

Minutes of GA Executive Committee meeting held 19th January 2021 on Zoom

Present: Marion Baker (Convener), Hilda Dumpleton, Peter Hanley (Treasurer), Philip Colfox, Lynne Readett, Jo James, Rob Whiteman, Robert Ince, Jim Corrigall, Liz Slade and Celia Cartwright

Peter led Opening Devotions with a quotation from Robert Feynman and a reading from Giraffe by Bryony Littlefair

Rob took the minutes.

1 Chief Officer's Report

Liz spoke to the previously circulated report.

The new website was the first priority and was just around the corner. The next step would look at how to support the roll out to congregations. She thanked Rory Castle-Jones for his work on this.

The Rev Bob Janis Dillon's work was focussing on reflections on on-line worship as a way to build connections across Unitarianism.

In Wales the Art of Hosting event was bringing around 20 people together who might not otherwise meet.

The closure of Kidderminster, despite having money, a building and a part time minister, was raising questions as to how the GA can support the closure process. It was noted that this might affect other congregations and that closures may have been accelerated by the pandemic. Lynne reported that Hindley was also closing. Liz felt that the focus should be on areas of potential growth and the need to build capacity.

Jim raised the MSG as the only strategy group that had been really effective. He saw the role as being wider than the Roll. He noted that Interfaith Ministers often wished to maintain that status for commercial reasons and were not on the Roll or in the MF. He saw their involvement in some Unitarian congregations as sowing the seed for potential future difficult issues.

Jim noted that Unitarian College was working the Worship Studies Course to deliver the course on line. He regretted that we are not well served with training for lay leaders for aspects of leadership beyond leading worship. Celia supported the idea of extending lay leadership to the wider competencies of leadership. Liz underscored this as most congregations have no minister and are not on a pathway to have one.

Jo noted that there were crossovers from competencies to a Code of Conduct that raised questions around the accountability of lay leadership to wider Unitarianism as representatives of it. He was also concerned that the effect of Interfaith ministers might be to hollow out Unitarianism, something that he viewed with concern. He felt that the Art of Hosting and the pandemic had highlighted the weaknesses of our current structures as ways of working.

Responding to a question from Peter, Liz felt that the majority of the GA staff work should be on enabling people and congregations to flourish; looking to build capacity required following where the energy is.

Philip welcomed the report with its energy and optimism. He stressed the need to focus on those things which we must do and the management tools to do them.

Robert raised the question of care of ministers arising from mental health and resilience questions arising from the pandemic. He felt that Covid was affecting the job of ministers and felt that this raised questions around whether they were office holders or employees and the concomitant effect of this on the MPF. Jim paid tribute to the work of the Welfare Team of the MF. Celia remembered that the GA had provided a package to provide access to counselling. Liz reported that this had been signposted at the start of the pandemic and agreed to do so again. It was recognised that concerns around the MPF were germane as the EC was the guarantor of last resort.

Hilda asked about the furloughing of ministers and the financial stability of congregations. Liz noted that many congregations had been relying on reserves and that these might be running out; most congregations cannot survive on the contributions of the current members.

It was agreed that a survey of congregations, following the survey of spring 2020, be conducted, as a matter of priority, to close with a question on plans for the future as a way of building energy and developing strategies to do this.

It was agreed that a future meeting might focus on specific parts of the report and go through that in greater detail.

2 Communication

Liz reported that the Annual Meeting was to be held on line. Andrew Mason was working on the practicalities, including voting. Thought was being given to the design of the Annual Meeting to ensure that it included worship, interest and inspiration as well as essential business. Philip was concerned that the offering looked to satisfy people's spiritual needs. There was discussion and Liz agreed to take the ideas raised to the meeting of the Annual Meetings Panel.

Saturday 24th April 2021 was being considered as a date for the business section of the Annual Meeting.

3 Minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2020

Item 7 AOCB to read 2021 not 2020 GA. With that amendment the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3.1 Matters arising from the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2020

Item 1.2.1 – Code of Conduct Liz reported that she and Simon Bland had met to discuss this and that work was ongoing.

It was recognised that the Findhorn Unitarian Network was preparing a motion for the Annual Meeting on the preparation of a Code of Ethics for Ministers and Lay leaders. It was recognised that the responsibility to engage with emerging motions lay with the Steering Group.

Rob raised the issue of removal from the Roll of Ministers. It was recognised that the EC was

responsible for the Roll and added names to the Roll on the recommendation of the MSG but Rob was concerned that there was no mechanism for removal. He suggested that a mechanism for removal be initiated. Initially this would cover those who were placed on the Sex Offenders Register following conviction; those disqualified from acting as Directors or Trustees and those holding office in other denominations. He was invited to draft a policy for the next meeting.

Pre Meeting note: Succession planning for Treasurer It was agreed that this be added to the Finance Group agenda.

4 Legacy from Mark James Following discussion of emails circulated prior to the meeting it was agreed:

- to request a Deed of Variation
- agree to honour the unsigned codicil to the will because “We are a religious based charity, the object of which is, for the benefit of the public, to further the religious and other charitable work of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. In being true to the moral framework of our religion we consider that it is appropriate to seek to enable the wishes of our benefactor expressed in the Codicil to be fulfilled. By so doing we are also safeguarding the reputation of the charity in the eyes of future prospective benefactors.”

Marion agreed to report back on progress, including the question of the level of fees.

5 AOCB

5.1. Steering Group membership Further to Liz’s email it was agreed that the Rev Daniel Costley and Louise Reeve be approached with a view to serving on the group.

Peter noted that this was a decision ready and non contentious issue and suggested that such items be circulated by email, agreed and gathered for minuting at the next meeting. This was agreed.

5.2 Nightingale Centre

The circulated minutes were received and noted.

5.3 Torquay Innovation Centre

Liz agreed to bring this idea back to the EC when fully formulated. It was recognised that she, Philip and Peter were acting as an ad hoc working party on this task.

In response to a question from Jo it was noted that the EC could set up working parties and that these might include non EC members.

5.4 Role of President Celia reported that the role of President had been affected by pandemic times and suggested that this might lead to a new approach in 2021-2022.

6 DONM The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 16th February 2021 from 11.00-12.30 on Zoom.

Celia read Carpe Diem by Richard Gilbert to close the meeting.

Minutes of GA Executive Committee meeting held 16th February 2021 on Zoom

Present: Marion Baker (Convener), Philip Colfox, Jim Corrigall, Hilda Dumbleton, Peter Hanley (Treasurer), Robert Ince, Jo James, Lynne Readett, Jo James, Rob Whiteman and Liz Slade

Hilda led Opening Devotions with a reflection on recent developments in Wales and shared a quotation from the Chief Exec of Coca-Cola on dreams and the savouring of life.

Rob took the minutes.

1 Chief Officer's Report

Liz spoke to the previously circulated report.

She reported that the website has been the main focus of the last month's work. The Art of Hosting events had been held in Wales and had been successful, especially in making connections between people. A National Youth event, Cloud 9, to be held on 29th March had been announced and was being advertised.

In response to a question from Peter on capturing the Art of Hosting event Liz reported that Melda Grantham was following this up with the participants so that the event was an ongoing dialogue rather than a one-off. Hilda echoed this sentiment. Jo noted that harvesting was built into the Art of Hosting model.

Robert asked about the changes at the B&FUA. Liz suggested that the committee recognised the need for ongoing succession planning.

The website had been launched at the end of January. Liz saw this as part of the ongoing process of transformation; of trying to tell a new story based on today's context and culture and, thus, she had not been surprised by reaction within Unitarianism to the changes. She argued that many of those who had responded were acting out larger issues around Unitarian identity in their responses.

Lynne expressed concern as to how some concerns expressed had been responded to and the EC reflected on the feedback process.

Liz reported that some changes were to be made to the website, particularly around accessibility in the mobile version. She agreed to circulate a list of the changes made.

Jo noted that a debate between humanism and liberal Christianity within Unitarianism was a century old and saw conflict avoidance as an increasing position within that discussion. He felt that it was important to find a way to engage with that discomfort and suggested that discussion around the website might be part of that. Jim noted that some comments on the website had been made to the Rev Bob Janis-Dillon and on social media, even if some questioned the level of engagement with that evinced. Jim saw the website as focused on the non-religious and felt that focus to be misplaced.

Liz reported that the roll out of templates for use would enable congregations to express their own ethos and identity. This roll out would include prompts to enable congregations to address questions as to what their identity and ethos were. In response to questions she

confirmed that Societies would be included in the roll out and that this was expected to happen within the next weeks or month. In response to a question from Peter, based on the document produced by the developers, she confirmed that questions around the roll out were still be worked on by the Steering Group.

Jo explored the difference between issues of branding and appearance and deeper questions of identity and who Unitarians really are.

Philip reflected on the work of the Steering Group and felt that it was important that it modelled good practice in including diversity in decision making. It was felt that the involvement of more people in the next phase might provide an example of a safe and enquiring space for exploring issues around identity.

Robert noted that he, and others, had expected greater functionality in the new website with more bells and whistles. He felt that the problem of a theological understanding of who Unitarians are was perennial and would never be solved. He felt that the number of comments on social media were indicative of a strength of feeling that it was necessary to engage with.

Liz agreed to share the EC discussion with the Steering Group and report back to the next meeting on progress. This was to include ways to tap into the underlying bigger questions around identity, recognising that responses thus far had suggested that people are engaged with and by those issues.

2 Communication

Jim asked for a return of communication of Key Messages following EC meetings.

3 Removal of Ministers from the Roll

Rob spoke to the circulated paper. Jim rehearsed the wider discussion of the grounds and process for removal in the *Guidelines for Ministers and Congregations*. It was noted that the Guidelines had been circulated in a number of versions and had been undergoing revision for many years, though it was hoped that that process might be concluded soon. Peter recognised that the information was widely dispersed and could usefully be brought together and codified.

The paper was noted. It was agreed that the EC Policy Manual must reflect the updated Guidelines and decided to wait for further action until they were available, hoping that this would be in the not too distant future.

4 Minutes

4.1 Minutes of the meeting of the EC held on 19th January 2021

Item 3.1 - Code of Conduct

In the third paragraph after “no mechanism for removal” the words “in the EC Policy Manual.” were added.

A fourth paragraph “Jim noted that the subject was covered in the *Guidelines for Ministers and Congregations*.”

With that amendment the minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4.2 Minutes of GA EC Finance Group meetings 28 January and 5 February 2021

The circulated minutes were received and noted.

4.3 Minutes of Nightingale Centre Management Committee held on 9th January 2021

The circulated minutes were received and noted.

5 EC Membership

Marion congratulated Jim on his appointment as LDPA District Minister. In the light of this Jim was to step down from the EC so that the continuing members after the Annual Meeting would be Marion Baker, Hilda Dumbleton, Robert Ince and Rob Whiteman.

6 DONM The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 16th March 2021 from 11.00-12.30 on Zoom.

Minutes of GA Executive Committee meeting held 16th March 2021 on Zoom

Present: Marion Baker (Convener), Philip Colfox, Jim Corrigall, Hilda Dumbleton, Peter Hanley (Treasurer), Robert Ince, Jo James, Lynne Readett, Jo James, Rob Whiteman and Liz Slade

Robert led Opening Devotions with a reading of The Invitation by Oriah Mountain Dreamer. Rob took the minutes.

Action

1 Chief Officer's Report

Liz spoke to the previously circulated report.

Feedback on the website continued to be gathered including pieces to be fixed and those keen to be involved in using the new designs. A meeting to discuss the website, facilitated by the Rev Bob Janis-Dillon was being arranged. Liz felt that the process thus far had raised questions around barriers to change and how to communicate that would be helpful in future.

Jo reflected on the dissenting tradition of Unitarianism, including its Anabaptist and radical roots and wondered, with respect to the website, whether we were prepared to take seriously the fears of those who fear becoming dislocated from our past. He rehearsed his involvement in the design process and worried that his and other voices involved in that process had been ignored. He urged engagement with those who felt disenfranchised by the website, particularly those coming from a Christian perspective.

Liz reported that she had heard from some quarters who had felt that the Christian voice had been over represented in the website. Her hope was that all voices could be reflected across the whole website, rather than using different parts for different voices.

Marion welcomed the planned conversations and hoped that they would give an opportunity both for those involved to speak and, equally importantly, hear the perspective of others; that it would be a genuine conversation.

Peter recognised the problem of holding diversity and felt the current design did not permit this. He felt that a redesign was needed.

Jim welcomed the listening exercise that he felt was much needed. He was encouraged to hear of those wishing to adopt the designs. He felt that the criticism of the website was not from those resistant to change but from those seeking a better projection of our past.

Hilda welcomed the planned group and recognised the impossibility of expressing the core of Unitarianism in words; a difficult task not previously achieved. Liz expected that that goal would never be achieved as there was a spiritual truth beyond language. She recognised the difficulty in communicating with a variety of audiences simultaneously.

Lynne asked Robert if there had been any feedback from the Manchester district. He reported that the website had been discussed at the District AGM and speakers, from across the spectrum, had said that they did not recognise themselves in the website.

Marion recognised that speed was needed in drawing the group together.

LS

Jo recognised the website as a presenting issue and was something with which the EC needed to engage. He stated that people were not feeling that they were being heard and that we needed to engage with them.

Liz argued that the website was not reportage as that would not help move Unitarianism forward. It should represent what we aspire to be rather than what we are. As such it may not always be appropriate in the local context. She recognised that it was necessary to communicate that understanding.

LS

Jim reiterated his plea for the return of communication of Key Messages following EC meetings. He agreed to work with Liz on this for the current meeting.

LS/JC

Rob asked about the Worship Studies Course arising from the circulated report and the previous report. It was noted that a Foundation Course had been run by Unitarian College (UC) in recent months. (Jo recorded a conflict of interest in that he had been one of the paid tutors on the course). Rob reported that he had heard that UC was keen to run the next stages of the course but felt uncertain in doing so. He understood that those who had previously run the WSC were keen that it be brought within the compass of UC. The EC supported this move.

LS

Liz saw it as important that competencies in lay leadership were developed over time. She saw this building from the ministerial competencies. Marion noted the interest of the Hibbert Trust in this area.

Torquay

Liz introduced the circulated paper. Philip reported a conflict of interest as he is a holding trustee for Torquay. Liz had spoken with Simon Bland and Gavin Howell as to the process to move from the provisional ideas circulated to a full proposal.

It was agreed that a scoping exercise be conducted in order to develop a fully proposal for consideration by the EC including a full budget. A budget of up to £5,000 from the 2020 Fund was approved for the scoping study, to include a structural survey.

LS/ David Joseph (DJ)

Members were encouraged to email Liz with questions that they wished the scoping study to answer.

LS/All

2 Finance

2.1 Approval of circulated papers

The previously circulated 2019-2020 Accounts, Letter of Completion and Letter of Representation were approved. Peter reported that a successful audit had been completed and that all was in order.

It was recognised the Mark James legacy had been included as a designated fund. Philip asked that a paper be produced, based on original documents where possible, that summarised the funds listed in the accounts and the restrictions, if any, attached to them.

LS/DJ

Jo raised the question of the move to being a CIO and what effect this might have on the funds. It was recognised that this work was outstanding and linked to the rationalisation of the funds. The Finance Group was asked to take on this work.

PH/Finance Group

Marion reported that the auditor had offered to run a free 1hr session on trustee governance. It was agreed that this offer be taken up, possibly as part of the induction process for the next EC.

LS/MB

2.2 Matters arising from recent Finance Group meetings

Peter and Robert tabled a paper *Finance Committee Update for EC – 16.03.22*. Robert introduced the triple threads of the Essex Hall loan, Investment Policy and the Mark James (MAJ) legacy.

In response to the points in the paper these decisions were made:

- The Essex Hall loan was to be repaid in full, as originally agreed.
- The Unitarian College grant of £45,000 would be paid from the MAJ Legacy as this was in line with the wishes of the donor.
- TNC to establish a designated fund, using a portion of their MAJ legacy, to support underprivileged and Unitarian under 18s to use the Nightingale Centre.
- TNC to invest £200,000 of their MAJ Legacy in the CCLA COIF sustainable investment fund.

LS/DJ/MB

It was recognised that in order to manage the cashflow and remove the need for cashing investments the Essex Hall loan repayment and the UC grant would be paid from the cash received from the MAJ legacy (£200,000 received thus far). The effect of this would be the equivalent amount of money (£200,000) plus the balance of the legacy still to be paid would be placed into a discretionary fund within the GA accounts that recognises the wishes of Mark James. At this point the MAJ Fund finishes up with £150k of Newton (ex Bowland) and £5k cash as £45k has been paid to UC.

LS/DJ

It was agreed that the Investment Policy needed to be revisited and reworked. There was inconclusive discussion around the basic principles to underlie this. It was recognised that professional advice might be valuably sort in this matter in future. No decision was made as to costs for this or from whence such advice might be sought.

PH/Finance Group

In response to the Cardiff Unitarians motion to the Annual Meetings it was felt that any response made should state that the EC was listening carefully to the debate and was not content at the current portfolio situation of the GA investments. Any response would include a clear statement of the current holdings and how they fitted with the requirements of the proposed motion.

RI/LS/PH

It was agreed that papers for consideration at a meeting should always be circulated prior to the meeting.

LS/All

3 Minutes of the meeting of the EC held on 16th February 2021

The circulated minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 DONM

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 20th April 2021 from 10.30-12.30 on Zoom.

It was agreed that the Rev Bob Janis-Dillon attend part of the meeting to provide an update on the Congregational Connections work.

The planning for future meetings (TNC will not be open for 16th May) was carried forward to the next meeting.

Marion closed the meeting by reading *Assembly* by David Dawson.

Minutes of GA Executive Committee meeting held 20th April 2021 on Zoom

Present: Marion Baker (Convener), Philip Colfox, Hilda Dumbleton, Peter Hanley (Treasurer), Robert Ince, Jo James, Lynne Readett, Jo James, Rob Whiteman, Celia Cartwright and Liz Slade

Apologies for Absence: Jim Corrigall

Philip led Opening Devotions with a reflection on his first meetings with Unitarians from outside his local area and how that had informed his work in wider Unitarianism.

Rob took the minutes.

Action

1 Chief Officer's Report

Liz spoke to the previously circulated report.

She reported that Gavin was currently in Torquay.

The Listening Circle, facilitated by the Rev Bob Janis-Dillon, on the website had been valuable. Around 20% of the comments had led to specific changes. Other comments referred to wider questions that had been prodded by the website.

Rory Castle Jones was making more changes centred around accessibility and readability. He was also starting to work with those who were keen to use the new designs locally and would report back on that development.

Marion passed on Jim's question as to how the changes would be communicated. Liz reported that Rory had produced a news item for the website outlining the changes and that the website process was evolutionary and open to feedback. It was expected that this would go live in the next few days. He had also referred to this in a video prepared for the Annual Meetings (AM).

Philip asked about the status of the logos. It was recognised that different congregations would use different logos, in a continuation of current practice. This was welcomed as a feature of congregational autonomy.

He also asked about the date for a rollout to local congregations. Liz recognised that this was a recurring question and that it was necessary to communicate a plan as to how and when this would happen.

LS

Jo welcomed the changes as evidence that responses were being heard. He spoke of the involvement of Francis Elliott Wright and others in deeper questions that the website had raised and wondered how these might be picked up and used as an opportunity for healing. Liz had seen the value in this but was unsure as to how to proceed. She recognised that some had been worried that there was an agenda to make all Unitarianism secular and humanist and that this concerned needed to be addressed in communications. Jo and Liz agreed to work in this area with the idea of online circle / campfire discussion being mooted.

LS/JJ

Rob asked about the survey of congregations that had been agreed in previous reports. Liz reported that this had not progressed but would after the AM.

LS

Rob asked about Excepted Status. Liz reported that the removal of this had been deferred for 10 years. It was recognised that this had been a useful lever to help congregations to review their governance and that such a review was still valuable. Rob asked whether a list of congregations with Excepted Status existed. Robert reported that it used to be held in Essex Hall and Liz agreed to research this further.

LS

Jo asked about progress with the Leadership Strategy Inquiry. Liz reported that not much progress had been made. Both she and Simon Bland had received enquiries that raised questions about pathways to leadership. Marion reported that Unitarian College (UC) was looking to develop thinking in this area. It was recognised that responses to enquiries must be tempered with care.

LS

2 Ministry Strategy Group

The circulated report was noted.

The recommendation that Shana Begum and Jennifer Sanders be accepted for Ministry training, both at Unitarian College, was agreed.

The recommendation that Melda Grantham, having completed training, be given Probationary Status on the GA Roll, was agreed.

The recommendation that the Rev Maria Pap, the Rev Mark Hutchinson, the Rev Duncan Voice and the Rev Andy Philips, having completed their probationary status and being eligible for Full Status, be given recognition on the GA Roll was agreed.

3 Charity Governance

The Convener listed a number of Statements and Responses circulated by email in the previous 2 weeks. On a vote it was agreed that the Response (Attached as Appendix 1) be adopted and taken to the next meeting of the EC. It was recognised that this included a number of actions to be taken forward. Marion reported that she and Liz had already started on this work in preparation for the next meeting and hoped to have a draft procurement policy for consideration at the next meeting. She reported that there was ongoing discussion with David Joseph (DJ) on systems and processes for financial reporting.

MB/LS/DJ

It was agreed that Link Reports from the Districts be reinstated for future meetings.

All

4 Finance

The circulated report from David Joseph was noted.

Peter was not happy with the report and felt that bigger picture financial reporting was required.

Philip asked that a variance column be added along with a brief commentary column. This was agreed.

LS/DJ

Marion asked about the Jay Deacon legacy. Liz reported that this was unrestricted. It was agreed that usage of this be included in future discussions.

LS

Liz reported that the 5K with Metropole being described as being capable of being redeployed was as a result of the contract with the Metropole now being at an end. She reported that thinking was being done as to where any future AM might be.

Robert asked about the current Gift Aid situation, including the historic reclaim. It was noted that this was not an individual line item. Liz agreed to investigate further.

LS/DJ

5 Minutes of the meeting of the EC held on 16th March 2021

Item 2.1, second paragraph:

This was amended to read:

“It was recognised the Mark James legacy had been included as a designated fund.

Philip asked that a paper be produced, based on original documents where possible, that summarised the funds listed in the accounts and the restrictions, if any, attached to them. **This paper would include the original wording of the documents. If this could not be found that should be recorded.**”

LS/DJ

With that amendment (in bold) the circulated minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

6 Matters arising from the Minutes of 16th March 2021

Marion noted that the Response (Item 3 above) had looked for reinstatement of an Action Points list and suggested that the minutes of 16th March offered a good starting point. This is attached as Appendix 2.

Liz noted that the offer of reduced quota payments has barely been taken up. She wondered whether the financial impact of the pandemic was being delayed. It was expected that this might appear in the planned congregational survey.

Item 1, paragraph 12: Marion repeated Jim’ plea for the return of communication of Key Messages following EC meetings. Rob agreed to work with Liz on this.

RW/LS

Item 1, paragraph 13: Worship Studies: Liz reported that she had spoken with Helen Mason (UC) on this and that it had been welcomed. Rob Asked about the financial effects of this as there were lines in the GA budget. Liz agreed to speak with David Joseph to clarify these effects.

LS/DJ

Item 1, Torquay: Liz confirmed that 5K had been included in the budget for this.

7 DONM

Prior to this business being taken Peter intimated his intention to resign as of midnight on 21 April 2021. He would make this formal in correspondence with the President.

PH

Philip resigned and left the meeting.

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 18th May 2021 from 10.30-12.30 on Zoom.

The planning for future meetings was carried forward to the next meeting as a new EC would be involved and there was ongoing uncertainty as to what the regulations would allow.

Marion paid tribute to Lynne, Jim and Philip and thanked them for their work on the EC as it was their last meeting.

8 AOCB

Marion reported a correspondence with Colleen Burns, Editor of the Inquirer, on the incorrect list of EC members in the Inquirer of 3 April. A form of words for the correction was agreed.

Lynne closed the meeting with a reading from Robert Walsh.

Appendix 1:

Response to the Treasurer's Statement to the EC of 9 April 2021

The memorandum to the EC of 9 April 2021 is welcomed for its reminder of issues of oversight and scrutiny.

Trustees recognise that we have fallen down in those areas in the last year for a variety of reasons. Covid has limited the time available to us and too little of that has been spent in scrutiny and oversight - duties that fall to us as trustees.

The memo will be noted at our next meeting (20 April). However we feel it should not be accepted as an official paper, instead we recommend that the Convener discuss it with the CO and report back to the subsequent meeting. It is clear that the CO is accountable to the EC. On a day to day basis that is through the Convener who is line manager to the CO (as laid down in contract). Thus it is right that the Convener is the point of contact for this review.

It is clear that the website procurement process has been sub-optimal and that lessons need to be learnt, for implementation by EC, CO and Treasury. There has been some overspend. These lessons might include clarification of devolved powers and procurement process.

We are satisfied however that nothing currently imperils the charity or renders trustees liable to legal action.

Nevertheless we recognise that this memo raises issues of prioritisation and structuring of our work so as to enable proper oversight. Rob Whiteman has already taken on the writing of meeting minutes and to augment this it is suggested that we bring back an action points list to

be considered after the adoption of the minutes at each meeting. This would list action arising from previous meetings and make sure that they were completed. We need to be clear as to the decisions taken and that they are followed up. We should continue to review and improve prioritisation and structuring on an ongoing basis. As the CO is charged with implementation we see this as part of that role.

We would also welcome a Treasurer's report to every meeting, to include the latest outturn figures and the current budget. That this has not been done has allowed the situation of which the memo complains to develop. It is also suggested that the Finance Officer might be in attendance for the relevant section of the EC business.

Furthermore the CO report should contain a report on the work of each of the Officers for every meeting. This would aid better oversight and scrutiny of the work of the charity.

Jim Corrigan, Hilda Dumpleton, Jo James, Lynne Readett, Rob Whiteman 13/04/2021

Appendix 2: Action Points List

Post Meeting Meeting

Marion Baker (Convener), Hilda Dumpleton, Robert Ince, Jo James, Lynne Readett, Jo James, Rob Whiteman and Liz Slade

Following the resignation of Peter Hanley it was agreed that the Procedural Motion for the appointment of the Hon Treasurer at the Annual Meeting (AM) be withdrawn, saying that he had resigned and that the EC would consider the position at it's next meeting.

At the AM the Stipend Review Report would be presented by Simon Bland, as Secretary of the Group.

The meeting closed.

Minutes of the Executive Committee (EC) Meeting held 18/05/21

Present: Marion Baker, Celia Cartwright, Hilda Dumbleton, Simon Hall, Robert Ince, Jenny Jacobs, Rob Whiteman

Apologies: Jo James

In attendance: Andrew Mason (Minutes), Anne Mills, (President), Elizabeth Slade (Chief Officer), Bob Janis-Dillon (Congregational Connections Lead, item 7)

1. Opening devotions

Jenny Jacobs read from Chapter Six of 'The Cloud of Unknowing' and the meeting started.

2. Check-in

Check-in was held.

3. EC Roles

Appointing a Convenor

It was **AGREED** to appoint Marion Baker as EC Convenor and Marion took over chairing the meeting.

Welcoming new EC members

The newly-elected EC Members (Celia Cartwright, Jenny Jacobs, Simon Hall and Jo James) were welcomed to the EC. Anne Mills was also welcomed as the new GA President, and would be observing the EC Meetings.

Decision on GA Treasurer proposal

It was **AGREED** to appoint Rob Whiteman as Acting GA Honorary Treasurer.

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held 16 March 2021 were **AGREED** and would be signed by the Convenor.

ACTION: Marion

Action list

The actions would be taken at the appropriate agenda items.

5. Finance

Management Accounts

The Finance Officer, David Joseph, had responded to Phillip Colfox's comments on the formatting of the Management Accounts. The Chief Officer did not feel there were major items to draw attention to in the Management Accounts.

Gift Aid Update

The Finance Officer had been to the office to look at Gift Aid. He would be completing the 2016/17 year returns by the end of September and putting in steps to catch up to date.

Draft procurement policy

It was **AGREED** that the policy be reviewed in the next Finance Committee meeting, and brought back to the EC, rather than being discussed. Any comments on this should be emailed to the Chief Officer.

Finance Committee

It was **AGREED** that the Convenor, Treasurer and Robert Ince would form the new Finance Committee and the Treasurer would arrange a meeting, to include the Finance Officer.

ACTION: Rob

Questions

The Treasurer had a question on the why the mentoring programme (line 70 of the report) was substantially over budget at this stage of the year, and would discuss this during a planned meeting next week with the Finance Officer.

ACTION: Rob

Finance Items from the Action list from 16 March EC Meeting:

Item 2: The Chief Officer was undertaking the designated fund listings.

ACTION: Liz

Item 4: The Chief Officer had spoken to the Auditors to check availability in June for a one-hour Zoom training session and would circulate dates.

ACTION: Liz

Item 5: Repayment of the loan from the Essex Hall Trust was in process.

Item 6: The £45K grant to Unitarian College had been paid.

Item 7: Marion indicated that the £200K designated fund investment would be made by the Nightingale Centre.

The Chief Officer would speak with Helen Mason of Unitarian College about the processes of handing over finances to the College.

Finance Items from the Action list from 20 April 2021 EC Meeting:

Item 8: The Treasurer would speak to the Finance Officer about the unrestricted Jay Deacon legacy.

Ministers Pension Fund (MPF) Meeting held 17 May 2021

Rob had attended the meeting and reported back. Rob indicated a vested interest as he was a beneficiary of the MPF. He would write a document about potential conflicts of interest where the GA Treasurer was a Minister.

ACTION: Rob

The General Assembly is the Guarantor of Last Resort for the Fund. Hilda Dumbleton and Marion Baker represent the GA on the MPF Trustee Board.

There was a plan to change the MPF scheme to a Collective Defined Pension Scheme. Questions were likely to be asked about the structure of the MPF, and a discussion was coming which could affect the GA as Guarantor of Last Resort. No decisions had been made at this stage, and the GA and EC would need to be fully involved in discussions long before any votes were taken. The Convenor indicated that the Secretary of the MPF would soon be sending a letter to invite the EC and the Ministerial Fellowship to be involved in that process.

A hypothetical question about whether the EC could opt out of being Guarantor of Last Resort if the proposal seemed detrimental was raised. The Convenor felt that the decision had been a resolution at the GA Meetings, and any reversal should follow the same route, though at present the initial indications were that the plans would improve the GA's position.

6. Review of GA Meetings, Feedback and reflections on AGM events

The Chief Officer indicated that some internal Staff reflection had taken place, which identified a need to prioritise community-building after two years without an in-person Meetings, though with a view to community-building for the future, not just the existing

attenders. There was more technical ability in the membership than a year and a half ago and initial feedback was that people were pleased with how the online AGM had been managed.

Initial comments from EC Members:

- Having the business on one day felt comfortable, and could enable in-person Meetings to focus separately on the social and side meetings.
- Some liked the business meetings. A hybrid system of in-person and online might be considered, though this did bring a variety of issues including voting. As the constitution was being reviewed as part of the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) process anyway, the section on the Meetings could be reviewed to better allow for the possibility of hybrid Meetings.
- A member's initial assumption had been that attendance for the online AGM would rise, as the AGM was free and involved no travel, therefore enabling people to attend. It was asked whether this was the case. The Chief Officer indicated that it was not – there were around 200 in attendance out of around 260/270 bookings, set against around 330 at the in-person Meetings.
- The Chief Officer noted that people book for the Meetings both for the Business and the other activities. Congregations paid for people to attend often for voting delegate. If the Meetings were separated, with the AGM online and the community-building separate, it might make congregations reluctant to pay for delegates in the same way. This did raise the question that if people weren't prepared to pay for themselves, were we offering something good enough? She would wish to look at the relationship-building to try and make the most of time out together in-person.

Members were asked to pass on any further feedback to the Chief Officer. **ACTION: All**

GA Resolutions – next steps

a. Code of Ethics

The EC were asked to appoint a Committee. The Chief Officer had been approached by the Findhorn Unitarians, wanting to be involved. Rob noted Maud Robinson's comments in The Inquirer as an interested person. The convenor wanted at least two EC Members involved in the Committee.

It was **AGREED** that Jo James and Celia Cartwright would form part of the Committee, then get other interested parties involved and convene a meeting. **ACTION: Celia and Jo**

b. Fossil Fuel Divestment

It was **AGREED** to ask the Finance Committee to take this forward as part of the Investment Review currently underway. **ACTION: Rob**

The Unitarian Investment Panel were meeting on 09 June and the resolution would also be discussed there. Bob Janis-Dillon's meeting of Congregational Treasurers would likely also have comments, and Rob would attend this and feedback. **ACTION: Rob**

It was noted that the Newton Finance Report gave a percentage of the portfolio and the resolution was based on a percentage of the profits. The Finance Officer would be asked to circulate this Report to the EC Members. **ACTION: Rob**

c. Provision for Young People

Unitarian College and Nightingale Centre Committee were interested in moving forward in a positive way and look at conversations on how to move forward with The Chief Officer, and the Youth Officer, Gavin Howell. The Chief Officer indicated that Gavin was happy to

have that conversation; had found the motion challenging and unclear; and worked two days a week, was a limiting factor, and therefore could better act by facilitating and enabling rather than being the deliverer. Several trustees indicated concerns about this resolution, particularly part D, and support was expressed for how much Gavin had achieved during this difficult year. It was felt that conversation and partnership might help.

d. Red Cross – Interfaith Red Cross Memorial Peace Appeal

It was **AGREED** that the best approach was to inform our constituent members about the resolution and encourage them to support it through a letter signed by the President, Convenor and Chief Officer, and that Feargus O'Connor should be asked to write the letter.

ACTION: Liz

A more general questions on motions was raised - whether they were still the best way to communicate, get the feel of the GA's position, and start discussions. There were also concerns about previous instances of toothless or irrelevant motions, and how that could reflect negatively on our perceived priorities. This potentially involved processes both constitutional and otherwise, and it was noted that the CIO process required an updated Constitution. There was general agreement that this motions process needed to be reviewed.

It was **AGREED** to set up a Constitutional Review Group, with a wider membership as a consultative group. The experience of past members of the EC & Steering Committee, and Past Presidents, could be helpful. The wider Movement needed to be included in the process. It was **AGREED** that Robert Ince and the Chief Officer would work together on drafting terms of reference.

ACTION: Robert & Liz

It was **AGREED** that the Constitutional Review would not include looking at the GA Object.

7. Staff update

Bob Janis-Dillon, Congregational Connections Lead, joined the meeting at this point and gave an update on his role.

The position had started in December 2020 as 0.6 Full-time equivalent (FTE). It was a temporary position and therefore thought would be needed on how to continue the work after Bob had left.

The position's remit focused on finding strengths in our Movement and attempting to connect areas which were working well, to spread growth naturally from congregation to congregation. Much of this was experimental and some mistakes would likely be made along the way.

Presently Bob was taking the opportunities offered by videoconferencing and phone contact, though the lack of in-person connection. The pandemic year meant that both our Movement and our society were in a transitory stage. There was considerable weariness in congregations and members, with anxiety and grief from both the change to our way of life as well as the lives lost, and some guilt among those who have enjoyed certain aspects of the changes.

However this was also a time of great flexibility. Zoom had enabled congregations to check-in in pastorally. There was a feeling of gratitude that we were now able to meet in person again. Congregations had been able to reconnect with previous members who have moved away. There had been creativity in leadership from Ministers and lay leaders. People had been open to new ways of doing things and acting collegiately. This was therefore a time of opportunity for our Movement to look at how our positive change could be engineered in our congregations.

Bob offered a number of metaphors for ways of looking at congregations, and what they could be:

- An airport – taking us to new and exciting places.
- A theatre – giving an exciting and meaningful show.
- Guardians of a tradition – A treasure we guard for others, or as Stewards of the Sacred Mysteries.
- The ‘Sexy Librarian’ – Access to tradition, but by looking at it an exciting way.
- A group of travellers – travelling together through an emotional terrain.
- A lighthouse – offering safety in life’s storms.
- Fertiliser – A place of spiritual intellectual and emotional growth.
- An Ice cream van – spreading a little bit of love and excitement wherever we go.

Our congregations tend to be a group of people, they may have some funding (variable) and probably have a weekly meeting (which gives identity). The Sunday worship tended to be felt of as a centre of identity, and this had been challenging during lockdown.

Bob was working to create conversations around congregations, and had been getting a good insight into how congregations have dealt with lockdown. There was a sense of accomplishment in what had been achieved and he noted the online approach had encouraged some people to connect internationally. Bob felt many congregations would stick with online meetings for the time being, and onwards. There was an unexplored territory of possible hybrid online and in-person meetings, which some congregations were hoping to do. This led into the wider question of what we have to share and how we share it. Congregations and congregational leaders were getting more open to sharing. This had not just been worship leaders – some Treasurers have undertaken work, often social justice oriented.

Interesting conversations were to be had about how we live our beliefs in the world and Bob had started a “Congregations in the Community” programme on Zoom. The next event on engagement groups was advertised on the GA website, and the plan was to record sessions to share afterwards.

Bob noted that we can be a bit insular and need to be connected to the community. We also had non-congregational entities we could connect with. Congregations and Affiliated Societies work together well. The Societies could work well by meeting monthly on Zoom, and then have an in-person gathering for a retreat once or twice a year to deepen the connections fostered on Zoom.

The overall question of where we going could only be answered with uncertainty. Bob recommended the book “How to Lead When you don’t know where you’re going” by Susan Beaumont. His thoughts were: opportunities come up when you are open; cultivate spiritual virtues but in community; give away some control to emerging leaders (though after consideration – he noted this was difficult to do). People were interested in spirituality and community, and we would stumble across these opportunities if we were open to them. This was a challenging time, but very exciting.

Bob was thanked for his report and left the meeting.

8. Chief Officers Report

The Ministry Students Fund needed some attention, as it was running down against the number of students to be trained. The Chief Officer suggested the possibility that the Mark Anthony James legacy could be used to cover the costs for the next few years, and further

consideration be given to have to fund this in the longer-term. It was **AGREED** to refer this to the Finance Committee, to come back with a proposal. **ACTION: Rob**

The Convenor highlighted the funding work Simon Bland was doing on legacy fundraising and working with the Churches Conservation Trust. It was **AGREED** to endorse this work and ask Simon to bring back proposals. **ACTION: Liz**

Torquay – A separate report had been received on development work at Torquay. Gavin Howell had visited and was happy in principle with the idea of working with them on a part-time basis. He would be coordinating a building survey and would visit the church when that took place. One important factor was whether there was an appetite to connect with us locally – he had received positive response so far, but needed to get a better idea of the potential for collaboration. A proposal for a longer-term programme would then need to be fleshed out. There was a desire to move quickly, so it was hoped that feedback would be available for the next EC Meeting.

9. EC meetings

The Chief Officer's paper made proposals for the pattern of EC meetings, with a plan for Zoom meeting and a facilitated meeting at the Nightingale Centre.

Comments / suggestions from EC members were:

- 2-hour Zoom meetings were too short to go into the depth of conversation required, and discouraged people from speaking due to agenda timing concerns.
- The GA constitution requires six meeting per year, though this was a minimum. 2 at Hucklow, 2 at Essex Hall and the rest as Zoom sessions was suggested, though six did not feel like enough to fill the role.
- One trustee liked the facilitation for the Hucklow meeting. Another felt the facilitation was not necessary and could be added in later if needed, with an emphasis on learning together by doing.
- Zoom meetings could involve two 2-hour sessions with a good break in between.
- In-person meetings as well as Zoom meetings were important, and travel was harder at certain times of the year.
- For those with other responsibilities, such as collecting grandchildren from school, the timing of meetings could be crucial. This was particularly the case where travel was required.
- The Chief Officer's paper equated to around 30 hours of meeting time during the year. Five years ago, the EC met for around 72 hours. Efficiencies were possible, but more time was needed. Mealtimes were an important space for getting to know each other more deeply.
- In-person meetings could be made more common in the first year of a new trustee group, with a move to more Zoom meetings in the second, to allow new trustees to get to know each other.

It was **AGREED** that the Convenor and Chief Officer would consider a schedule of more in-person meetings this year, and one-issue agendas for Zoom meetings, in a way which did not exclude people (it was noted that input would also be needed from Jo James) as a trial for the next year. This plan would be circulated after the meeting.

ACTION: Marion & Liz

June EC meeting

21-23 June at Hucklow had been suggested as the date, but there were some clashes. Instead of the normal strategy meeting, this meeting would focus on the trustees getting to know each other, working together, and business. The next two-night meeting would be the usual strategy meeting. The Convenor would set up a Doodle poll of possible dates.

ACTION: Marion

The months set out in the Chief Officer's document for meeting were acceptable.

10. EC District links & other roles

Districts currently not covered were: East Midlands, Yorkshire, Western, NE Lancashire, Southern, London and Merseyside. Rob indicated he would be happy to take Western or London, Simon would be happy to take Southern areas. Jenny would be happy to take Yorkshire. Celia offered to take NE Lancashire and Northern.

It was **AGREED** that the Chief Officer and Convenor would send a list of the Districts with their current representatives and members would respond on their preferred districts.

ACTION: Liz & Marion, All

Other Roles

it was **AGREED** that Jenny would be the link with Visibility, and would take the lead on setting up a group.

It was **AGREED** that Jo would be the link for the Ministry Strategy Group. Celia had volunteered to be on the Annual Meetings Panel.

Pattern of meetings

Simon noted that he worked at Waitrose on Saturdays and would be unable to attend meetings on that day. It was noted that many of the Districts (and GA groups) were expected to continue to meet on Zoom in the future, which would reduce the travel burden.

11. Any Other Business

Key Messages – these were needed. Andrew would produce the Minutes and Liz would pick out the key messages and send these to the EC as well as publishing them through Uni-News. **ACTION: Liz & Andrew**

EC Link Reports – The desired frequency of EC Link reports was raised. It was felt to be dependent on the pattern of district meetings. Where a district hadn't met, a report was unlikely to be needed.

President's Report – Anne had emailed a President's Report, which was noted.

12. Check-out

The check-out took place.

Simon Hall gave closing devotions with a reading from Richard S Gilbert's book of meditations 'In the Holy Quiet' and the meeting closed.

Minutes of the Executive Committee (EC) Meeting held 27-29 July 2021

Present: Marion Baker (Convenor), Hilda Dumbleton, Simon Hall, Robert Ince, Jenny Jacobs, Jo James, Rob Whiteman (Treasurer)

Apologies: Celia Cartwright

In attendance: Liz Slade (Chief Officer)

1. Framing the meeting

Rather than following our usual approach of opening and closing devotions, Marion Baker invited the EC to see the whole meeting as devotional, reflecting our values, purpose and intentions as a movement in our work together during the meeting.

2. Finance

The timeline for the 2021 audit process was noted.

The paper from the Treasurer ('Treasurer for EC 0702') was approved, outlining the likely upcoming work for the Finance Group, and noting the conflicts of interest highlighted by the Treasurer.

Staff salaries were reviewed and a pool was approved to enable mid-year payraises and end-of-year bonuses.

3. Governance

Robert Ince presented the paper on the proposed working group to review the GA's constitution as part of a move to CIO status, and it was approved by the EC.

Action: Robert and Liz to follow up

4. Strategic planning

The majority of the meeting was focused on strategic planning.

The Chief Officer shared a paper in advance of the meeting reflecting on the current health of the movement, and how, although there are some points of strength, the vitality of the movement overall is low, and many congregations have been put under new pressures due to pandemic.

Each EC member added their insights and reflections on the current status of the movement.

The EC then shared their perspectives on what a successful 2030 vision for the movement might look like.

These exercises created a shared context from which we worked to identify the areas of work that would help us get from our current status towards our ideal future.

The EC recognised the importance of communication of the output of these discussions to the movement, and that these should be shared through a number of channels.

Action: Liz to work with colleagues to create suitable outputs to be shared for wider communication, and to develop plans with the team to feed into the budget planning process

5. Unitarian College

The EC reflected on the two papers provided by Unitarian College, one on formalising leadership roles beyond the GA Roll of Ministers, and one on residential youth programmes.

It was acknowledged that

Action: Rob Whiteman to chair a group to identify how we move forward on leadership roles

Action: Liz to follow up with the Youth Coordinator to explore how the GA might partner with the Nightingale Centre and Unitarian College on youth residencies

Action: Liz to follow up with Unitarian College in developing the Memorandum of Understanding with the GA

6. Follow-up from AGM

Resolution on a code of ethics – to discuss at the next EC meeting

Action: Liz to include on the agenda

Motion (not selected for debate) on trans rights – in recognition that it is likely there will be a future motion on this issue, the question was raised on how we help the EC and wider movement be well-informed

Action: Liz and Jo to follow up

It was recognised that there is room for improvement in the motions process, to allow a good depth of discussion of the issues, and to ensure the quality of motions put to the movement is high. With the move to CIO status, there will be an opportunity to review the constitutional framing of the motions, and there may be procedural improvements that can happen in the meantime.

Action: Robert and Liz to consider as part of plans for CIO constitution review group

7. Previous meetings

In the meetings of the EC meeting of 20th April 2021, following a request from Peter Hanley, former GA Hon Treasurer, the following was deleted from Appendix 1, Response to the Treasurer's Statement to the EC of 9 April 2021: "That this has not been done has allowed the situation of which the memo complains to develop."

Minutes of the Executive Committee (EC) Meeting held 17-18 September 2021

Present: Marion Baker (Convenor), Hilda Dumbleton, Simon Hall, Robert Ince, Jenny Jacobs, Jo James (Friday only), Rob Whiteman

In attendance: Celia Cartwright, Gavin Howell (items 10-11 by Zoom), David Joseph (item 3 by Zoom), Andrew Mason (Minutes), Elizabeth Slade (Chief Officer)

Friday 17th September

Jo James gave opening devotions, listening to local sounds then reading a poem on listening by Adrienne Rich.

1. Check-in

Everyone checked in and the meeting started.

2. Minutes of the last meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held 27-29 July 2021 were **AGREED** as a correct record and signed by the Convenor.

3. Finance

- Update from the Finance Group Meeting held 07 September and Management Accounts
The Management Accounts were presented by David Joseph, who joined the meeting by Zoom for this agenda item.

David highlighted that a third legacy had been received, and therefore more legacy income was expected for the year. The third legacy was from John Cox, who died about twenty years ago. A trust had been set up for his brother. On the brother's death in May this year, a claim had been triggered on the final part of the estate, with five charities sharing the remainder. The value of our share is not yet known.

The account had originally provided for £400K from the Mark James legacy. £375K had been received, but the remaining £25K was not expected to be received, and this will therefore be adjusted in the accounts.

A question was asked as to why the totals of the youth figures lines 155-168 appeared to be the same figures and zeroed out. David replied that line 155 was a total expense figure, with no corresponding income, and therefore this was a net cost. The format was untidy and he would look at making it clearer.

Finance Committee meeting 07 September 2021

As Acting Treasurer, Rob reported on the meeting.

Stipend Review group – Rob registered a conflict of interest as a Minister receiving a Stipend. He suggested a lay person or Retired Minister (not in receipt of a stipend) join the group. The commitment was for one meeting a year, likely by Zoom. It was **AGREED** that Simon Hall be appointed to the Stipend Review Group.

Audit timetable – David had updated the audit timetable and this had been agreed with the Auditors. The Audit Fee had been discussed with the Auditors. The Audit had involved more work than originally expected, and it had been agreed to increase their fee.

Funds digest – This was ongoing. For Restricted and Designated funds, we needed to know the applicable restrictions. Rob reminded members of his potential conflict of interest with the James Speed Trust (balance c£800K) which pays part of Scottish Ministers' stipends (including his).

The Inquirer – The Chief Officer had a conversation with the Editor and a board member after their strategic review. The GA gives The Inquirer a grant of £6K every year, and the Inquirer are .

New accounting system – David had produced a draft paper, which would be tweaked and presented to the next EC meeting. We would need to update our policies and procedures and it was hoped that the new system would allow better integration with our database and help streamline bookings for the Annual

Meetings. David had some indications of cost but was hoping to get further information for the updated paper.

Budget – David was looking to pass the year end, and then produce a draft budget in early October. The budget timetable had been prepared. Rob was looking to produce a single page paper for the new budget headings.

Procurement policy – This had involved lengthy discussion and a revised paper would be prepared.

Finance Action List items

20 April 2021, item 5: Jay Deacon legacy – The amount was still being clarified. The last element to send off would be the papers requiring physical signatures, going off next week to the Investment House, to transfer investments into our name. They will still need to be liquidated. The value depends on investment valuations, but a conservative estimate would be up to £70K. David would not update the legacy outlook until more accurate information was received. It was clarified that there no restrictions on this legacy. This item would now cleared be from the Action List.

20 April 2021, item 6: Clarifying the financial implications of the Worship Studies Course moving to Unitarian College – David had started the workings on this and these would go to the next Finance Committee meeting.

18 May 2021, item 3: Fossil fuel disinvestment – this remained on the agenda.

- Investment Policy

A first draft would be brought for wider discussion with the investment stakeholders, with a view to going to the Movement for a discussion on how we manage our investments, with particular reference to the disinvestment motion. It was noted that ethical investment was becoming more mainstream.

4. Governance

- Update on Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) status

It was agreed last time there would be two groups (a working group and a consultative group) to carry this forward. There had been no progress on the consultative group. A number of people had been approached and were prepared to put their names forward for the working group. In respect of the remit of the working group, the GA Object was not up for discussion, but everything else was considered to be. The group would look at new CIO models for the Constitution and what needs to change. The major items of discussion would be: membership, motions, and the EC itself.

A five-person group had been envisaged. It was **AGREED** to appoint Robert Ince, John Bates (New Unity), Winnie Gordon (Birmingham), and Natasha Stanley (Manchester District Association Administrator) to the working group, with a fifth person to be decided by email. Simon Bland would act as Secretary to the group. The group would be asked to try and put a form of the outline steps and order needed at their first meeting.

The Chief Officer felt it was important to keep the purpose of the exercise in mind – changing the Constitution would not change our fortunes as a Movement. It did give an opportunity to engage with people, but ultimately would not move us forward, so we should retain balance by keeping an eye on how the conversations could help us focus, build capacity etc.

The Chief Officer would put out a letter regarding the consultative group. This stage would happen after the working group. This process would not be in place to present a new Constitution to the next Annual Meetings.

ACTION: Liz

- Risk Register

Robert reported that he and Marion Baker had looked at the Risk Register, which currently had 17 risks recorded. There were two main types of risks – those where little could be done about the uncertainty

involved (the impact could be mitigated, but there was no real control), and another group of risks which may be in our control.

The main uncertainty risks were considered to be Safeguarding (as we could not know what might already have happened); illegal or unauthorised activity; the GA's position as Guarantor of Last Resort to the Ministers' Pension Fund (this was improving with a reorganisation of the Fund – Marion would be meeting with the Fund's Solicitor and Actuary next week, but it was hoped that the GA would eventually no longer be the Guarantor); and Covid implications (the Charity Commission was asking for all charities to have this on their Risk Register). It was hoped that the next EC Meeting could flesh this out.

The other risks were about lacks (money, ministers, volunteers etc). The Finance Group were looking at money. The Ministry Group don't currently have the remit to keep up ministerial numbers, and this issue relates to whether congregations are able to fund the ministries. Jo James also identified the risk of changes in our political landscape which could impact a Movement predicated on religious and civil liberty. Jo would consider this.

ACTION: Jo

It was **AGREED** to rewrite the Risk Register with those four risks and bring to next meeting. **ACTION: Robert**

In response to a question as to whether the Risk Register was for the GA as an organisation or as the Movement, Robert replied that we exist as part of both and so would look at this collectively. As an example, Safeguarding issues were most likely to happen at a congregation, but the whole Movement would feel the impact.

5. Nightingale Centre

Marion Baker gave an update on the Centre. The Centre had reopened in June. Bookings were back on course, with plenty of bookings for next year, and bookings picking up for the following year. It was felt that the need for people to get away was driving this.

The EC expressed their appreciation for the way the Management Committee had handled a very difficult period. In this respect, the question was raised as to whether the time had come for the Nightingale Centre Management Committee to become the Centre's Trustees. This required further time to digest. In the short-term, the EC would send thanks and recognise the Management Committee and Staff team's work.

ACTION: Liz

6. AGM Resolutions

- Follow-up on Code of Ethics resolution

Action List 18 May 2021, item 2: Celia Cartwright and Jo James were to form part of the Committee on the Code of Ethics Resolution. Findhorn have written to say they will have someone help. There was some concern that the Findhorn letter seemed to have this as being intended to cover congregational members, and it was unclear this was intended by the Resolution. The need for a clear project scope was recognised. It was noted that the Ministerial Fellowship have done some work on ethical conduct recently. It was **AGREED** that Celia and Jo would set up a meeting with interested parties.

ACTION: Celia & Jo

Action List July 2021, item 6: To include the Code of Ethics on the EC Agenda – this was cleared.

- Youth Programme

The Resolution asked for Junior Weekends to be reconsidered. Some preliminary conversations had been held with the Nightingale Centre and Unitarian College (who were keen to access the 7-11 age group as part of their lifelong learning programme). Concerns were expressed that this Resolution asked us to countermand the Youth Officer's operational decision based on an agreed strategic plan.

It was **AGREED** that Helen Mason would be asked to convene a meeting, at which the Youth Officer would represent the GA as the EC had confidence in him. The Chief Officer would express the EC's points to Gav and advise him to have a pre-discussion with Helen Mason.

ACTION: Liz

Motion on Trans Rights – This motion had not been taken at the 2021 Meetings. It was unclear whether it would be resubmitted in 2022.

7. Ministry

- New Ministers on the GA Roll

The following were **accepted** as Ministers on the GA Roll with probationary status: Rory Castle Jones and Robin Hanford.

Ministry students – The role of the ministry group needed to be defined, and Robert suggested a broader role of sustaining ministry. The Ministry and Congregational Support Officer (MCSO) would be asked to look into this, and the Chief Officer and Jo James would consider it further. It was **AGREED** that this would go on the agenda at the next meeting, and the MCSO would be invited to attend for this item. **ACTION: Liz**

- Update on review of new types of position on the Roll.

The review group had met three times, though the third meeting had been unsuccessful as an email got lost in the ether. The meeting was to be repeated next Friday, and it was hoped to have an extensive paper for the next EC Meeting. It was felt to be wise to consult with the Ministry Group. It was important to be aware of the GA Constitution, as some of the different positions have voting rights as full members. Rob Wightman was working on this with Simon Bland and Ant Howe. It was clarified that the group were not just looking at the names of the positions, but how we engage people with the Unitarian Movement, routes into leadership in Unitarianism, recognition and what that and non-recognition means.

8. Weddings

- Proposal on Wedding Support

The Proposal was to employ Melda Grantham for a further two days a week for a two-year period to identify the need, facilitate and share tools and training, help congregations promote weddings locally, connect those trained to lead and support weddings, and raise awareness of Unitarian weddings externally.

The Chief Officer endorsed the proposal as a clear opportunity to build on both our position on Same-Sex Weddings and our different shape of religious weddings to other places of worship or civil settings, and suggested the Jay Deacon legacy would be appropriate for this, particularly enabling more same-sex weddings. It was noted that the wedding situation was sufficiently different in Scotland that this role would not apply. Rob Whiteman indicated this was not an issue, and the Scottish Unitarians could handle this themselves.

It was **AGREED** to go ahead with this proposal.

ACTION: Liz

9. Staff reports

Reports had been received from the Chief Officer and Staff.

The Chief Officer highlighted how inspiring Rory and Melda's ordination services had been. She had attended the Minister's Conference last week and this had been very collegial.

It was **AGREED** that Hilda Dumbleton would speak to the Officers of South Wales with respect to governance. Hilda would speak to the MCSO beforehand.

ACTION: Hilda

10. Youth and Safeguarding

The Youth & Safeguarding Officer, Gavin Howell, joined by Zoom for this item and gave an update.

The Parents' Group – A couple of people got in touch with Gavin to see whether there was a possibility of creating a group for parents. A few Zoom calls were held, and the Youth Officer looked for interest by putting out invites and setting up a meeting.

The group had two broad areas of interest: exploring the needs of parents; and nourishing their child's spiritual growth. The group spent most of the time discussing what they would like, described as being similar to an engagement group but through a parental lens - hearing how other parents approached parenting issues, feeling isolated and wanting to be part of a group / community. There were no pre-set rules, and the group could take their time to form. There was lots of exploration and the Youth Officer was optimistic.

Congregational Support Leaders group – The Youth Officer's sense was that it was going well, with occasional participants and a hard core of participants who turn up every time - mostly consisting of people from #Blessed and Malvern Transformers, plus Stalybridge and New Unity. There was a lot of sharing on how they were adapting things in their respective patterns and relationships were growing. The pattern seemed to be with groups that were well supported by their leadership teams. Big youth continuance seemed to be within chapels where youth leaders were well-resourced and feel supported.

The Youth Officer was interested in looking at a Unitarian presence at The Green Belt Festival. His role had been to hold the space, with initiatives coming from the wider Movement from people who needed support to start and get momentum.

The Youth Officer was asked what support he needed from the EC. He believed it was working well at the moment. He was enjoying the freedom given by the EC and the support from the Chief Officer to explore what's happening in the Movement. He would be meeting next week with #Blessed and the Religions for Peace youth body, and there was a great dynamic between these groups. He asked for the EC to continue to give positive feedback and encouragement to our youth.

Safeguarding - The majority of time on this 0.1-full time equivalent role was spent on enquiries from congregations about minor incidents, training or renewing policies. Congregations were overwhelmed by current best practice standards. We would need to look at how we do Safeguarding differently, preferably put in a conversation about what we do well. The 31:8 Safeguarding Audit had been great, but there was not the capacity or heart to put everything in place at local level. Robert would have a separate conversation with the Youth Officer in respect of the Risk Register. It was noted that Safeguarding was also on the agenda as part of looking at the GA Rolls for leaders in congregations. **ACTION: Robert**

11. Torbay / Torquay Project

Gavin Howell gave an update on the Project with a paper supplied. It was confirmed that there was no existing congregation in the building. The Project proposed a five-year project for Gavin to relocate to the Torbay area and work an additional 2.5 days a week, which would include an extension of safeguarding time. Gavin had undertaken the scoping exercise previously agreed, including the survey of the church building. The survey had suggested repair costs for the building in the order of £300k. Gavin explained that this was not a pre-requisite – a fixed building was not necessarily needed for the project. If the building part were to be done, it could be done later in the project. This could have the positive effect of requiring the project to use an imaginative and creative approach. He had spoken to an interested person from the area and they had suggested using other environments, such as pubs. The area had an appetite for regeneration and play, and was a 'transition town' (community projects to increase self-sufficiency).

In answer to a question on what we could offer to the area, if it was already being served by various groups, the Chief Officer felt that the area was aligned to things we cared about, but didn't have the roots, knowhow, safety and collective strength we could offer from having been a denomination for hundreds of years. We could offer solidity and allow the evolution of faith.

Rather than define success criteria for this project in advance, Gavin felt that the approach was to listen and adapt to the needs - in the same way that recent young adult activity had occurred, initiatives would happen organically. Setting advance success criteria implied an approach with pre-defined goals incompatible with allowing spontaneous emergence. Emergence was a part of our Unitarian History.

Gavin left the meeting at this point for further private discussion by the EC. Considerable debate followed and a vote was held. It was **AGREED** that the section of the proposal relating to the Torquay Church building would not be moved forward for the time being. It was **AGREED** that the main section of the proposal would be progressed, but that the Chief Officer and Gavin would look to address concerns raised and share a summary with the EC. Those with concerns were asked to email the Chief Officer so they could be addressed. **ACTION: Liz, All**

12. Forward Planning

The Chief Officer explained this was a chance for the EC to revisit what was discussed at the Hucklow meeting and see how it felt now, and asked people to consider enablers – those things which would help to make change happen. In her July PowerPoint presentation, Liz had identified ten priorities. She had done further work on this, and not felt that these could better be grouped into five main priorities, with the others being subsets or items which supported or enabled these. For example, “Enabling people to act” would be a main priority, with “Building capacity for imagination” and “Clarity of local vision” as subsets of that. Similarly, “Encouraging, supporting, identifying new leaders” and “Creating /enabling transformative experiences” were ways of working we need to be doing in all we do.

The five main priorities were identified as:

- Enabling people to act
- Developing what is offered to support spiritual health
- Telling our story to outside world
- Telling our story internally
- Supporting buildings

The next level required further work to flesh out the detail, including thinking about the costs and budget implications, key staff to support activities progress and who the other stakeholders were.

Key questions for the group (reflections more than decisions) were:

- Were there gaps, mistakes, things overlooked, or exciting things to be acted on first.
- What was needed for us to help make change happen? The Chief Officer had received a number of disgruntled contacts throughout the year about fairly minor changes. In some cases it was possible to engage on what they were upset about. In some cases it could be a person with good intentions stepping in the way of change. Knowing change was needed, how could we facilitate change were there was potentially resistance?

It was remarked that the longer initiatives took to communicate, the more mission creep and frustration could creep in. Changes needed to be tangible and accessible. Some of the website dissatisfaction could be seen in that light – communication with the Movement was important at this point. The issues around how best we could communicate was highlighted. Secretaries could no longer be assumed to be the best conduit for communication, and not everyone subscribed to The Inquirer. Social media was obviously one of the mechanisms available. It was suggested that we needed to find ways to tell interesting stories, such as various of our congregations opening gardens and cafes to engage with people or offer an improvement for their spiritual life.

The Chief Officer felt that Congregational Connection Lead and the Communications Officer would be key people in spreading this message. There was also a need to be alert to opportunities. The Religion Media Centre had contacted her to invite her to do a panel on Assisted Dying, and from that Radio 4 had invited her to speak on Assisted Dying.

Other suggestions were: providing media training (possibly through Unitarian College); ensuring welcome in our congregations (as a way of living out Unitarian values); encouraging congregations to share their space more with others as an organic change, and using our buildings during the week, not just for the Sunday Service; adapting our offering to ensure spiritual health. It was noted that this could involve big stewardship and capacity issues, and there were some other barriers to change or growth.

Ultimately energy came from clarity of vision locally, with a sense of mission and purpose, inspiring people to act. We needed to help people find this, then nourish and support it. This was the best way of generating organic small growth in congregations. Exponential growth often did not have the roots to enable it to remain healthy.

A leadership pathway was needed – progression was motivating and working on this with others could give a sense of collegial support to leaders in congregations.

There was a potential role for Districts, though it was accepted that some would take it on and some either couldn't or wouldn't. Where Districts were not in a position to collaborate, or have a clear view of the

future, we would need to find other ways to work, or to enable some people to step back and pass on the baton with trust to those who did.

13. Check-out

Check-out for the day took place. Celia Cartwright gave closing devotions and the meeting closed for the day.

Saturday 18 September

Robert gave Opening Devotions with a reading on Celtic Spirituality and the Infinite Knot, and the meeting started.

14. Check-in

Everyone checked in. Jo James had given apologies for today as he had to return to Leeds for a wedding.

15. President and District Reports

President's Report

The President had submitted a report, which was reviewed and discussed. The Addendum comments about the post-pandemic trends were noted. It was noted that the realities of congregational financial losses and the perception – how people were feeling about the situation – were not necessarily the same. There were differing levels of mental and spiritual capacity for people to come out and join in. The comment about there having been few possibilities for celebrating during the pandemic period was noted.

A discussion on low energy, highlighted by this report and also reported at recent Ministerial Fellowship meeting was held. Only a third of congregations have a Minister, so it would be even harder to have a focal point with someone putting energy into the congregation. Some congregations had been dormant for 18 months, and there was a question on how to re-energise these congregations.

The Annual Meetings was noted as something people were looking forward to. The Chief Officer indicated that the Annual Meetings Panel had met earlier in the week, and had talked about making the Opening Ceremony an exciting spectacle, the three years' worth of new Ministers to welcome. The Panel's priority would be connection and community – celebrating being back together, with an emphasis on welcome and hospitality

There was an opportunity to embrace change and new possibilities, at this time, as the Nightingale Centre bookings demonstrated. There would likely be some dissatisfaction, either through change resistance or unhappiness that about not having as much influence as they used to or feel they should. The move to Zoom services and online offerings had shifted the power dynamic in some congregations, as those who these skills had needed to take on some leadership. Zoom also made it easier to bring different groups of people together to gather around something they care about, which could be energising. New connections in congregations could be formed, and people who had not previously been asked to help could be approached.

The Chief Officer identified a philosophical challenge – a part of the EC's responsibility was to serve the Movement as it is, another was to serve our wider Society. Serving some groups who were effectively moribund would not help Society. The GA needed to play a role in re-energising by supporting and facilitating and connecting people. This would likely have the effect of putting influence where energy existed currently, rather than where historical influence had been. Leadership and capacity remained a crucial part of retaining energy within the movement. Energised people were more likely to bring in new members and find the new way of doing things for the future. Ultimately there would need to be a balance between the two aims we serve.

With Anne's comments about some people returning slowly to meeting in-person congregations, a discussion was held on hybrid services. While it was positive that these were possible, it was noted that there were issues in engaging well simultaneously with those attending in-person and those outside, as

well as the IT equipment and technical support limitations, particularly for smaller congregations. It was important to avoid segregating into an “Us and Them” situation with those attending in-person and those attending remotely.

District Reports

There were no specific district reports, though there was discussion about initiatives in different districts.

16. Action List

The Action List was reviewed and had mostly been cleared.

April 2021

Item 1 – online circle discussion of website discussion questions: Liz and Jo have had initial conversations but need to action. As a side note, Jane Blackall was running some follow-up sessions from Summer School.

ACTION: Liz and Jo

Item 2 – Survey of congregations: Liz and Simon had spoken about but not yet actioned.

ACTION: Liz and Simon

Item 3 – List of excepted status congregations: Robert indicated that there was an existing list, as he had done some work on this with Phillip Colfox comparing information from our congregational files, and the charity commission website, and had sent a list to Simon.

ACTION: Liz

Item 4 – Progress leadership strategy inquiry – Liz would pick up with Jo about the Ministry Group and the strategy on leadership would feed into this, along with the Hibbert Trust Leadership Inquiry meeting.

ACTION: Liz and Jo

May 2021

Item 1 – The item on the review of the online AGM was removed.

July 2021

Item 2 – This was work in progress and would be covered at the next meeting.

Item 5 – The Unitarian College Memorandum of Understanding – Liz had a brief chat with Helen Mason and would follow this up.

ACTION: Liz

Item 7 – Trans rights – Jo and Liz would have a proper conversation on this.

ACTION: Liz and Jo

17. Items carried over from the previous day

Celebrating Spaces

Robert wanted to explore more on Simon Bland’s work on buildings. Jenny and Robert have both worked on the new Celebrating Spaces group replacing the Buildings Advisory Panel. Jenny felt it would make sense to have a model environmental policy.

Simon’s report lays out four main themes for Celebrating Spaces:

- Land
- Buildings
- Sacred Space
- Environmental

Interested parties could be interested in all four aspects, or just have a particular passion for one. There was an opportunity to help local groups focus on their local mission, and the Churches Conservation Pilot in Whitby and Bridgwater fits well in this. These had the possibility to be shared and used to energise people, as positive local stories were of interest.

EC District Links

The EC District Links needed to be announced. These were:

- Rob – Scottish & Western
- Robert – Manchester and London

- Marion – Sheffield and East Cheshire
- Jenny – Merseyside and Yorkshire
- Celia – Northern and North East Lancashire
- Hilda – South Wales and South East Wales
- Simon – Midland & Southern
- Jo – East Midlands

18. EC Responsibilities

The areas of responsibility and specialism were discussed, following a Risk Register discussion. It was felt to be helpful to allocate roles, and for the Chief Officer to have a sounding board for the different areas. EC members would still be able to contribute across the board, and there was a degree of overlap with all the items. The following were allocated:

- Rob – Finance
- Jo – Ministry and Leadership.
- Robert – Celebrating Spaces
- Jenny – External Communication, Publicity and Outreach – and bringing her expertise to Celebrating Spaces
- Celia – Internal Communication, Community Building
- Simon – Culture and Safeguarding.
- Hilda – Learning and sharing

Expectations re. Districts

A further conversation was needed on this. The most basic communication from the EC is the key messages, but this was insufficient. It was noted that there were varying level of engagement with the Districts, and there was an opportunity to have more of a dialogue. The link roles would be dependent on the needs of the area. The expectation for expenses purposes was based on one physical visit per District per year, particularly as many meetings had moved to Zoom, though special circumstances might apply.

19. Communication

- Channels of Communication

These were: The Inquirer, Uni News, Social Media, Districts and Congregations. Communications through the different channels would ideally be tailored to the audience.

- Key messages

- Finance: Overhauling financial processes and reviewing our practices to make them more responsive, including the budget.
- Finance: Looking carefully at Investments and funds, and how they can be used creatively.
- Finance: Announcement that Rob Whiteman was Acting Treasurer.
- Governance: Risks associated with Covid – these needed to be highlighted.
- Governance: Picking up the CIO Resolution – the EC would shortly be looking for members for the consultative group.
- Nightingale Centre: The Centre was open and operating and would be welcoming back Unitarians, who were invited to attend. People would need to book quickly as availability was going fast. More information could be found on the Centre's website.
- GA Resolutions: Working hard to progress Resolutions. A subgroup was working with Unitarian College and Nightingale Centre exploring issues around the Youth Resolution. Work on the Disinvestment Resolution was continuing.
- Communicating the new Ministers on the GA Roll
- Weddings proposal: There should be an announcement, with a second stage at the launch. Melda should be involved in the communication.
- Safeguarding: Overview of things happening.

- Torbay: The specifics of Torbay, along with the meta message of being bold, and taking a leap of faith. Being open that the project felt scary but exciting. Recognising there were pitfalls with this way of emergent working. Learning from it. Communicating the intention that it would benefit the whole Movement. This would require a separate follow-up with more detail.
- Forward planning from the July Hucklow meeting: The process on how the EC are working and making decisions. Another separate large 'State of the Nation' piece on the health of the Movement, what was needed and possible, and identifying the priorities to move forward.
- EC District Links and Responsibilities: Notifying people of these.

20. Check-out

Check-out took place. Marion Baker gave closing devotions and the meeting closed.

Approved Minutes of EC Meeting held 26/11/21

Present: Marion Baker (Convenor), Celia Cartwright (Zoom), Hilda Dumbleton, Simon Hall, Robert Ince, Jenny Jacobs, Jo James, Rob Whiteman

In attendance: Simon Bland (item 6), Andrew Mason (Minutes), Anne Mills (GA President), Liz Slade

Opening devotions: Simon Hall read from 'Meditations' by Richard Gilbert.

1. Check-in

Check-in took place and the meeting started.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Previous Meeting were **AGREED** as a correct record.

3. GA Activity

Chief Officer's Report

A Chief Officer's Report had been circulated and was reviewed. The strategic priorities were identified. Liz also highlighted strengthening our foundations – ways to build more resilience in congregations.

Communication – It was felt that the high-level strategic priorities diagram was clear enough to be able to show to people, and members could use it at their next District Meetings.

Congregational Matters – It was reported that Bolton Bank Street were looking to close. This had caused some shock, as it had traditionally felt like a healthier congregation. It was likely to amalgamate with another local church. This might trigger others to consider closing. It was noted that there had been a 40% drop in membership there in recent years. From the data, at-risk congregations could be identified, but there was then a question about what conversation to have with them, about this, along with further questions on how struggling congregations could feel the courage to change or offer their space for other uses, or how they could be helped to close well.

Great Hucklow had initially fallen to very low numbers but had now come back to life and were engaging with the local community. Congregational viability was not a matter of the membership data trends, more information was needed – it was often as much about people. Hucklow had a wholesale change of trustees and had gained new energy. Other issues about congregational closures and amalgamations were discussed, including issues with pride and history; transition plans after the departure of charismatic leaders; an imbalance in the roles of the congregation and its leader; issues with people's willingness or ability to take on committee and other formal roles; and the remit / training of Ministers.

Harris Manchester College, Chaplain Tutor – The Chief Officer reported that she had spoken to the College Principal, Jane Shaw, about Alex Bradley's successor as Tutor and what was needed in that role. Liz described it as requiring change to the role, being collaborative with Unitarian College, looking at the future, and navigating Oxford to tap into what is unique about us having access to a College there. It would be important not to compete with Unitarian College but to work together on ministerial training.

In response to a question, the Chief Officer indicating the Principal of the College appoints the Tutor. The intention was to advertise before Christmas, and for an Interview Panel to interview.

Ministry Coffeehouse – This monthly Zoom meeting had come out of the September minister's conference. There was gratitude for its existence, though it was still finding its feet, with a broad group of people. It was hoped to make it feel worth being at for the busiest Ministers, when the right shape had been worked out, and Liz would welcome help with this.

Provincial Assembly – It was clarified that the Provincial Assembly were not necessarily closing. Though this was under discussion, no decision had yet been made. The Provincial Assembly had met in mid-September, as a hybrid meeting, and the Zoom connection had failed. The meeting had therefore been inconclusive.

Staff Reports

Staff Reports had been circulated and were reviewed.

Flowergate Chapel, Whitby - Regeneration Report

A report had been circulated on regeneration at Flowergate Old Chapel and was reviewed.

4. Finance - Budget update and Summary of financial results

The Treasurer reported.

New Accounting Software

A project to replace our Accounting Software was being scoped, and a submission would come back in the medium term.

Budget

The budget had been reshaped to be driven by our activities, to better show how what we're spending relates to priorities. We were also trying to make clearer how the investments work. Some were held in larger pooled funds, often heavily consisting of restricted funds, which can only be used for certain purposes (e.g. the Kerecki Legacy of c£1M for educating Hungarian Ministry Students; and James Speed Trust for supporting congregations and Ministers of Dundee and Edinburgh). It was also noted that the Bowland Trust money – where a larger amount had been given in place of an annual grant – was being drawn down, reducing investment income over time. The Bowland Trust money would need to be replaced to retain the current level of expenditure.

Summary of the current year's financial results

This had been presented and was in process of preparation for the Audit. We had met with our Auditors earlier this week for general meeting about rebuilding relationships and kept the pressure up to keep fees down.

Income was slightly above Expenditure without the Bowland monies, but this was mostly because some activities couldn't happen due to the Pandemic. It was noted that legacies received from Jay Deacon and Leighton Cole were unrestricted.

Investments – investments had been discussed with the Investment Managers. They would be coming back with new products over the next couple of years, and it was felt that the GA Resolution requirements would likely solve themselves through the new products, as others were moving to a similar position to us. An updated Investment Policy was in draft form.

Procurement Policy – A discussion was held on the most appropriate level for notifying the EC on procurement. The Chief Officer differentiated between information and decision-making. The EC were Informed on what amounts are being spent, as they had delegated responsibility to the Staff team, having trust in the processes. This was different to requiring active decision-making. It was noted that the Annual Meetings contract is our largest single item in most years – the EC would often see the budget but not necessarily the contract itself. It was **AGREED** to change the notification level in the policy from £20K to £10K.

Nightingale Centre Accounts – The Auditors had given the Nightingale Centre the list of information needed, and this had been sent.

Bowland Trust – The Trust had initially signalled an intent to provide match-fund financing over a number of years for projects to inspire and initiate action within the Movement before deciding to provide a lump sum. The Treasurer noted that the budget was attempting to make clearer new initiative projects, such as the Weddings Project.

After discussion, it was **AGREED** to change the purpose of the designated Fairey Bequest from young adult attendance at conferences to the new Weddings Project.

5. Annual Meetings

Pricing and Ticket types

The Chief Officer reported on the circulated document which outlined plans to change the Annual Meetings pricing. This was a different approach, with online booking, and a greatly reduced number of ticket types, including the removal of the Retired Ministers' discounted ticket (Retired Ministers being able to select the subsidised ticket, as others can). It also introduced the concept of people giving more if they can or paying less if they need to – an experimental approach. The subsidised tickets would not be means-tested, and would operate on trust, though with a capped number to limit our liability. The pricing model had been analysed and the Chief Officer felt it was affordable, though it was important to recognise a financial risk was being taken.

It was **AGREED** to reallocate £1.8K from the EC budget, previously allocated to support Retired Ministers, to the general subsidy, and to the potential cost of 40 subsidised tickets at an anticipated additional cost of £2.6K.

Retired Ministers: The Ministerial Fellowship, Ministers' Benevolent Fund and Ministers' Benevolent Society were all possible sources of further support for Retired Ministers' attendance if required, and people could be encouraged to apply. It was suggested speaking to these groups directly, and also bringing this up in the next 'coffeehouse' discussion.

As a rule, whether money or time, people's ability to afford depends on what value they place on something as well as their level of resources. It was noted that there was uncertainty about how people would react to an in-person meeting, whether feeling keen to meet up again after so long, or feeling reluctant or unable (possibly people who have come for many years) from a Covid perspective. The difficulties of people with young families or caring responsibilities for all in-person events were noted. Hybrid meetings had some drawbacks, and would require us to redesign the entire event to do well. We were not there.

ICUU motion – A draft motion had been received from Celia Midgley, with input from Derek McAuley, following the vote of the International Council of Unitarians & Universalists (ICUU) to dissolve. Celia was hoping this could be put by the EC as an Administrative

Motion (i.e. not requiring debate or being included in the limited number of Ordinary Motions). There were some doubts as to whether it met the requirements of an Administrative Motion, particularly in relation to the final clause committing to supporting the development of a new organisation. Indications had been received that the proposers would be happy to lose the last section if it helped to make this an Administrative Motion. It was **AGREED** that this would need to be referred to the Steering Committee to make a ruling on its category. **ACTION: Andrew**

Lancashire Collaborative Ministry (LCM) motion – A motion applying for Affiliated Society status had been received from the LCM. Anne Mills declared an interest as the Secretary of the LCM. It was noted that the motion would go with a note of the membership criteria, and that the EC was happy that the relevant criteria had been met, without requiring the 57-page application to be distributed. This would also be referred to the Steering Committee. **ACTION: Andrew**

General

Vice-President nominations – The letter of invitation to nominate the Vice-President / President-elect had yet been sent. This would be done as a priority, with submissions to be received in time for discussion at the January EC Meeting. **ACTION: Liz**

Election of GA Treasurer – Rob was currently Acting Treasurer and would be happy to be put forward as Honorary Treasurer for next year. Rob left the room for discussion of this item. It was **AGREED** to nominate Rob to the Meetings as the Honorary Treasurer. It was noted there would then be a need to co-opt a new EC Member. **ACTION: Liz**

Finance Group – It was noted that all the current EC Members on the Finance Group would be leaving at the next election, and it was therefore sensible to appoint a member now to ensure someone remained during the transition. It was **AGREED** to appoint Simon Hall to the Group.

Motions process

A discussion was held. It was **AGREED** that the group reviewing the Constitution would consider, as a priority, whether the current motions process should be substantially changed.

6. Ministry

Simon Bland joined the meeting by Zoom for this item.

Approval of new ministers onto the GA Roll

Process – The EC confirms that the appropriate process has been followed, following confirmation from the College that the Competencies have been met, then the Interview Panel gives a recommendation for approval, before the EC accepts people onto the Roll. The process of approval, valediction etc needed further consideration by the Ministry Strategy Group.

It was **AGREED** that Reverends Elizabeth Harley and Laura Dobson be accepted onto the GA Roll with probationary status. Some work had yet to be completed, and therefore Jane Blackall's approval would be revisited.

Review of paper on new types of roles on the GA Roll

A paper on the Unitarian Rolls had been submitted by Simon Bland, following a request from Unitarian College to change the Roll Categories, and a desire to rationalise classifications and titles which were confusing or redundant.

The paper proposed a change of the Rolls to include:

- Ministers: As current, but with a new category for Student Ministers. They would then come under our discipline, particularly if there is someone who already has a position in another religious denomination – this would be set aside.
- Lay Worship Leaders Roll: This would sweep up most of the existing Lay categories, and would affirm their ministry, but not make them a voting member of the Assembly. People doing the Worship Studies Course would be automatically pre-accredited, subject to Safeguarding training being completed.
- Lay People in Charge – Would remain unchanged, outside the GA Rolls.

The Memorandum of Understanding agreement with Unitarian College had not yet been completed, and this was fundamental to this issue and the wider curricula discussions.

Discussions were held on chaplaincy and celebrancy - on the demand, engagement opportunities and safeguarding / reputational risks for us as a denomination.

This led to questions about whether the Rolls tied in with the roles required from our Ministers over the next 3-5 years and beyond, and whether there were any gaps. The EC needed to consider the overall health of the Movement and ensure that the roles being endorsed and recognised by the GA were those that would help to develop future health; for example, one of the important aspects was congregational development, which was not currently included in the new Rolls paper.

There were two strands of work:

1. Agreeing the initial Rolls with a view to the long-term.
2. Designing the future Pathway.

It was **AGREED** to adopt the paper and accept the Rolls, recognising that there is significant work to be done to ensure this is put into action in a strategic way.

Ministers' Stipend Augmentation Fund

The Ministers' Stipend Augmentation Fund anonymised survey comments were reviewed. Some comments about in-person, online and hybrid congregational meetings (and the Annual Meetings) were received. There was some tension in differing desires from people to meet in Zoom and in-person. This led to interesting questions about what constitutes our communities, and whether / how an online community might become a member of the GA.

It was noted that a number of Ministers commented that Zoom had enabled them to expand their spiritual offering beyond Sundays, with new groups and new people meeting on other days or nights. This related to comments about what they needed from us, with several replies on IT training and the provision of equipment.

In response to a question about information requested by the Sustention Fund, Simon Bland indicated that the Fund (via congregations rather than ministers) requests information on plans and visions for the future, rather than trying to 'take the temperature' of the current situation, but there was scope to gather more information than just the main financial information as part of their process.

Resilience of the GA Roll

Ministers have been open about how difficult the pandemic has been. We have a small pool of valuable people on the GA Roll, but this it is quite fragile. With a number of congregations or districts without resources, timely support for people who need it can be hard. The question becomes how we can be more responsive for the long-term resilience of the Roll.

Simon Bland indicated that we would need to acknowledge there was likely to be at least another 9–12-month effect of the pandemic on our congregations, with the resulting social and psychological effects on our ministers. He had noticed a greater use of sabbaticals for the purpose of recovery rather than refreshment. Some of the ones finding it most challenging were our most active ministers.

The GA currently relies on congregations to support the fabric of the Roll, by paying and supporting Ministers, rather than us. The Ministers Benevolent Fund / Society does not have a mental health policy – there is a counselling fund, but not much else. Congregations and districts were not consistent across the UK. Simon would recommend putting aside money to create working funds to step in for exceptional issues (a last resort fund) to protect the resilience of the Roll.

We would be coming up to a period of dealing with the fallout of the pandemic, and potentially looking at post-pandemic changes as we go forward. We have invested in, and trained, the 50 active ministers on our Roll, so would need to consider mechanisms for a duty of care to them which would allow them to be on, and stay on, the Roll.

Congregations also felt the need for support at times of dealing with ministerial crisis, and sometimes a small amount of money or other support could give great confidence.

There were various options including time off, counselling or retreats which might benefit ministers who were struggling, and other possibilities could be explored.

It was suggested that the GA create a fund, along with a number of other districts or trusts, to support Ministers which would allow Simon Bland to be more responsive to situations. It was noted that the Ministers Benevolent Fund had over £1M and this would be a good place to start. It was **AGREED** that the Finance Committee be asked to look at this fund.

Simon Bland was thanked for his work in supporting our Ministers.

Ministry guidelines

Simon has modernised the existing text of 'Guidelines'. Two sections still need to be developed: social media use; and a system of conflict resolution and support, as there was not currently a robust system for this. There were likely to be upcoming issues resulting from the period where people were not able to meet, and couldn't clarify or clear the air on issues.

There was still some misunderstanding about the Guidelines (covering ministry and congregational relations) and Help is at Hand (which deals with practical matters for congregations). It was suggested they could be merged into one congregational manual.

Even without the two new sections, the fact there was a draft Guidelines document was a big step forward and needed to be looked at.

Simon Bland identified that improvement in support for conflict and mediation arrangements was needed. There were possibilities for a panel of volunteers, a peer system or outsourced support and this needed considering.

Simon would double-check whether the Guidelines had been reviewed for gender-neutral language.

ACTION: Simon Bland

7. President's Report

The President had submitted a report and was thanked for her work.

8. Nightingale Centre

The Minutes of the Nightingale Centre Management Committee were accepted.

The Centre's Chef had returned from sick leave. The Manager was still on sick leave. The Assistant Manager was performing well. The registration of land was moving forward. The financial results from the end of year Accounts were positive, due to government grants and furlough monies.

9. Districts

Updates on District Associations – a report had been circulated. A number of Districts had either not met recently or had met just before this meeting. In the Yorkshire District, responsibilities were being passed to a younger generation. The North East Lancashire District's September meeting had not been quorate, but they hoped to commute pandemic loans to congregations into grants when they next met. Governance workshops have been held in the South Wales District.

10. Communication

There was a desire to increase communications beyond the brief bullet points of the Key Messages. Liz had spoken to Colleen Burns about writing more detail for The Inquirer. Some of the items from Liz's Chief Officer's Report could also be more widely circulated.

ACTION: Liz

Key messages:

- The changes to the GA Rolls.
- ICUU – A communication on the ICUU closing (separate to the motion).
- Priorities – Liz's priorities chart, with the first page of her report reworked as direction of travel.
- Things the EC are hearing / concerned about, (e.g. Zoom issue etc, Simon's comments)
- Finance group – reflect Liz's report by making the budget more relevant to strategic priorities
- Looking at how we can support Ministers

There would be separate communication about the Annual Meetings changes in more detail.

11. Check out

Check out was held and the meeting finished.