to their Strategy Group and introduce members.

No one had yet been approached to launch the Anniversary Appeal. The Hon. Treasurer or past President were suggested. **The Chief Officer to pursue.**

It was agreed that Andy would give a presentation on the 2020 Development Programme during Plenary Session IV on Thursday 5 April with questions being taken at a new workshop after lunch of the same day. **Chief Officer to programme.**

The GA President, the Chief Officer and the Steering Group were meeting on the 16th March to finalise procedural arrangements. EC members would only be on the stage during the annual report presentation. The GA President would give a one minute "centring" introduction before the sessions with no worship.

Session 2

5. EC Communication

Correspondence received from Kay Millard, Secretary of the Western Union, with regard to Communication with the EC was discussed. The Convenor reported that he would be attending their meeting in March 2012. It was suggested that initial contact on issues from Districts should be with the Chief Officer or their EC link.

A lengthy discussion took place on how the Link role to the Districts had developed. When the Executive Committee took over from the GA Council the EC members held road shows and attended most district meetings at some expense. Since then more use has been made of the electronic medium such as Uni-news, Minutes being distributed (this was not done until three years ago) and Key Messages being printed in the Inquirer. There was a need to review the role in light of the needs of the Districts, and how the EC could respond to those needs, given the costs in terms of time, as four EC members were working, and travel expenses of visits

It was recognised that the Executive Committee should more clearly communicate what they are doing by key messages giving much more detail after each meeting on email, uni-news and if necessary hard copy. Districts should be encouraged to channels comments and questions to Links and to copy Links into their internal communications. Links should try and attend, if invited, at least once a year and be given a significant slot to share the up-to-date work of the EC.

It was also suggested that the Chief Officer and the Convenor approach the editor of the Inquirer and offer to give an interview after each EC meeting to give some colour to the Key Messages. **Chief Officer to explore.**

It was also emphasised that listening was as important in developing the Link role.

6. Millennium Fund Bids

a) Doncaster - (Robert declared an interest)

A bid was received from Doncaster, supported by Sheffield and East Midlands Districts, to encourage sharing around growth and improve confidence in small congregations. It was considered that whilst the proposal had some merit more work was required. Robert was asked to liaison with the proposer. **It was agreed to**

refer the bid back to Doncaster for clarification on certain points.

b) Billingshurst – (David declared an interest)

A bid was received from Billingshurst Chapel in West Sussex for funding toward the cost of installing a loop system which would improve access. **It was agreed to award £700.**

It was agreed that the availability of Millennium Fund support be publicised in the Key Messages to encourage further bids.

7. Closure of Pudsey Church

Correspondence has been received from Christine Dawson, the Secretary of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union, regarding the decision of Pudsey Congregation to close. The EC expressed their regret that this had happened and noted that the Chief Officer and then EC district Link had visited the Church. The Chief Officer had responded to Pudsey Congregation directly. Discussion took place on the relationships between congregations, districts and the General Assembly when congregations are in vulnerable position and the need for a co-ordinated response.

Session 3

8. Feedback on Staffing restructure – Mary-Jean was not present for this discussion

The comments of staff and consultants on a review of the staffing structure were received. Discussion took place on issues raised and it was agreed to leave a final decision until after consideration of the bids for funding from the strategic groups the following day.

9. Non-responsive check-out

Friday Closing Devotions: Andy Pakula

Saturday Session 4

Saturday Opening Devotions: John read from a book by Kit Ketchum – “Blessed be our Dissenters” a passage about radical dissenters

10. 2020 Development Fund –

Andy reported on the proposed Terms of Reference for the Board of the 2020 Congregational Development Programme. The 2020 Board would be accountable to and will report regularly to the Executive Committee.

It was been noted that the proposal had faced some challenge and that it needed to be emphasised that it included new and also renewed congregations. The lessons of thriving congregations needed to be applied more widely and with some urgency. Communication also needed to be improved on the proposal. It would be made clear that none of the existing GA Funds will be utilised and the programme will be funded solely by new money which will involve vigorous fund-raising.

The EC **agreed** to the proposed Terms of Reference after some adjustments were made on accountability, funding, and restrictions on membership.

Several individuals were suggested as possible Board members and Andy was authorised to approach them to join the Board. Others who might serve would need EC approval. A request for support would be included in key messages. There would be a workshop on Thursday 5 April to answer any questions or concerns

Session 5

11. Worship Packs & Lindsey Press

A response was received from the Lindsey Press Panel on the proposal that they assume responsibility for future worship packs which they did not think fitted with their current role. The value of the packs was questioned, however, many lay worship leaders found them useful. It was agreed that the issue be referred back to the Local Leadership Strategy Group for their attention.

12. Other Reports:

There was no Nightingale Centre report as their meeting was cancelled due to bad weather, however Robert did inform the EC that the Centre's Risk Register was now in line with the EC Risk Register.

13. Chief Officers Report

Rev John Harley has produced an extensive draft manual on "Safeguarding" and has already received some feedback. It was a lengthy document which he hoped to have completed by the 18 March. The Chief Officer requested delegated authority for two members of the EC and himself to approve the final document in view of the need to progress – **Robert and Cathie agreed to undertake this task with Chief Officer.**

Robert volunteered to assist the Chief Officer in regard to the Business contingency arrangements.

14. Management Accounts to end Jan 2012

The Honorary Treasurer reported that the outlook for year end pointed to £11,000 deficit due primarily to Congregational Quota contributions not meeting the budgeted amount with effect on Bowland Trust contributions. The Chief Officer had reviewed this in some detail and quota membership had continued to fall in some cases by significant numbers. One congregation had simply sent a donation rather than a much larger quota. It was also noted that it is also a challenging year with regard to dividend income which affected the B&FUA's contribution as well as the GA's income.

It was **agreed** to place the question of the Quota on the Agenda of a future EC meeting.

Discussion took place on the nomination of an Honorary Treasurer. As no suitable nominee had been identified arrangements would have to be in place to cover until someone could be co-opted and a mechanism to do this would be proposed at the Annual Meetings.

The Convenor thanked the Hon Treasurer for his invaluable contribution to both the EC and the wider movement during his term of office. Huw thanked everyone for their support and understanding and that he had enjoyed serving on the EC.

Mary-Jean left the room at this point

15. Reports from Strategic Groups

a) Local Leadership

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2012 noted. A Fee Policy was put forward which clarified the current position. This was approved as follows:

“It is expected that Unitarians will give freely of their time when acting as volunteers in any capacity including officer roles, training and facilitation. Appropriate expenses and material resources will be reimbursed on production of receipts. We will only pay for external leadership and facilitation if doing so adds significant benefit which cannot be gained

from within our Unitarian communities and with the prior approval of the Chief Officer.”

EC was asked what would be the effect of the 2020 Development Programme on LLSG? Andy was asked as a next step to contact them and also the Ministry Strategic Group.

b) Ministry

Minutes of a meeting held on 17 January 2012 noted.

10. Interview Panel Report. Andy Pakula declared an interest.

The recommendations concerning the GA Roll were approved.

Ending of probationary period: Rev Andrew Pakula, Rev Patrick Timperley and Rev Roux Malan.

Entered on Roll of Ministers with Probationary status: Rev Myrna Michell.

The Chief Officer was asked to clarify processes for informing individuals about decisions at each stage.

c) Visibility

The Convenor reported on the meeting Andy Pakula, the Chief Officer and he had held with Angela Maher and Melanie Haberstroh on Monday 20 February 2012. It had been positive and productive and follow-up actions were agreed. Concern was shared about the membership and support to take forward the work. Angela had agreed to be the co-ordinator until 30 September 2012 but a replacement would be required from then.

Session 6

16. Strategic Group Business Plans

Business case proposals were received from the Local Leadership and Ministry Strategic Groups and a strategy document from the Visibility Strategic Group.

The Visibility Strategy was welcomed as a good and thorough report. It was strategic and also proposed specific actions. The Chief Officer emphasised the need for visibility measures to be grounded in real social responsibility work as set out in the EC strategic priorities. The

recommendations for the EC (1-3) in the strategy were supported with the remainder delegated to the Strategic Group.

Discussion took place on the significant proposal for a paid public relations officer; a half time post would cost £20,000 plus £10,000 budget. It was suggested that an alternative could be use of external agency with some of the proposed tasks undertaking by current staff and/or volunteers. The use of reserves to fund a visibility initiative was suggested. The Treasurer indicated that the limited reserves needed to be used sparingly and to generate a future financial benefit for the Unitarian Movement. The Chief Officer was asked to explore options with the Group.

In relation to the Local Leadership Strategic Group their capacity to deliver the proposed programme in 2011/12 was questioned. An indicative 5 year plan was suggested as a way of managing the various suggested training events.

The following additional financial allocations were made for 2011/12

Visibility	£5000
Local Leadership	£4000
Ministry	£500

The Chief Officer was asked to begin discussions about plans for 2012/13 with the Strategic Groups.

17. Staffing Review

Discussion took place on the overall financial implications in light of strategy group allocations and the requirements of the Movement. The Chief Officer was asked to take forward the framework of the staffing proposals as originally set out; working in conjunction with the human resources consultants, ensuring that practical issues were addressed and opportunities for further cost savings were explored. It was also agreed that a project be initiated relating to physical space requirements and the use of the current telephone systems.

18. A.O.B.

None

19. Key Messages

Main issues were identified and final document to be prepared by the Chief Officer.

20. Arrangements for Future Meetings:

May 5th 9 - 5 pm London

EC May 12

Appendix A
EC 33/12

July 6th 2-6 pm – 7th 9-3 pm – LKH Manchester (with post dinner session on 6th)

Sept 1st 9-5 pm – London

Nov 16th 2-6pm – 17th 9-3pm – London

21. Non-responsive check out

Saturday Closing Devotions: Cathie Masztalerz

