

## **Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting held 14 January 2022 by Zoom**

- Present:** Marion Baker, Hilda Dumbleton, Simon Hall, Robert Ince, Jenny Jacobs, Jo James, Rob Whiteman
- In attendance:** Andrew Mason (Minutes), Liz Slade (Chief Officer), Anne Mills (GA President)
- Apologies:** Celia Cartwright

Jenny Jacobs gave Opening Devotions from “The Backwater Sermons” by Jay Hume, and the meeting started.

### **1. Check-in**

This took place and the meeting started.

### **2. Minutes and actions**

#### Action list:

The Action List was reviewed.

#### March 2021 Action List

Item 1: Paper summarising Designated Funds – David Joseph was still working on this. It would be taken off and added to the Finance Committee’s Action List instead.

Item 2: Review Investment Policy. This was in progress, and would come off the Action List.

#### April 2021 Action List

Item 1: Develop online circle discussion – This was still under discussion and was in progress. It was noted that there may be a motion about the decision-making process for the GA Website put to the Annual Meetings. Jo had been asked to write something for The Inquirer. The Editor wished to invite substantial articles rather than print letters about the website.

Item 2: Survey of congregations – Liz and Simon had picked this up recently. It was originally intended to be a post-pandemic survey but could still help people engage with the big questions.

Item 3: List of excepted status congregations – Liz indicated it was unlikely to be prioritised for action until it was specifically needed. Robert believed that Simon Bland has an existing list (which may need tweaking).

Item 4: Progress Leadership Strategy – This was to be discussed later at this meeting and the action would be cleared.

Item 6: Clarify WSC financial implications – This would be put as an action for the Finance Group. Liz would pick up the conversation on this with Helen Mason. There was a wider question that just Finance, though it was noted that the Budget template may also need revision.

### May 2021 Action List

Item 2: Code of ethics committee – This was on the agenda for today.

Item 3: Fossil Fuel divestment – This was on the Finance Group's list, and would therefore come off the Action List.

### July 2021 Action List

Item 1: CIO Working group – This duplicated an Action from the November 2021 list.

Item 2: Strategic planning / operational and budgetary – This item would come off the Action List.

Item 3: Leadership roles – Rob has now chaired the group, and this item would come off the Action List.

Item 4: Exploration on Youth events partnership with Nightingale Centre and Unitarian College – This was under discussion later and would therefore be cleared.

Item 5: Memorandum of Understanding – A meeting had been scheduled.

Item 6: Code of Ethics on the agenda – This had been done, and the item would therefore be cleared from the Action List.

Item 7: Help inform on trans rights – This item would be taken off as it was now partially covered under the September item 2 on the Risk Register.

### September 2021 Action List

Item 1: CIO Consultative Group letter – Rob had met with the core group, but we had not yet engaged with the wider group.

Item 2: Risk Register, consider changes to political landscape – This would remain as something to consider.

Item 3: Risk Register rewrite – Robert and Liz had a long conversation recently, and Robert reported. The Risk Register has two main purposes: 1) Meet the requirements of the Auditors and the Charity Commission; and 2) Act as a useful tool to help Liz and the EC manage risks. We were not in control of many of the risks, as in many cases the actions of congregations were more likely to bring up problems. An initial draft indicated that mitigation actions were partly for us, and partly required us to persuade others to take actions. Further risks addressing declining numbers, and a risk on finances had been added. The draft would go to the Finance Group, and then come back to EC.

Item 4: Thanks to Nightingale Centre Staff – This had not been done in December due to a technical issue and would therefore now be New Year thanks.

Item 5: Code of Ethics meeting – The meeting had been set up and a paper produced, so this would be cleared from the Action List.

Item 6: Junior Weekend discussion – Gavin Howell, Helen Mason and Cathie Mastalerz had met in November. Cathie and Helen came with the perspective of an existing plan they had developed for Junior Weekend. Gavin had come with the perspective of the meeting being to have conversations on the opportunities of partnership and see what would be possible. With different expectations and objectives, this had not been a great meeting. Gavin had given it some time and reached out to discuss this again, with Marion facilitating. Marion indicated that the Nightingale Centre wanted to look at a wider partnership to work together on youth

events, rather than just Junior Weekend. This year the Centre was prepared to support a Junior Weekend (booked) and UniFest (not yet booked), where children would go free and adults would be subsidised, to test the future need and demand. This might then inform possible future events. Infrastructure needed to be in place. Cathie would run the Junior Weekend, sponsored by Unitarian College, who would do the administrative work for this. It needed to be made clear that it was not the GA's responsibility if the event went ahead without the GA, as Safeguarding was a major risk. Unitarian College would need to take responsibility and there would need to be a proper review of the event afterwards.

Item 7: Consider Ministry Group role – This was done and it would be cleared from the Action List.

Item 8: Enact wedding support proposal – This was done and would be cleared from the Action List.

Item 9: Safeguarding and the Risk Register – Robert had a conversation with the Youth Officer and would have a further conversation. This item was cleared from the Action List.

Item 10: Email re. Torbay concerns. Liz had talked this through with Simon Bland and Gavin Howell and would look through the concerns. This item was cleared from the Action List.

Item 11: Share and address Summary of Torbay concerns – This was cleared from the Action List.

Torbay Project update – Liz reported that Gavin Howell's new contract had been started from 01 January and he was in the process of moving down to Torquay. It was important to get the communication right on this project, as rumours were already starting Liz felt that the Annual Meetings were the right occasion to launch the wider communication. A brief description in Uni-News was not enough and would only raise more questions. This would be on the agenda for the next EC meeting.

**ACTION: Liz**

#### November 2021 Action List

Item 1: Change Procurement Policy notification level – This had been done. The Finance Group had made some small changes to Procurement Policy and sent through an updated draft to the Treasurer last night. The new draft would be shared over lunch and agreed later at the meeting or over email. This item was cleared from the Action List.

Item 2: Refer motions to the Steering Committee. This had been done. Andrew would chase up the response. This item was cleared from the Action List.

Item 3: As co-option could not take place until after the Annual Meetings decision on the Treasurer, this item was cleared from the Action List.

Item 4: Constitution Review Group – The Group agreed with this change, and felt this was the right time to look at it. Robert had drafted some text and would share this with the EC before the CIO group met.

**ACTION: Robert**

It was likely this would need discussion at the Annual Meetings.

Item 5: Progress new types of GA Roll: Rob's Action Paper had not yet been discussed properly, and it was unclear what discussion Simon Bland had held about

the paper with the Interview Panel. The processes needed to be worked out and we were not ready to put the new students on a Student Roll yet. Liz would arrange for an agenda item for the Ministry Support Group to consider where the process work should happen.

**ACTION: Liz**

Item 6: Ask Finance Committee to look at a Ministry Support Fund – This would be on the agenda of the next meeting. Simon was meeting the trustees of the Benevolent Society in December, and he would be asked to join the next Finance Group meeting to give an update on this.

Item 7: Check gender-neutral document – Liz had proofread it this week. It needed a few tweaks, and there were a few queries for Simon, but it would go out soon. This item was cleared from the Action List.

Item 8: Increased Communications – Liz had been talking to the Editor about how we use The Inquirer, and had also had a discussion with the Communications Officer. This would be continually-evolving but we were presently considering how to spread messages to different audiences. This item was cleared from the Action List.

### Minutes of Previous Meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting, held 26 November 2021, were **AGREED** and signed by the Chair.

Item 6, Jane Blackall – It was clarified that ‘revisited’ meant it would come back to the EC Meeting.

### **3. GA activity**

#### Chief Officer’s Report Jan 2022

Health of the Movement – This was related to the need to help people to imagine a future ahead. It was noted that this form of imagination could be difficult when people felt depleted.

Communications - A GA Roadshow had been suggested. GA Staff have been unable to travel in recent times but may be able to do more visiting in 2022. In-person day events with different districts (Including congregations and local connections, not just district officers) were suggested, to share what’s going on, listen, broaden communication channels, and perhaps help districts to create a good vision for the future. Simon Hall would think about how this might work with the East Midlands and Melda Grantham was hoping to do something similar in Wales.

Office – The Chief Officer had been having conversations with the Essex Hall Trust regarding our use of space at Essex Hall. Our current space was serviceable but not exciting. The ground floor shop and basement kitchen space, which has been vacant for a bit, was being looked at as a possibility. Some plans had been drawn up by a Designer / Space Planner. The initial budget cost was very high, and the Designer had come back with a reduced but still high cost. The Chief Officer was thinking through different options to share with the Essex Hall Trustees at their meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January. If purely a financial decision, the GA would probably move out entirely, but there was a prestige and local amenity of having a central London office space, and indeed a permanent location. The Chief Officer was looking at creating space for the possibility of partnership - creating events with other organisations in an underused space. Changes to the layout and a more modern design meant more

possibilities. There were also reflections to our self-image in having a more imaginative space. It would require the Essex Hall Trust to take a leap of faith and invest in an exciting change, and we would need to see how that conversation went. The possibility of change felt exciting.

Comments from the EC were:

- Image is important in how we present ourselves to and communicate with the world, and the Humanist UK HQ was a good example of poor presence.
- A space in which activities and current conversations could be programmed felt exciting for Unitarianism.
- Using our culture, standing and history as a leap into the future was exciting, and many of our churches needed modernising. This could give our Movement a boost.
- Some churches, such as Great Hucklow, were looking at more community / partnership use, and this could be an opportunity.
- The flipside was the likelihood of letters to The Inquirer talking about the GA spending money on its offices.

The Treasurer asked about funding. Traditionally, the Essex Hall Trust pays for the building works, which is the majority of the cost. The GA would likely need to invest in the AV upgrade, and relocation expenses. There was less precedent for who paid for new furniture, and this would need discussion.

Branding – There had been an assumption in the design element that congregations were presently in a place to run a process about what they stand for, discovering colours, fonts etc and taking up an invitation to engage. In practice, there seemed to be significant barriers to this in terms of energy and capacity. This reflected some concerning weakness in the capacity levels of many of our congregations which was currently not being addressed openly. Jenny indicated some of the issues she had initiating a discussion on the Design Programme within her local congregation, even though it had quite an active membership.

There was also a concern that our consultation process had not been done well enough, and people felt that the branding exercise was being imposed on them, leading to people feeling confused and upset. This needed to be reframed to indicate that the approach was to provide congregations with the tools to do the things which were right for them. Dealing with the responses from launching the GA website had delayed the process of communicating the design programme. The Design Programme had been sent to Secretaries and Ministers, but perhaps needed to have been clearer about the steps which needed to be taken to engage with their congregations. A Zoom call had also been held with 30-40 people to explore the Design Programme, but it may still need continual encouragement and subsequent questions.

The branding exercise was intended to prompt congregations to consider what they're doing and what it's for. To find energy, we needed to point people to a sense of purpose, mission and personal connection. This was connected to spiritual health. It was **AGREED** that Liz would put a framework together for what the EC could do at a session on this at the Annual Meetings, and engage members of the EC in the process.

**ACTION: Liz**

## Staff reports Jan 2022

This was taken as read and Staff were thanked for their reports.

## President's report to the EC

An invitation had been received from the Hungarian Unitarians to the installation of their new Bishop at the end of January, but neither the President nor Vice President could attend. It currently felt likely this would be rescheduled due to an Omicron surge. This did not feel the right time to go. It was **AGREED** that Anne would reply and decline the invitation for herself and Sue, and the Chief Officer would reply on behalf of the GA. It was suggested that the new Bishop be invited to attend the GA Annual Meetings from the budget for guests. **ACTION: Anne, Liz**

## District reports to January EC meeting

This document was taken as read.

### **4. Finance**

The Treasurer gave a verbal report.

An Audit sign-off meeting planned for yesterday had been postponed by the Auditors for a week. All request information had been sent from, and they needed to review this. The Treasurer was not aware of any issues.

The revised procurement paper would be distributed over lunch.

The Finance Committee had met in December and looked at the Budget, but this was not yet ready for a new budget paper to be presented to the EC.

The Investment paper was still ongoing. The disinvestment resolution issue was part of the Investment Policy. Currently the main focus was on the Audit.

### **5. Annual Meeting**

An initial draft schedule was created in December and had been circulated to the EC for information. It was noted that the 'Worship' item in each breakout section was a placeholder for a wider section of curated sessions, including worship, training and options for people to connect. A summary of the sessions had also been circulated.

There had been a great deal of uncertainty about the Meetings and we had held off on signing a number of contracts. Normally we would have opened bookings around Christmas. This year, due to the Omicron variants it did not feel like the right time. The formal notice had been distributed, but with a cover letter indicating we would open bookings in the New Year, without giving a date. At present the Annual Meetings Panel felt it was practical to go ahead with the event, and views from the EC were sought.

Discussion was held, and the following points were made:

- Winter Walking Weekend had taken place at the Nightingale Centre with only three cancellations, and they had not seen signs of significant concern for attendance. The Centre had required Lateral Flow Tests to be taken before coming and results to be shared with the Centre.
- It was impractical and divisive to insist on vaccination and proofs.
- Asking people to take lateral flow tests before coming was more practical. We would need to consider how we communicate risks and personal

responsibilities, and emphasis that attenders should be careful and responsible and be kind to each other.

- Minimum numbers for the event to go ahead were not based on the financial (as we would already be committed by the contract), but low numbers would make it hard to debate motions. The Chief Officer felt that under 150 people would cause us to look at redesigning the structure.
- The Welsh Government was relaxing regulations.
- Meeting together matters, and there was a sense that people felt the need to come out and meet each other again.
- Safeguards – sanitising, cleaning, and HEPA filters for the air conditioning were the biggest thing. It was important to communicate what safeguards would be in place, though it was noted that these could change nearer the time.
- We would expect people to cooperate with whatever legal guidance is in place, and any precautions we encouraged.
- We could strongly encourage people to take lateral flow tests beforehand.

After discussion it was **AGREED** that the Meetings should go ahead, subject to there being no major changes in the Covid situation. Bookings would open around the end of January, and a Uni-News communication would be sent next week to explain the delay and current plan.

## 6. Ministry

Over time, the operational aspects of the Ministry Strategy Group (MSG) had seen good people putting in a lot of effort, and working well. Strategic issues haven't really been looked at. The Chief Officer's conversations with people have recognised that trying to deal with both operational issues and soul-searching questions need very different types of working (and probably people).

The MSG Chair Sarah Tinker had been thinking about this and she proposed a Ministry Matters group for operational GA Roll matters, aiming to strive for excellence and uphold standards. The other 'transformational' work would need to look at the future of ministry in all forms, exploring with people from outside the Movement, outside the constraints of how we currently do things.

The Ministry Matters group would identify developmental improvements (e.g. handover / sign off of new students or joining the GA Roll, in conjunction with the Colleges and Simon Bland) and look at responsibilities and procedures. Similarly the transformational group would need ultimately need to develop strategy into operational outcomes.

There was general approval of the approach, and it was **AGREED** to pass this back to the Chief Officer to develop further. **ACTION: Liz**

The Chief Officer drew attention to Sarah Tinker's longer-term desire to step back from the group, and the need for succession-planning with the Ministry Matters group. Suggestions for possible people to join the group were: Jamie Cooper, Patrick Timperley, Daniel Costley, and Jo James (as EC Link). EC members would contact Liz with other possibilities. The group would need a mix of ministers and lay people from different backgrounds. Some people with education or people-management experience would be an advantage.

The Transformational group, imagining the future, would also need people. As a specific time-limited project, this could enable new leader development. Robin Hanford was suggested, and EC members would contact Liz with other possibilities.

The overall position of the strategy groups was that most had not really been functional for a while, and the sense was that there was more interest in specific elements of what the groups did, rather than the groups themselves. Liz would work on this for discussion at the March EC Meeting. **ACTION: Liz**

## **7. Code of ethics motion**

A paper had been circulated and Jo James reported on discussions with the Findhorn Unitarian Network, which had gone well. It had been agreed to extend the deadlines on the project, and that bringing a meaningful plan back to the 2022 Meetings was unrealistic. The group had requested that the EC communicate the work so far, though it was currently unclear what the best vehicle for that would be.

The plan was for a first stage to request a copy of existing codes of ethics and behavioural covenants be sent in by congregations, societies etc. A second stage would then to circulate a survey. A draft had been circulated in the paper. Jo noted that some amendments from the previous version were still to be made.

It was noted that the line that it “will apply to 3,000 Unitarians” was out of the scope of the Resolution. Jo agreed that this needed amending. The intention had been to indicate that this was not just for worship leaders, but Movement-wide.

The terminology of ‘Code of Behaviour’ or ‘Code of Ethics’ was raised, and Jo agreed there was a need to be careful with language. His hope was that that this would broach the idea of a greater conversation throughout our Movement on our ethics and practical theology.

The survey mentioned ‘Guidelines’, and the updated version of this document was about to be sent out. The phrasing in the survey needed to reflect this to avoid confusion.

The group were thanked for their work.

## **8. Procurement Paper**

The updated version of the Procurement Paper had been issued over the lunch break. The Finance Committee would consider the review date. The paper was then **approved**.

## **9. Interview Panel**

Three people had been approved and accepted for training with the Unitarian College training programme.

There was a line in the report about not naming students until after the orientation. This seemed to take back ownership of part of the process, whereas it used to be that the EC ratified and named the students. It was **AGREED** that Liz would speak to Sarah Tinker about this. The Students would be admitted to the new Roll of Ministers (Students) and the EC would name them, but not include which College they were to attend. **ACTION: Liz**



## **10. Key Messages**

- Progress on Code of Ethics / Behaviour.
- Decision to go ahead with the in-person Annual Meetings..
- Creation of Roll of Ministers (Students) and names.
- Coming change from Ministry Strategy Group to Ministry Matters.

## **11. Check Out**

This took place.

Rob Whiteman gave closing devotions and the meeting ended.

## **Notes of the Executive Committee meeting held 11/03/2022**

**Present:** Marion Baker, Hilda Dumpleton, Simon Hall, Robert Ince, Jenny Jacobs, Jo James, Rob Whiteman

**In attendance:** Gavin Howell (Zoom, item 4), David Joseph (item 5), Andrew Mason (Minutes), Anne Mills (GA President), Liz Slade (Chief Officer)

**Apologies:** Rev Celia Cartwright

### **Session 1**

Opening devotions were given by Jo James with words by William Ellery Channing, and The First Discourse on War, and the meeting then started.

#### **1. Check-in**

The check-in took place.

#### **2. Minutes and actions**

##### **Minutes of previous Meeting**

Page 2, Action List Sept 2021 Item 1: It was noted that the action was for Robert Ince, rather than Rob Whiteman.

Page 4, Action List Nov 2021, Item 7: This was restored to the Action List.

Page 6: Item 3, President's Report: Anne reported that she had declined the January installation invitation, and had since been invited to attend another time.

Page 7, Item 6, Ministry, final paragraph: It was noted that Jane Couper and the others mentioned were existing members of the group.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2022 were then **AGREED**.

##### **Action List**

###### **20 April 2021**

Item 1 – Online circle discussion of deeper items: This overlapped with other items Liz and Jo would have a conversation with Lizzie Kingston-Harrison, and this change would be added to the Action List item.

Item 2 – Survey of congregations post-pandemic: This would be considered after the Annual Meetings.

Item 3 – This item would be removed from the Action List.

Item 4 – Clarify financial implications of the Worship Studies Course (WSC): Liz had met with Helen Mason this week and now had a clearer sense of the changes. The WSC was in transition, and the detail had not been explored yet. This item would be removed from the Action List, and covered by the Finance Group.

#### 18 May 2021

Item 2 – Code of Ethics: Progress on this was on today's agenda. There was likely to be another survey. This item would be removed from the Action List.

#### July 2021

Item 5 – Memorandum of Understanding with Unitarian College: Liz had held part of discussion with Helen Mason and gave an update: it felt like the GA and UC were quite aligned; they had talked through key points for the Memorandum of Understanding; there was agreement on general item, and which items needed details to be fleshed out. Helen was reviewing the notes Liz had sent to her, and further discussion would then take place, with the intention of bringing a draft Memorandum of Understanding to the next EC Meeting.

#### September 2021

Item 1 – CIO Consultative Group letter: This would be done before the Annual Meetings.

Item 2 – Risk Register: This would remain on the Action List.

Item 3 – Risk Register: This had been discussed at the Finance Group, but was not yet ready to bring to the EC. Robert and Liz would have a further conversation, and bring it to the Finance Group, with the intention of having a draft ready for the next EC Meeting. This would remain on the action list.

Item 4 – Thanks to Nightingale Centre: Liz delegated this to Andrew Mason.

**ACTION: Andrew**

Item 6 – Junior Weekend GA Resolution: A meeting had been held. Marion had acknowledged differences of opinion but hoped they might meet constructively and find common ground. By the end of the meeting there was common ground. Way forward seemed clear, and there was another meeting in about three weeks' time to move things on. It had been stressed that the EC was responsible for money being spent from Restricted Funds. with robust procedures for application. Future requests were likely to be more realistic, and EC was looking at Youth provision across the board not just Junior Weekend.

## November 2021

Item 4 – Motions in new Constitution: Robert reported that the CIO group have talked about Motions, and a number of people liked the UUA System. The UUA have two types of motion: Study Motions and Actions for Immediate Witness. Neither worked as well as hoped.

Study motions are those where the UUA agree to study a motion for a period of three years. The disadvantage was that by that time, interest and momentum will have been lost interest. Additionally, for the UUA there is no responsibility on the person / group sponsoring the motion to give background information. If we adopted this, it would need tweaking. This approach had worked well with our Assisted Dying motion.

Actions for Immediate Witness were the most common type of motions, requiring more immediate action. The UUA put these forward on the first day of their Meetings, and make a decision on the last day. This is similar to our ordinary motions, but retained the issue of potentially needing to wait a year for the next opportunity to put a motion on an issue of concern. The UUA have a Commission on Social Witness which is there to filter motions, but also support things which can go through to refine and provide the wherewithal to make them happen. Robert hoped to discuss Motions at the GA. Administration motions would still be needed. We would still need the ability to have some form of emergency motion, but it would probably be different to the current arrangement. This item would be removed from the Action List.

Item 5 – Progress new types of GA Roll: Liz would be speaking to Sarah Tinker next week to discuss steps, and who we need to involve. Outside expertise would be needed for items like Chaplaincy. Issues around DBS checks as well as the overall steps for students were noted. One Spirit Ministers had been appointed as Chaplains in an NHS context. Practices and training for chaplaincy were different to regular ministry, and counselling was already a weakness in our training. This item would stay on the Action List.

Item 6 – Ministry Support Fund: A paper was awaited from Simon Bland. Liz would ask him to send this the Finance Committee, and this item would be removed from the EC Action List.

**ACTION: Liz**

## January 2022

Item 1 – Torbay Project Communication: This item would be removed from the Action List.

Item 2 – Add MSG Agenda item: This item would be removed from the Action List.

Item 3 – Framework for Branding session: Around communication about Annual Meetings generally. This item would be removed from the Action List.

Item 4 – Reply to Hungarian Unitarians: This item would be removed from the Action List. It was reported that the Bishop would be attending the Annual Meetings as an Overseas Guest.

Item 5 – Develop plans for Ministry Matters / MSG changes: Liz was talking to Sarah Tinker. This action would remain on the Action List.

Item 6 – Consider Strategy Groups: The Annual Meetings would be used to communicate how we are working, particularly for Ministry. The Broader 'how we work' discussion was being done. This item would be removed from the Action List.

Item 7 – Discuss Student Minister Process with Sarah Tinker: This would be removed from the Action List.

### **3. GA Activity**

#### Chief Officer's Report

Hibbert Trust – A funded retreat for Ministers would be considered. The Chair of the Hibbert Trust, Derek McAuley, had indicated there was likely to be money available for this purpose, and Hibbert might also provide some funding towards information displays and communications in respect of the GA Office. Simon Bland would be an advisor on the Gregson Trust.

Welsh congregations – A conversation was held about congregations who are struggling. There had not been much willingness to engage on payment of the GA quota and contributions to the Welsh Officer post. Attendance at the Eisteddfod was planned, but the Districts would be doing it for themselves and would therefore have a better idea of how much work is involved. The districts have promised to contribute financially to this. A Meeting was to be held tomorrow. Hilda wondered if #Blessed could attend the Eisteddfod for a day.

Harris Manchester College Oxford Chaplain Tutor - Liz went to the interviews on Monday. There had been 7 applications, with 4 people interviewed, and the number and quality of applications was pleasing. An appointment would be made soon, and a joint announcement made with the College and the GA.

#### Staff Reports

Leaflets – The Weddings leaflet was not available yet. The General leaflet would be launched at the Annual Meetings. Then a Pride leaflet would be launched, followed by the Weddings leaflet.

Weddings survey – Liz was struck that many respondents found it hard to say what was great about their chapel, and why people would want to get married there. If it was hard to do for the tangible idea of weddings, it would be even harder to explain why people should come generally. It was important to help congregations to tell their story well.

#### Ministry and Congregational Support Officer's Report

Page 3, Guidelines report: It was clarified that Rev Peter Fairbrother had resigned - his contract was not terminated.

#### Legacy Survey

The survey results would be looked at in detail in in June.

#### President's Report

Anne had attended a Zoom meeting of congregations arranged by Great Hucklow and had found it to be excellent.

She had also attended Melda's Zoom wedding session. There were around seven people there, with Anne the only non-Minister (she is an Authorised Person). Melda had recognised to the need to assess the situation for a little longer, and was considering another survey.

Anne had been very occupied last week on statements about Ukraine, which enabled her to let others to know what we were doing - statements on our website were not enough. Some congregations had used the statements in.

Anne had been thinking about how we encouraged good behaviours at the Annual Meetings.

Anne suggested that we send a message of congratulations to the Queen for the Jubilee, though Sue Woolley would be President by then.

#### District Reports

Robert mentioned the Interfaith Ministers issue which had been brought up by the Manchester District. This required further discussion, and had been included in the transformation part of the Ministry debate. It was also noted that the Interfaith / Multifaith Ministers have no support network within our Movement if appointed by our congregations, as they are not on the GA Roll. Unitarian College was working with The Unitarian Association for Lay Ministry to support non-Ministers, and this might be possible to build on. It was suggested that congregations needed more information on what training Interfaith Ministers receive.

#### **4. Torbay Project**

Gavin Howell attended by Zoom for this item.

Liz gave background information. There had been concern from the Western Union that they were not involved / briefed on Gavin's new role. Kay Millard had been leading good work with Kate Whyman, Edgar, Mark or Karl Stewart in the Western Union, with Helen Mason facilitating. They had met a few weeks ago, and Simon Bland was invited. His report indicated that rumours had clearly been flying. Liz discussed the reality of our communication vs respect for Gavin's desire to speak to his family before announcements were made. Gavin had met with Kate Whyman, so was unsure why there should be consternation. It was possible that there was an expectation that the aim of the Project was to reinvigorate the Torquay congregation, though this was not the case.

Gavin indicated that he had moved to the area on 27 January, and then taken some leave, and had therefore started working in Torbay around 10 February, for two days a week on this project. Since then, he had met with other faith groups, climate action groups and community groups, with the aim of opening doors and introducing himself. He had been pleasantly surprised by how positive and receptive people had been. Many had not heard of Unitarianism. People had appreciated the feeling that we're open to listening, collaboration and cooperation. It had been uplifting for both Gav and them. Those he had spoken to were interested in potential access to a building which could be used, but more for our approach in not having a pre-set agenda, or planned outcome, but instead working in an emergent way.

##### Tangible outcomes

Gavin had a second meeting booked for tonight with someone enquiring about Unitarianism in the Bay through social media, and they had been exploring the concept of 'pub ministry'. He had been formally accepted onto the Devon Faith and Belief Forum, who had been very positive to having a Unitarian presence there, especially with our other links to organisations like The Interfaith Network. A Torbay climate action group were keen to use a building if we have access, as there were shared values. Groups were eager to collaborate, and also to look at what hospitality might look like. There had been lots of signposting to other groups, and Gavin was heartened by the way people were willing to introduce us positively to others in the area. The groups he had spoken to were very receptive to working in collaboration and appreciated our willingness to take a longer-term view in not knowing what will come or having fixed objectives.

At present, Gavin was focusing on the connections being made with local groups for people in the Bay. While he was happy to speak to the Western Union, he currently

felt the priority was to listen to the landscape and make more connections with other local groups.

### Communication with the wider Movement

This was something for the EC to consider. The Project would be launched at the Annual Meetings, which was now fairly close. However, we would need to have conversations with some people beforehand so they did not feel blindsided. This was more likely to be key people in the Western Union rather than necessarily the organisation itself. Gavin had not spoken to Kate Whyman since last Summer, and would need to be in touch. He was currently still settling in.

### Communication at the Annual Meetings.

Gavin would be giving a snapshot at the Meetings, as he had only just started. He felt it would be more beneficial to talk about the journey of how we got to where we are, and pitch this as a good news story. Next year would then have a more reflective report on what we had been learning.

Liz indicated that Gav would be reporting during a plenary session, rather than at a breakout session. The main elements of our communication would be: the origin story; new ways of working (emergent way, with no project plan); specific details (the Torquay building was out of scope, it was for two days a week, how much was in the budget etc); and ongoing communication. There might be a regular space we could host for people to hear what's happening in Torbay and bring their own experiences, to swap learning, likely in conjunction with Lizzie Kingston-Harrison. Transparency would be included, but not in the style of formal reports to committees.

Rob would communicate with the Western Union about the AGM presentation and the four communication elements.

**ACTION: Rob**

## **Session 2**

### **5. Finance**

David Joseph joined the meeting for this item.

Draft Accounts and a Draft Budget had been circulated, along with a Management Letter / Report from the Auditors.

The budget would be reviewed in May. The Treasurer felt that the Auditor's Report was a good report, and thanked David Joseph for his work in preparing the Draft Accounts.



David indicated that a lot of pre-audit work had been done, with the AGM refunds from last year causing extra work.

Draft Accounts – The bottom-line numbers were not going to change. There were one or two rough edges, e.g. the Statement of Financial Affairs on Page 11 and narrative of the trustees commentary, but the Accounts were broadly complete.

#### Auditor's Management letter

Pg 2 & 3 – internal controls: This referred to a single person at the Nightingale Centre who had worked briefly on a zero-hours contract and could no longer be traced. The other information mentioned had been located. The GA information had all been provided.

Gift Aid – David indicated that we were catching up fairly rapidly on claiming outstanding Gift Aid amounts, with the process having been improved. The Balance to claim was now down from £18K to £9K from £18K. Now within three years.

The Treasurer thanked David for his work on getting more information on the Restricted Funds. This had not been totally completed but good progress had been made.

#### Approving 2020-21 GA Accounts

The Accounts were formally approved.

#### Approving 2021-22 GA Budget

The Budget reflects planned income and expenditure for the year from our unrestricted funds, with the ideal being to achieve a breakeven or a small surplus. It is split between programme work, support functions and fundraising. As a result of last Summer's work, it has been arranged against our strategic priorities, as a statement of intent.

A mid-year review was planned in April, based on data from the five-month period from October 2021 to February 2022. This would enable us to review and reassess the budget priorities, and refine the budget for the second part of the year.

In response to a question, David indicated that we had sufficient liquidity to not need to drawdown investments from uncertain markets during the year.

Some minor changes were needed. On page 3, the strategic priorities needed a light presentation change, and lines 74 and 186 about Staff payrolls were slightly unclear. David would look at these.

**ACTION: David**

The Budget was approved as a draft, subject to the mid-term review in March. The Staff would work with this as the budget.

Ukraine – Lizzie Kingston-Harrison would be sending out a mailing inviting people to a collective time of silence next week, and pointing people where to donate. We had already advertised the Red Cross donation scheme. It was **AGREED** to give all the Anniversary Service money to the Red Cross Ukraine Appeal. Lizzie Kingston would include this in her message.

## **6. Code of Ethics**

### Update on discussion with Findhorn Unitarian Network

Two papers had been received. The invitation and survey have been tidied up. Jo felt it was ready to circulate via Uni-News. After discussion, it was felt to be better to create an electronic survey and circulate by email instead of hard copies. Andrew Mason would create the electronic survey from the paper given. Jo was thanked for all his with the FUN group. **ACTION: Andrew**

## **7. Motions, Background Papers and Ministry Stipend Review Report**

The Motions and Background Papers had been circulated to EC members and would be distributed today.

Lancashire Collaborative Ministry (LCM) – The decision on the LCM Affiliated Society Motion made by email was homologated.

Ministry Stipend Review Report – The Report was **APPROVED** for distribution.

## **Session 3**

## **8. Annual Meetings**

Liz planned to acknowledge the reality of our situation at the Meetings. There was a sense that people were aware that congregations dwindling but treated it as the elephant in the room. The situation was not all doom and gloom. The world was very different not just since 2019 but from the cultural context when many people at the Meetings would first have joined. It was essential to identify who are we serving and what are we offering, and then ground communication in our current reality. From that, we needed to recognise that our past is not our future, while not letting go of what is at our core. Some of our systems and infrastructure were not alive, but there were some new things which are. As a non-hierarchical movement, we need to be working where the energies are rather than following structures.

As the GA Charity, it was important for us to get across to people the impact of our work on the Movement in service of members and the wider world. The EC would talk about how we work, showing collaboration between Staff, EC members and other volunteers. We would also try to remind people or introduce them to the Staff Team, and introduce people to the EC, particularly newer the EC members. Next year is an EC election year, with Hilda, Marion and Robert all stepping down. This was therefore an Important year to build trust and awareness of the newer EC members carrying the work forward, and to encourage people to put themselves forward for EC election. With Rob being appointed as the new GA Treasurer, there was also an opportunity to communicate on our financial situation.

Worship and celebration were important to give an injection of energy. It was important to reflect that there would be both excitement and anxiety for people in meeting together.

There were currently 270 people booked in, and papers would be going out today with a reminder that bookings were still awful.

Initial comments received:

- There were very few comments disapproving of holding in-person meetings on safety grounds.
- There were more questions about why we were not doing a hybrid meetings (split between “I can’t go” and “everything should be hybrid”).
- Marion identified some dissatisfaction of the removal of Retired Ministers Discount, which was based more about the culture of ‘honouring the tradition’ than the practical financial implications.

Liz felt it was more important to think about the audiences we need to design around, which she identified as a) Emerging leaders (people getting involved, those checking us out or assessing early stages of commitment – a critical group; and b) . Unsung Heroes (people who do lots of work behind the scenes, but won’t go behind a microphone).

The Meetings should remind people that ours is a bottom-up Movement – progress will come from the passions, skills and enthusiasm of the Movement. Our leaders need to hold space for others to try things (some of which will fail). Fear of failure can make us too cautious. People’s contributions would be recognised in the plenary sessions, and the Chief Officer was the most appropriate person to do this.

## EC Workshop

The EC's workshop was an opportunity to speak about the strategy and listen to people's thoughts, hopes and challenges. It should be framed around the emergent leaders and unsung heroes and would inform the EC's June strategy meeting.

## Plenary Sessions (General)

Liz was currently sketching out the agenda. There was an opportunity to do trailers of the workshops Staff are leading. Setting our expectations about how to be together positively had been discussed with the President. The intention was to make Administrative Motions as streamlined as possible. Overall, we wanted the plenary sessions not to feel like a heavy bureaucratic thing, but to be full of life and celebratory, with this the start of a new chapter where lots of good things were emerging.

### **9. Proposal from Bowland Trust / Penal & Social Affairs Panel**

Tony Cann had an initial conversation with Liz pre-pandemic, then got back in touch with Simon Bland recently.

It was noted that we had not given a lot of feedback to the Bowland Trust on how we had used monies previously given. This was important to do going forward.

This was an interesting proposal. A Social Action Staff member was felt to be a positive thing. This appeared to be a half-time post for five years.

There were some practical issues to consider, with the employment and line management items being the most significant. The GA has to act properly as it would be the responsible employer. Liz felt that we could work with the PSAP to put together terms of reference, a job specification, how decisions would be made, line management etc. The timing was also tight, as there seemed to be a desire to announce this at the Annual Meetings.

The proposal was agreed in principle, but with the need for a job description and terms of reference. The EC could discuss and agree by email if this needed to happen before the AGM. It was **AGREED** that Liz would reply to the Trust / Panel.

**ACTION: Liz**

### **10. Nightingale Centre**

The Minutes of the Nightingale Centre February meeting needed to be sent to the EC.

Mike Tracey and Karen Hicks will be running The Nightingale Centre stall at the Annual Meetings.

The Nightingale Centre to be asked to do brief update for the Plenary Session.

## **Session 4**

### **11. GA Roadshows**

The Roadshows needed to consider what people needed to hear from us, and how we could have good conversations. It felt like a good time to go out and meet people. We had already had a good foundation exploration of what we might do, but needed to turn this into actual plans.

Simon Hall has been progressing a roadshow with the East Midlands. At their quarterly district meeting, he had told them about plans for roadshows, and received a good response. On Monday he emailed to request two names for each congregation, specifying new people with no relationship with the district before. So far he had been given two names from Hinckley, (including new Minister Robin Hanford), and two from Leicester, and was trying to get two each from Mansfield and Belper. The idea would be to trial the roadshow with them, and then look with them at what lessons could be learnt afterwards. If the roadshow approach works, it was noted that it would not necessarily be arranged via Districts. It was hoped to involve more Staff members, and be more in-depth and interactive, as well as give a chance for us to see what it was happening at local level.

### **12. Communication**

- Annual Meetings – We were excited about being able to meet up; a good number had booked; an interesting programme had been created.
- Staff highlights – Highlights from Staff reports.
- Chaplain Tutor Appointment – When ready, the announcement would be made.
- Anniversary Service Donation to Ukraine
- Ethics Resolution – communicating and calling for submissions.

### **13. Check-out**

Check-out took place, Simon Hall gave Closing Devotions, and the meeting finished.

**Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held at  
The Nightingale Centre, Great Hucklow, 19-21 June 2022**

Attendees: Marion Baker (Convenor), Rob Whiteman (Honorary Treasurer), Robert Ince, Hilda Dumpleton, Jenny Jacobs, Simon Hall (until the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> June), Jo James

Apologies: Celia Cartwright

1. The meeting opened on the evening of 19<sup>th</sup> June with devotions led by Marion Baker and a check-in from all present, and an introduction and orientation for the meeting.
2. The EC discussed the current health of the movement, acknowledging the status after two years of pandemic when the movement had already experienced a period of decline. It was acknowledged that things have inevitably changed due to covid, and it is not possible for those who wish to go back to a previous time to do so. Many can feel threatened by the new, or feel scared of losing power and control. There is a need to build capability, capacity and confidence in congregations. There has been a change in many congregations in that newer members have returned to in person worship more quickly than longer standing members, and are often stepping into leadership roles. This often includes younger people of working age. This results in a culture change in congregations, but not one that has been planned and intentional, meaning there are interesting and sometimes disruptive things happening, particularly as power dynamics change. It was acknowledged that there is a lot of tiredness, among leaders and among members, and many people are experiencing very difficult life events due to all that has happened in the last couple of years. What we do can offer a place of rejuvenation, but this is also needed for leaders. Energy can come from engaging with the sacred, and it is important that congregations support their leaders in this, as well as for the GA to provide support. Practical support can help create the space for people to re-engage with what matters to them most. It is easy, particularly in our smaller congregations, for the culture to be dominated by those with difficult challenges in their lives and in their behaviour; that can be draining to leaders. It was acknowledged that it will be important for us to invest in the retention of our younger ministers throughout their career. It will also be important to look at the recruitment pool for new ministers; they can only come via our congregations, and it can be hard to nurture good leadership in small, constrained congregations.
3. The minutes of the March 2022 EC meeting were approved.
4. The staff reports were received.
5. The recommendation from the Interview Panel was agreed - that Jane Blackall and Julio Torres should be accepted onto the GA Roll of Ministers with probationary status.
6. There was an update on the mid-year budget reviewed by the Finance Group in May. There was a review of the report provided by David Joseph of the income received from legacies over the last several years.
7. The EC had a discussion about our destination in the next 3-5 years, and there was good alignment around the destination that was shared (Appendix 1), and agreement that the area of 'strengthening our foundations' needs support from the EC.

There was recognition of the challenge that congregations may be approaching closure or otherwise struggling without getting in touch with the GA or the district association for help; therefore it will help us to find new means to build connection with congregations while acknowledging that the staff team has limited capacity to manage multiple relationships. It was acknowledged that many congregations can be 'frozen' - not closed down, but not taking any steps towards change.

The EC reviewed the output of the workshop held at the annual meetings, where participants were asked:

- What has changed in your congregation in these last two years?
- What are your needs now?
- What are your dreams for the future?

Current needs were mainly practical support, and the dreams for the future were generally no more specific than 'more people' or 'greater awareness of Unitarianism'. This suggests that participants needed more support or space than was available in the workshop to express their vision more clearly.

8. The EC reflected on the recent annual meetings, including feedback from the attendee survey. Feedback from the EC was positive. The anniversary service and the sense of ceremony around the new ministers was appreciated, and the EC encourage the Annual Meetings Panel to consider what further opportunities for ritual there might be (including ensuring that the banner parade feels suitably ceremonial). There was a suggestion of working with the Sacred Spaces team to help make the space in the hotel have a more meaningful feel. The EC also suggested that newly retiring ministers could be offered a place at the meetings for free, rather than returning to all retired ministers having a discount. It was suggested that Districts may wish to play a role in supporting retired ministers in their area to attend. There was discussion of whether there should be a return to daily meeting rates, but no recommendation from the EC to the Annual Meetings Panel on this issue; it was acknowledged that there is a benefit to having people there for the whole time, as well as a wish from some to have more flexibility. There was a suggestion that there could be an Exhibitors Ticket that would allow people to attend for a single day if they were supporting an exhibition stand. The improved sense of welcome was acknowledged, and the EC encourage the Annual Meetings Panel to build on this. There was the suggestion that techniques from the Art of Hosting could be used to make more of the meetings interactive and allow deeper connection between participants.
9. Robert Ince gave an update on the process of moving to a CIO. The consultation group has been exploring the process of motions, and whether there should be a move to adopting 'study motions' and 'actions for immediate witness' as the UUA do. There was acknowledgement that the whole process of motions needs to be reviewed, including understanding what need within the movement is articulated by motions, and whether a resolution is the right outcome of motions.
10. Rev Dr Rob Whiteman identified his conflict of interest as the minister at Dundee, and left the room for the discussion and decision-making.

The EC agreed a change from the current pattern of use of the James Speed Trust:

- That 4% of the capital could be drawn down in the GA's 2021-22 financial year and distributed to St Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh and Williamson Memorial Unitarian Church, Dundee. This would be in addition to the funds currently allocated to those churches from the income of the Trust.

- That up to 4% of the capital could be drawn down in future years, to be agreed each year by the EC Finance Group
  - The EC agreed that the current restrictions of the use of the funds were broad enough to allow most uses by the congregations
  - That the EC Finance Group would follow up with any further review
11. Rev Jo James gave an update on the work around a code of ethics / code of conduct following last year's motion from the Findhorn Unitarian Network. Jo raised concern that although there had been good discussions within the working group, a template code of ethics had been proposed outside of this group. Jo will bring back a report to the next EC meeting.
  12. The job description for the new social action officer role was approved, taking into account the suggestions made by the Penal and Social Affairs Panel. It was agreed that Jenny Jacobs should be on the interview panel for the role.
  13. It was agreed that the EC would not co-opt a new member for the three remaining meetings before the next election. It was suggested that the EC could benefit from members receiving training, and this should be considered for the future.
  14. Liz Slade left the room for the discussion of staff salary reviews. It was agreed that the Chief Officer should receive a 3.25% pay increase, and that the Chief Officer should allocate payraises to staff within a 3.25% increase to the total payroll cost for the rest of the team.
  15. In reviewing the plans discussed throughout this meeting, the following actions were agreed:
    - a. That Liz and the staff team would explore what a congregational support package might look like. The aims would be to help reduce the burden of work on congregations so that they have more capacity to focus on their vision and purpose; it was acknowledged that for many congregations, help to carry on as they are will not help them to flourish in the long term. Another aim would be to help build closer relationships with congregations, so that we can get earlier sight of the health of the congregation. This should be factored into the budget planning, including any additional staff costs. The toolkit may include payroll support, training for trustees etc.
    - b. To explore practicalities and costs of hosting a workshop with Moral Imaginations to help Unitarian leaders to envision a future.
    - c. To communicate to the movement that we're exploring a) and b), and how it is responding to the EC workshop at the annual meetings
    - d. To consider how 2020's Art of Hosting training can be built on, and how we might use open space technology to host conversations about our future.
    - e. To plan and budget for exploration of future ministry, recognising the need for transformation as well as developmental improvements to our current approaches.
    - f. To plan and budget for the assessment of current spiritual practice inside the movement and in communities outside of traditional faith groups, potentially in collaboration with Harris Manchester
    - g. That Simon Bland should act as facilitator for the Ministry Matters group
    - h. To respond to the East Midlands Union on the motion that they put to the General Assembly, and to communicate more widely how we will be consultative in our work
    - i. To invite districts to meet collectively and informally to share what issues are arising



## **Appendix 1: 3-5 year destination**

### **Where do we want to be and how do we get there?**

Building on conversations in EC meetings over the last year, the points below sketch a picture of what things might look like in 3-5 years' time, aligned to each of the priority areas. This is a sketch of the destination in that timeframe, so that we can check that we are taking the steps that will move us in the right direction.

#### **Enabling people to act**

- Local leaders and congregational committees have confidence, vision, skill, and a healthy culture
- Visionary, competent leaders have easy access to the resources they need
- There are active regional and national campaigns / action groups / working groups that serve the Unitarian movement and wider society, that have grown from the bottom up

#### **Designing for spiritual health**

- Local leaders are equipped to make discerning choices about the style of worship – and other activities - that will make the biggest impact on their community's spiritual health
- Training of worship leaders and other leaders supports this, and there is a culture of continual learning and improvement
- Unitarian rites of passage are known for their quality

#### **Communicating inside the movement**

- Local leaders can connect easily and healthily with each other, including outside of current structures and hierarchies
- Congregations, districts, other groups feel well informed about what is happening at the GA and elsewhere in the movement
- There is good dialogue between local leaders and the GA

#### **Communicating with the wider world**

- Local leaders are well supported in reaching out to their communities, and telling their stories well
- The GA has good media relationships, and we are called on to contribute to public dialogue
- The revamped Essex Hall is a vibrant and visible location for wider ideas about spiritual community and its role in society today, representing Unitarian and Free Christian thought and values; things happening there have an impact beyond London and beyond the movement

#### **Strengthening our foundations**

- There is a plan for GA financial sustainability
  - o Legacy fundraising is part of our norm
  - o We have unlocked further funding from the Bowland Trust to develop our future growth
  - o We have good relationships with other likely major donors
  - o There are good conversations being had about a longer-term financial model for the GA
- Congregations are confident in their own long-term vision and plan, considering finance, management, member demographics, and their cultural and community setting, aligned to the congregation's mission and ethos
- Congregations facing closure are considering their legacy in their planning
- There is a culture of collaboration in how resources are used across the movement

## Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held 27 September 2022 at Essex Hall

**Present:** Marion Baker (Convenor), Celia Cartwright, Hilda Dumpleton, Jo James, Robert Ince, Liz Slade, Rob Whiteman

**In attendance:** David Joseph (items 5-7), Andrew Mason (Minutes), Sue Woolley (GA President)

**Apologies:** Jenny Jacobs

Celia Cartwright gave Opening Devotions.

### **1. Check-in**

Check-in took place and the meeting started.

### **2. Minutes and Actions**

#### Minutes of previous meeting

With some minor amendments, the Minutes of the June EC meeting were **AGREED** as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### Action List

The Action List was reviewed. Overlapping items would be considered during the meeting as they come up.

#### *April 2021*

1. Circle discussion – Jo attended the first of two discussions, which he found energetic and positive overall, with people having enjoyed the opportunity to air their views as a listening exercise. Rob had also attended the first. He had been surprised our social media pushed the new logo two days after the Meetings. Liz had a similar thought, but the comments on social media had been positive. The President has been visiting congregations and wearing both the old and new chalice badges. The response to the new chalice had been almost universally negative. She had spoken to someone who had attended the second meeting and felt issues weren't being discussed.

A discussion was held over the logo, and the following points were made:

- The GA has the right to say it wishes to use its own logo.
- Someone who supported the new logo at the circle discussion withdrew before the end of the meeting, as the tone of negative feedback was aggressive. This needed to be considered, if people who are positive feel silenced.
- There had been some understanding from those negative about the new logo that it had been launched 18 months ago.

- There was not a common understanding from people who disliked the new chalice as to what they wished to happen as a result.
- Some people had responded so vehemently, they were now a little entrenched. It had been emotive for them.
- It was noted that a major aspect of the upset was that communication didn't happen in a way they were happy with, rather than being about the logo itself. In the second meeting, EC visibility at district meetings also came up. This might have been disrupted by Covid connections, or represent a general feeling of disconnection. It may reflect a broader disgruntlement with people's own disconnection or changing role in the movement. It was agreed to pick this up in the Communications discussion later in this meeting.
- It also seemed for some people that they had very clear expectations of what the consultation process would be (e.g. write to all congregations and ask whether they like the new or old chalice better), and because this was not the style chosen, they did not feel like a consultation had taken place.
- There had always been different designs of chalice in use. It was suggested that this was a manifestation of a fear of change in the movement.

This action item was cleared, though the discussions on communication would be an ongoing practice. It was suggested that if a suggested survey of congregations were to be undertaken, there could be a question about the chalice, though any survey needed more consideration for its timing and purpose.

### *July 2021*

1. Unitarian College Memo of Understanding – A draft had been brought to this meeting. This action item was therefore cleared.

### *September 2021*

1. Letter re. CIO Consultative Group – Information was awaited, and Robert and Liz would speak. **ACTION: Robert & Liz**

2. Risk Register – Jo was still considering the risks from changes to the political landscape but had written a short report which he would circulate during the break.

3. Risk Register – Rewriting the Risk Register with the four main uncertainty risks – This had been done and was on the agenda.

4. Appreciation to Nightingale Centre. The Management Committee had been thanked, and chocolates had been sent to the Centre to thank the Staff. Plants had also been sent for Stella Burney's retirement. This action item was cleared.

5. This action item was cleared.

### *November 2021*

1. Progress new types of GA Roll – This remained on the agenda, but had been left until after the Ministry Matters group had a chance to start.
2. Check Guidelines Document – This action item was cleared.

### *January 2022*

1. Develop plans for Ministry Matters – this item was ongoing.

### *March 2022*

1. Ministry Support Funding – The Ministers' Benevolent Fund didn't wish to change their practices. Simon was following up with Martin Whitell, who had responded, and more dialogue was needed. It was suggested that the anonymised feedback from the Ministers Stipend Augmentation Fund could be shared with the Benevolent Fund, as they might find it useful. This action item was cleared.
2. Communication re. Torbay – Rob had communicated with the Western Union and this action item was cleared.
3. Code of Ethics survey – The survey had been sent and this action item was cleared.

### *June 2022*

1. Add Ministers to the Roll – This action item was cleared.
2. Feedback to the Annual Meetings Panel – This action item was cleared.
3. Speed Trust – This action item was cleared.
4. Consider training for EC Members – An application for training from Jo had been approved, with Mill Hill Chapel covering half the cost. Jo would ask the Finance Officer about the best way to invoice this. **ACTION: Jo**  
As there would be new EC Members joining, training would be followed up with them. The action item was cleared for now.
5. Explore Congregational Support Package – Simon and Lizzie have started looked at this. Detail was not yet available but this was ongoing. It aligned to much of what we were doing and supporting congregations in this difficult time was important. The terms 'package' and 'toolkit' were being used, and there was a need to be consistent in our terminology to avoid confusion.
6. Congregational Support Package Workshop – Contact had been made, but this had been delayed by Summer.
7. Communication – We would communicate that this was being considered, and ask people what they needed. Lis was talking to Rory and Simon about a line of communication with congregational committees, separate to Uni-News, for practical matters unlikely to be of interest to Uni-News subscribers.
8. Building on the Art of Hosting training and open space technology – this was ongoing.

9. Plan and budget for exploration of future ministry – Jo and Liz have been speaking about this, but further work was created. It was noted that this was a creative exploration, separate to not Ministry Matters which was focused on the operational.
10. Plan and budget for assessment of current spiritual practice – this would be part of future ministry and designing for spiritual health, and more planning was needed. The President mentioned that she had asked about this in her 2017 Survey. Though the Survey was a smaller self-selected group, it might be helpful.
11. Respond to East Midlands Unitarians – This action item was cleared.
12. Invite districts to meet collectively. Liz had sounded out a few people and this had been met positively. It was not intended to replace EC District Links. Lizzie Kingston had agreed to co-host. This would be integrated into the overall area of how we could improve communication.

### **3. GA Activity**

#### President's Report

The President reported on her recent activities. She reported that there was still low-level discontent about the new logo (though she agreed it reflects a deeper unrest on the future of the Movement).

#### Stipend Review Committee

It was noted that there were two churches where Ministers had been laid off due to a lack of funding.

#### District Reports

The District Reports were reviewed.

The Manchester District had given grants to congregations to cover increased heating costs. In NELUM, the Hindley sale had resulted in a transfer of £10K to NELUM congregations (via the District).

The East Midland Unitarians had asked for an EC Member to attend meeting in October. Simon Hall had resigned from the EC to pursue a full-time degree in Contextual Theology at Luther King House, started early in September. He had been the East Midlands EC Link. Jo would be happy to be the replacement link but could not attend that meeting and Robert would therefore attend the meeting in his place. Midland Union, Merseyside and East Midlands all needed EC links and this would be picked up at the end of the meeting.

#### Staff Reports

The Staff Reports were reviewed. A Social Action Officer, funded by the Bowland Trust, was in process of appointment, and there had been strong candidates interviewed.

Essex Hall – The GA Offices were still under consideration.

Communications Officer – Rory had given an update on websites. The DUWIT websites needed updating, though John Wilkinson might carry them on for a little longer. The new WordPress template websites were thought to be an improvement.

Congregational Connections Lead – The imminent launch of the Worship Words website was highlighted, and the group had been working together well. This should be a good resource for people to use weekly, as well as a good place to submit readings. The 'Together in Meditation' sounded like a positive step, and along with the Unitarian Christian Association's Sunday online worship, there were good quality worship / spiritual activities online for people to find us.

A common theme was identified across the Staff reports – a style of working which aimed to bring people together on Zoom to have conversations and strengthen connections with people who are committed but may be isolated.

Youth – In the conversations between Unitarian College and the Nightingale Centre conversations, it had been agreed to ask people what they wanted from the youth programme. If the GA can support this with some market research, it would help us to invest where it's needed. Professional market research support had been discussed to enable us to ask the right questions and people were being explored for this. There were different ways to connect. The international meetings felt positive. Other smaller innovations had a lot of energy, but were still at the beginning. Some of these would fizzle out, some would evolve into other activities.

Torbay – Liz had visited Torbay in the Summer to meet Gavin and to see the church building. She had met with other non-Unitarian people in the area, and there was interest in what we are doing. This project was at the relationship-building stage. Good conversations had been held with the Torbay trustees and she had attended the Western Union AGM.

Wales – Hilda went to the Eisteddfod. Lots of work had been done, and there had been a great team spirit, with at least thirty people involved in production. They had put on a performance and a memorial to Cen Llwyd, and both had been very well-received. The Welsh Districts had run the activities this year, rather than Melda.

Weddings Lead – The new weddings leaflets were due to be delivered next week. The survey indicated that the new role had enabled connection with Ministers who did not do many weddings, and this could boost their confidence.

### 2022 Annual Meetings

A Report on the 2022 Annual Meetings was reviewed. Andrew highlighted that: numbers were down due to Covid; there was a high proportion of newcomers; in the survey the responders gave positive ratings for the event. The report identified those things the Organiser felt had gone well, and those that could be improved. A decision to reintroduce

non-resident tickets had been made for 2023. The £3K transfer from the £10K AGM fund for the new signage and exhibition banners was noted. This reduced the fund to £7K.

#### 2023 Annual Meetings

A Report on the 2023 Annual Meetings arrangements, and an initial budget for 2023, were presented. The costings had increased significantly since the 2022 Meetings was booked in 2020 and the charges would therefore need to be increased. The reasons for this would need to be communicated. The wording on the subsidies would be reviewed, as some confusion had been expressed as to eligibility. The issue of gluten-free labelling would be raised with Staverton Park in advance. It was **AGREED** that the EC would fund 25 discounted tickets in 2023. The Budget, charging and ticket structure were **AGREED**.

#### **4. Nightingale Centre**

A Report, Trading Report and the Minutes of the 10 September Management Committee meeting were reviewed.

Junior Weekend would be taking place the weekend after next, and there had been a late rush of bookings. There were 27 participants booked, of whom 3 were Staff, 16 were kids, and 8 were escorting adults. After the event, the Centre would survey the people who attended and look at the feedback at the November Management Meeting.

Depreciation question – The Management Committee were proposing to depreciate faster than was standard practice, which had been queried by the Auditors. Marion intended to argue this with though it was agreed that the proposal would be dropped if it would result in the Auditors giving a qualified audit. A compromise was felt to be likely.

The Management Committee's recommendation that Ian Hicks take over as Treasurer was **approved**. Colin Partington was thanked for his work for the Centre over many years.

The External Examiner had retired. Matthew Knox would be taking over as External Examiner and this appointment was **approved**.

Robert would speak to Mike Tracey about the EC transferring trusteeship to the Centre Management Committee as a new CIO.

**ACTION: Robert**

#### **5. Finance**

##### Finance Group

The Staff were looking into the purposes of the GA Restricted and Designated Funds, and scanning in the evidence. The intention was to try and simplify by using up the smaller funds for their intended purposes.

Investment Policy – This was under development. David Joseph would look at it further after the end of the year, for the Drawdown and Reserves Policy. The Auditors had indicated that capital growth could be used.

Accounting System – Aqilla was to be replaced. The intention was to use a similar system to the Nightingale Centre. David was looking to put this in place by mid-December, upload in mid-January, and go live in Spring 2023. Costs were in line with the budget previously set out to the EC. David would speak to Jeff Teagle re. the B&FUA using the same system.

**ACTION: David**

Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF) – The GA is Guarantor of Last Resort for the MPF. The MPF were considering changes to the format of the pension, and it was possible that this might have an effect on the GA as Guarantor. The GA Treasurer would discuss this informally with an Auditor, in order to create a formal question we can ask for professional advice on, as to whether it materially affects the GA's risk as Guarantor of Last Resort. Before the November MPF meeting, he would email Jeff Teagle to ask about how the GA would be consulted on the MPF's proposed changes. A budget figure of £3K was set to pay for the professional advice.

**ACTION: Rob**

### Update on 2022 Outlook

The Finance Officer and Treasurer presented the Management Accounts for Quarter 3. David and Cherralyn were thanked for their work on this. David would speak to the Auditor about the Audit timeline, aiming for a completion meeting in mid-December.

**ACTION: David**

The results were slightly worse than expected, £19K worse than budget. This was explained by a combination of variances. On the expenditure side, we were underspent by £96K. On the income side, we had underachieved by £115K. A fundraising plan for us was not straightforward and David had therefore zeroed this. The figures did not allow for new legacies, of which we had received four. There had been a £47K payment to the Ministerial Students Fund from the David Ayton legacy; and a small round sum of £5K was being allowed for from the Zoe Bremer legacy (the amount was still to be confirmed). David had not felt comfortable drawing down from the Bowland developmental funds, so had been conservative. There were provisional figures, and it was expected that the results would be more positive by the end of the year.

## **6. Ministry**

### Ministry Students Fund (MSF)

Long-term projection – expenditure was easier to predict than income, for example in 2021-22 there had been unsolicited donations of £127.8k from the Thornton Fund closing. We were aware the funding situation was ongoing.

Notes: There was an assumption of three new supported students per year across both colleges - a significant statement, as a few years ago there was an eight-student 'bulge'. In the case of more, we might only be able to take 3 on a supported basis. Training costs an average of approximately £30K per annum per student (though we don't pay all of it



ourselves). The Charter with Harris Manchester College Oxford (HMCO) is for 3-4 students per year. HMCO won't be recruiting any students for the next academic work as the Tutor needs to redevelop courses, so there will be no students there in 2022-3 or 2023-4.

The central point was that that with these assumptions and the resources we have, this is what we can currently fund. A student training fundraising strategy needed to be developed to plan for the future.

The Chief Officer indicated that Unitarian College were looking at this. There was a shared challenge – if there is a desire to train more Ministers, a clear fundraising strategy is needed, and perhaps a change in the model, in order to have a sustainable fit for vacant pulpits in the long-term.

It was noted that the assumptions were based on all students who were accepted needing living expenses. This was the current situation but might not be in future. This was a funding model, rather than a hard cap on numbers, but the Interview Panel should be aware that this was the benchmark. If the numbers were significantly higher, this needed discussion. Inflation was not built-in.

The Mark James legacy, had been received for educational purposes (not just ministry), but it would be possible to use some or all of this to support Ministry Training and this would be given future consideration.

Communication on MSF – This would be tied to our fundraising strategy, and our strategic priorities, and would be carefully worded in the Uni-News Key Messages. **ACTION: Liz**

#### Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Unitarian College (UC)

A draft MoU was reviewed. The College Board are happy with the draft. There was a level of detail which is important. On page 2, Item 6, paragraph 3 (starting "The College retains the right"..) needs rephrasing. A sentence also needed to be added for a period to review the Memorandum of Understanding. **ACTION: Liz**

An EC member was needed on the College Board, and it was noted that Hilda and Marion, who were both current members, would both leave at the next EC election. This needed to be noted.

It was **AGREED** that Jo James would sign the tweaked MoU (as Marion felt there could be a conflict of interest for her, as a member of the UC Board). **ACTION: Jo**

It was **AGREED** to try and create a MoU with Harris Manchester College Oxford. Liz would have a conversation with Jane Shaw about this. **ACTION: Liz**

## **7. Risk Register**

Robert reported on the Risk Register, which was reviewed. The GA itself has certain risks, but also carries a lot of the risk from congregations. It did not make sense to look at risk

just from our activities but should also include risk from our member congregations. The four classic risks were: Safeguarding incident (accusation); Fraud / illegal activity; Ministers Pension Fund; Covid. After discussion with Liz, Robert had included some other issues we needed to keep an eye on. These had been given the following titles (subject to change): Financial sustainability; Member sustainability; Buildings sustainability. This gave a total of seven risks. Covid and the Ministers Pension Fund were currently receding but this could change. Impacts and mitigations had been split into what the GA could do, and what our communities could do. Robert planned to tell the Auditors this was work in progress.

Discussion followed and the following points were made:

- We have poor intelligence on congregations, and did not currently have the facility to store it well in our CRM system.
- Those with the greatest problems were often very reluctant to communicate.
- Excepted Charity congregations had an obligation to submit Annual Reports to the GA, registered charity congregations should submit to the Charity Commission.
- Quinquennial reports were recorded for Listed Buildings, and this might be available through the Gregson Trust if they provided funding.
- It was important not to be too bureaucratic and collect information we don't use.
- The EC should focus on what was done with the information we collect, rather than the question of how it is collected and stored. There was a cultural issue of how we have conversations with congregations – we often need to be invited in. The relational aspect was important in our management of the risks.
- Districts might be able to help with information gathering.
- Congregational autonomy can make it difficult to gather information.
- Money might be available from elsewhere to support buildings if we know about issues.
- Sustainability of the GA was a key risk, and it was suggested we take one sustainability item to discuss per EC meeting. Finance was the easiest to gather information on.
- Membership sustainability is at the core of everything, and we needed to look for both short-term and long-term policies.
- Capacity was as important as numbers
- People's needs and reasons for going to churches were fundamental, and the gathering of people was more important than the building.

It was **AGREED** to put on the agenda of the next meeting to discuss the Risk Register, looking particularly at Membership Sustainability. This had moved from the Finance Group to the EC's Agenda.

**ACTION: Liz**

## Reflections from Ministerial Students Augmentation Fund applications

The anonymised applications were reviewed. It was pleasing to hear of congregations reaching out to their local communities so soon after the pandemic, and re-evaluating their community ethos. The section on things that helped during the pandemic mostly did not come from within the Movement, and this showed a gap in supporting Ministers.

### **8. EC Membership and Elections**

A Report had been prepared with the timetable. It was noted that Hilda was not eligible to re-stand. Only Jo, Celia, Jenny and the Treasurer would remain after the election.

The EC needed to appoint an Electoral Panel. It was **AGREED** that the same rolling-three year (but for the two-year election cycle) model used by the Annual Meetings Steering Committee be implemented, so that someone new joined the group for each election, allowing for a healthy transition of people and a retention of experience. Howard Wilkins was the longest-serving member and it was therefore **AGREED** that we would invite David Warhurst to join Gavin Mason and Nicola Temple on the Electoral Panel. **ACTION: Andrew**

There was time to look at the Documents before the November meeting and Andrew would send out the documents before that meeting. **ACTION: Andrew**

It was **AGREED** to elect the four members and then Co-opt after the Annual Meetings for the 'casual vacancy'.

Robert indicated that did not intend to stand again. The new EC will need a Convenor. After the co-option there would be five new people, which meant there were only three experienced people to select from as Convenor. The role could be demanding, and this was an issue.

### **9. GA Resolutions Progress**

#### Code of ethics

Jo would be attending a meeting next week and was interested in the developments so far. He had been emphasising that there was more work which could be done looking at other ethical arrangements. Celia indicated she would re-join the project.

#### We The Peoples

Peter Bruce from Bristol had written with a suggestion of the steps needed and Liz had asked him to take it on. Peter was writing a briefing paper to inform congregations.

#### Chalice consultation

There was some ambiguity as to what was being asked for. The East Midlands Unitarians wished us to write to all congregations, but it was not clear what the question would be, nor what we would do with the result, given congregational autonomy.

Since the Meetings, Liz had held two listening circles on this, and both had been advertised in Uni-News (with a circulation of over 1,000), The Inquirer, and on social media. The Key Message for this item would be that we had held some consultation and it remained ongoing.

## **10. Moving to a CIO / General Constitutional Matters**

### General Constitutional Matters

The following was **AGREED**:

The EC, in its capacity as Trustees of the Nightingale Centre, resolves on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2022 to amend the Constitution by adding an additional paragraph to clause 2 (headed Administration):- "Virtual or hybrid meetings are allowed when deemed to be in the best interests of the charity."

The following was **AGREED**:

The EC, in its capacity as Trustees of the General Assembly, proposes a motion to the General Assembly meetings in 2023 to add under Section 11 of the Constitution the following paragraphs:-

"Participation in meetings by electronic means

- a) A meeting may be held by suitable electronic means agreed by the charity trustees in which each participant may communicate with all the other participants.
- b) Any charity trustee participating at a meeting by suitable electronic means agreed by the charity trustees in which a participant or participants may communicate with all the other participants shall qualify as being present at the meeting.
- c) Meetings held by electronic means must comply with rules for meetings, including chairing and the taking of minutes."

### Moving to a CIO

Robert explained that there was a suggestion of motions on issues of social justice being replaced with petitions, whereby certain thresholds would be reached that could trigger statements or other actions at a lower level, and then on a certain threshold (say 50% of those eligible to vote) it would go to the Annual Meetings. The UUA have a Commission for Social Justice who support their process, and it frees up time during their main Assembly Meetings. It would need a wider approval, and the Social Action Officer would likely have more of a role in progressing Resolutions. It was suggested that this be discussed with the Penal and Social Affairs Panel. It would likely replace all motions except the administrative and procedural.

This had come from a motion to move to a CIO, where the problem being solved was trustee risk. In looking at this it had led into issues of motions, membership etc.

Robert explained that in essence the group was aiming to clean up those things which

didn't work – 1) How we do motions; 2) Membership (which was fundamental to which model of CIO is chosen); 3) Elections to the EC (getting the right people in the right way).

It was likely that changes would be incremental, as attempting to change everything at the same time - particularly coordinating with the financial year end where entities change and have to change bank mandates etc - was very complex.

It was noted that there could be an issue if people perceived the EC was trying to remove levers from the movement, and many people feel that the motions process is the opportunity for debate and accountability. Robert did not feel that there was anything in the proposal which would stop the EC from being held accountable, but felt the Annual Meetings was not the best place for social action – we needed to find another way to do this. A consultative approach seemed best.

## **11. Communication**

A working group was appointed to communicate a) about activity in the movement including from EC meetings, and b) in response to world events. Liz noted that the GA is not geared up to respond well to world events. It is hard to do this well for a group of our size in a way that meets the need of our people. Item a) relates to the chalice conversation – the appetite for more / better communication is clear. A small group, with Rory coordinating, would look at how this could be done, define the task and agree a process to act, then bring back conclusions to the EC. Jenny might wish to be involved.

**ACTION: Rory**

### Consultation

The following comments were made:

- We have not decided on a framework on how we consult to minimise upset. It was recommended that we consult relevant stakeholders appropriate for the issue and then communicate who we consulted with. It was important to hear the voices of people you don't agree with, however.
- There was a potential pastoral role for those upset they weren't consulted.
- There was a communications gap which Key Messages didn't seem to fill.
- The strategic aims diagram, possibly in a revised version, might help tell the story of what the EC is doing and why to some who take in information better visually. Others take in information through words, and so communication through different mediums will spread to the widest group.
- People on the ground often only see the local situation, and there's a need to explain our actions in a different way so it fits into their congregational and personal lives.
- Uni-News had around 1,000 subscribers, which was a significant proportion of UK Unitarians, so was a prime vehicle for getting people to tell us if they want to be consulted.

District Links – It was **AGREED** to have an agenda item at the next meeting on the expectations for an EC link.

**ACTION: Liz**

## **12. Key Messages**

- Comms from this meeting, including the strategic priorities diagram
- Reviewed the Students Fund and recognised issues to address and continue to train.
- Progressed the Memorandum of Understanding with Unitarian College.
- Toolkit – What would be helpful to support you and your congregations?
- Risks we all face – Taken the next step in developing how we deal with risks, and making sure we're sustainable in the future.
- CIO Motion – Will be consulting on a proposal on motions.
- Working Group – Put forward members for a Comms working group
- Simon Hall's resignation and thanks.
- Social Action Officer appointment
- Listening Circles
- EC very grateful to receive comprehensive reports from the Staff which were very useful in today's discussions.

Suggestions:

EC Inquiry Day – We could hold an EC Inquiry Day, like the Ministry Inquiry Day, to help move people on from interest to completing an application.

Key Messages: Could go in a format shareable on Social Media, and could be emailed to Secretaries to share.

## **13. Check out**

Everyone checked out.

Hilda Dumpleton gave closing devotions and the meeting closed.

## Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting held 22 November 2022 by Zoom

**Present:** Marion Baker (Convenor), Celia Cartwright, Hilda Dumpleton, Jenny Jacobs, Jo James, Robert Ince, Liz Slade, Rob Whiteman

**In attendance:** Andrew Mason (Minutes), Sue Woolley (GA President)

**Apologies:** None

Hilda Dumpleton gave Opening Devotions and the meeting started.

### **1. Check-in**

Check-in took place.

### **2. Minutes of last meeting**

The Minutes of the meeting held 27 September 2022 were **AGREED** as a correct record.

### **3. Action list**

#### *EC Minutes 20 April 2021*

1. Survey of congregations – current state of play: This had been absorbed into the congregational toolkit work and this action item was cleared.

#### *EC Minutes September 2021*

1. Letter re. the CIO Consultative Group: Liz and Robert were still to speak. This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Robert & Liz**
2. Risk Register: Jo had sent a document to EC members and this action item was cleared.

#### *EC Minutes November 2021*

1. Progress new types of GA Roll. Nov 2022 update: awaiting creation of Ministry Matters group: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade & Simon Bland**

#### *EC Minutes January 2022*

1. Develop plans for Ministry Matters / MSG changes: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**

#### *EC Minutes June 2022*

1. Add Jane Blackall and Julio Torres to the GA Roll of Ministers with Probationary Status (and notify them): This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Andrew Mason & Liz Slade**
2. Feedback to the Annual Meetings Panel: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
3. James Speed Trust: The EC Finance Group would follow up with any further review as needed. This remained ongoing. **ACTION: EC Finance Group**

4. Consider training for EC Members: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
5. Explore Congregational Support Package: This remained ongoing.  
**ACTION: Liz Slade & the GA Staff**
6. Explore practicalities and costs of hosting a workshop with Moral Imaginations to help Unitarian leaders to envision a future: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
7. Communicate the exploration of the Congregational Support Package, Workshop, and response to feedback from the EC Workshop at the 2022 Annual Meetings: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
8. Consider how 2020's Art of Hosting training can be built on, and how we might use open space technology to host conversations about our future: This remained ongoing.  
**ACTION: Liz Slade**
9. Plan and budget for exploration of future ministry: This remained ongoing.  
**ACTION: Liz Slade**
10. Plan and budget for the assessment of current spiritual practice inside the movement and in communities outside of traditional faith groups: This remained ongoing.  
**ACTION: Liz Slade**
11. Respond to the East Midlands Union on the motion that they put to the General Assembly, and communicate more widely how we will be consultative in our work: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
12. Invite districts to meet collectively and informally to share what issues are arising: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**

### *EC Minutes September 2022*

1. Speak to Mike Tracey about the EC transferring trusteeship to the Centre Management Committee as a new CIO: Robert had spoken to Mike Tracey recently. There were two main issues: changing the Centre's trustees from the GA Executive Committee to the Centre's Management Committee; and the Centre becoming a CIO. It was not practical to deal with both issues simultaneously and Robert recommended changing over the trustees first, as this could be done fairly quickly. The GA would remain as a Custodian Trustee on the new trustee group, with a representative of the GA attending. The Management Committee would meet on 03 December and would discuss this and report back to the January meeting of the GA Executive Committee. This was **AGREED**. It was noted that if this were done by September 2023, it was unlikely that the GA would need to produce Consolidated Accounts for the following year. Careful communication of this was required, to avoid negative rumours about the GA's intentions, when the reality was that it reflected positive confidence in the Management Committee.
2. David Joseph to speak to Jeff Teagle. Re B&FUA using same Accounting System as the GA: This was believed to have happened, and the outcome needed to be confirmed.  
**ACTION: Liz Slade**
3. Email Jeff Teagle to ask about how the GA would be consulted on the Ministers Pension Fund (MPF) proposed changes: The Treasurer had emailed Jeff Teagle and



received a response which did not directly address the concern. The MPF had met and voted to change the scheme. The Treasurer had spoken to professional actuaries, who had declined to take a fee. Their conclusion had been that the GA's risk the Guarantor of Last Resort would go down over time under the new scheme. When the last member of the Final Salary scheme dies, this risk is ended. The major risk was of personal liability of EC members, which would be ameliorated by the GA plans to move to a CIO. The risks were if a ruling were to be made that Ministers in the scheme are employees; or if a member successfully claims they did not understand what they were voting for and claim disadvantage.

The issue was noted that all but two EC members (Jenny and Robert) were either Ministers or on the MPF Committee, and could all have a conflict of interest. It was **AGREED** that the status quo, with the GA as Guarantor of Last Resort, continued. This action item was then cleared.

4. Discuss Audit Timeline with the Auditors - for finance update: This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
5. Communicate re. Ministerial Students Fund in Key Messages: This action item was cleared.
6. Add sentence to Memorandum of Understanding with Unitarian College: Liz would follow this up and the action item remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
7. Speak to Jane Shaw about a Memorandum of Understanding with Harris Manchester College: Liz was having conversations with them about this and would follow it up. This action item remained ongoing. **ACTION: Liz Slade**
8. Add agenda item for the next meeting to discuss the Risk Register, looking particularly at Membership Sustainability: This action item was cleared.
9. Invite David Warhurst to join Electoral Panel: David had now joined the Electoral Panel, and this action item was cleared.
10. Circulate Electoral Panel documents for November EC meeting: One document, the Call for Nominations, was still being considered in respect of the policy covering postal strikes. This was expected to be finalised by the end of the week and all documents would be circulated together when this was ready. **ACTION: Andrew Mason**
11. Propose EC Motion on remote meetings: This had been done and the action item was cleared.
12. Set up Comms group and define tasks: Conversations were taking place on this. This remained ongoing. **ACTION: Rory Castle Jones**
13. Add agenda item for the next meeting to discuss expectations for EC District Links: This action item was cleared.

#### **4. Staff reports**

The Staff reports were reviewed.

Ministers' Conference – Simon and Liz had gone to the Ministers' Conference, and found it positive. In-person contact and feedback was useful, though with the caveat that the group attending was not necessarily reflective of all Ministers.

Meetings with Colleges – Unitarian College have been busy with redesigning ministerial Worship Studies Course training. It was now time to look together at the needs and longer-term direction of our movement, and this was at an early stage. Meetings were scheduled for December around the communication process relating to new students and Ministers. Liz had visited Oxford recently to meet with the new Chaplain Tutor, Claire MacDonald. Claire was still settling in but was looking at big questions on what Harris Manchester College Oxford (HMCO) should be doing. Some of the questions on the future of ministry could be held at HMCO. Collaboration was needed on how to explore these questions both within the movement and outside. The two colleges were quite different with different ways of working and different resources and sets of opportunities. This meant working out how best to work together collectively felt a little uncertain at the moment but would become clearer.

Chalice Logo – Feedback from the East Midlands District was that they wanted the GA to write to congregations asking what they think about the logo. This had therefore been done and some feedback was starting to come in. We needed to consider how we communicate this, as there was not a clear resolution in sight acceptable to all. The intention was to try and keep people moving forward together, rather than factionalising. When Liz had spoken to Patrick Timperley, it had transpired that some of the communications sent through other mediums such as Uni-News did not make it to the District's meeting agenda if they had not been sent specifically addressed to the District Secretary. This related to the agenda item on District EC Links.

Congregational Support Toolkit – The toolkit was taking shape, though initial plans to communicate on this before Christmas were being reconsidered, and it was now more likely to be an ongoing communication with different elements dropped in over time. A query was raised about the payroll aspect, and how much direct assistance would be offered, as opposed to signposting and advice. This was still under consideration. Liz highlighted the need to balance providing valuable services with making congregations dependent on us. Facilitating peer-to-peer support and connecting different groups (Lizzie coordinating with people in Admin roles, Rory with Communications and social media staff, Gav with Youth Leaders etc) to strengthen links for people across the movement (not just local geographical links) was key.

Coastal communities – Simon had been speaking to Great Yarmouth recently about governance. We had also connected with Dan Thompson, who had set up an Empty Shops project making use of vacant commercial properties in cities, and who has experience in

coastal towns. Simon had recognised there were several coastal congregations in need of community support. It was proposed to have a pilot scheme with Great Yarmouth to look at possibilities with their location and community to bring life into the space and do some good in the area. The pilot scheme would engage Dan Thompson for a few days' work at a cost of around £1,000. It was hoped that this would provide useful learning which could be applied to congregations in other coastal communities (and beyond).

Discussion covered:

- The need to communicate this, and take districts with us, while being aware that districts were not the area of overlapping interests in this case (this being a less geographical connection).
- Consideration to be given to what feedback and learning would look like.

It was **AGREED** to go ahead with the Coastal Communities project. **ACTION: Liz Slade**

As part of the discussion on Communications, there was a wider recognition that different communications tools were needed for Officers than just Uni-News, such as a more formal newsletter to say what is going on. This reflected the fact that people were not always picking up on our communications. Some of our traditional means of communications (400-word article in The Inquirer, Minutes of meetings etc) were still useful but could be limited as to how much could be communicated. A richer connection and more engagement could be achieved from live conversations. Multiple attempts at communication, and with different tools, were needed.

LGBT+ Voices project – An advisory group of prominent and well-respected Unitarians was helping to shape this project, intended to avoid losing the voices of people who have done important activist work on LGBT+ rights for decades. This would involve interviewing people and creating videos to capture oral histories, and also requesting documents and materials from the movement to allow them to be properly archived. The Librarian at Harris Manchester College was excited at the idea of bringing their Unitarian Collection up to date with more current material.

A proposal had been received for the GA to part-fund the video process. A wider point was raised, that for all organically-arising activities the GA was asked to fund or part-fund, the criteria of how well it fitted in to the our core business of supporting Unitarians to benefit our wider movement. In this instance, the materials created were felt to be usable for the Annual Meetings and for congregational exhibitions which could generate energy at the local level. The GA's role in this case was to help amplify and disburse positive activities for our congregations. There was believed to be a small Restricted Fund for LGBT activities and this would be investigated with a view to using it towards this project.

It was **AGREED** to go forward with this project.

**ACTION: Liz Slade**

## 5. District and GA President's reports

The reports were noted and those who had submitted them were thanked.

## 6. Finance

Audit – The Treasurer highlighted an issue where our Auditors, James Cowper Kreston, our Auditors, substantially increased the proposed audit fee at short notice. We had therefore contacted our previous Auditors, Shaw Gibbs, and confirmed a lower fee. The Treasurer did not believe there was an issue changing auditors in the charity's interests. A proposal to change back to Shaw Gibbs for the Audit was **AGREED**. **ACTION: Treasurer**

Sustainable investment – The Treasurer had spoken to Rory Evans, Client Manager at Newtons, and Bhavin Shaw, Investment Manager for the Growth and Income Fund, in which the GA is invested. Newtons now offer a Sustainable Growth and Income Fund, which is considered to be the same level of risk as for the current Fund. The Treasurer had discussed with them the possibility of moving our investments to the new Fund and Rory Evans was producing paper on how we might do this. The trustees would need to consider this, and it was therefore hoped there would be a paper for the January EC Meeting. The Treasurer noted a possible issue of the account looking poor due to unrealised investment losses in the September valuation, caused by the Truss budget market crash from that period. **ACTION: Treasurer**

Jo raised the idea of considering joining with the Methodist Finance Board's Ethical Investment Programme, running since 1996. It was **AGREED** that Jo and the Treasurer would speak outside the meeting. **ACTION: Jo & Treasurer**

## 7. Nightingale Centre update

Marion reported that Interviews for a new Manager were scheduled for tomorrow with three people, and a further person would be interviewed on another date, with a view to making a decision by early.

Marion made a note to bring up with the Management Committee two items: the Gender Neutral Initiatives, and the proposed Trustee changes.

Finances were positive and bookings for next year were the best Marion has seen at this stage of the year. Ian Hicks had now taken over as Treasurer, and would have a hands-on approach.

## 8. Risk management: membership sustainability

A document had been circulated on risk management. Liz felt it was valuable to check we were aligned on the risks, and whether there was anything which has been missed. This was a larger issue than just for this meeting, being a question of whether we were confident that our actions to address membership sustainability risks were sufficient.

A deeper conversation on this was needed, including a sharing of ideas from beyond the EC, which would include our aims, definition of members etc. It was suggested that a workshop at the Annual Meetings, possibly in a different style to the more traditional panel / audience model, might be a good starting point.

## **9. Reviewing EC link arrangements**

East Midlands do not have a link and they are keen to have one. It was **AGREED** that Jo would undertake this role, along with the Midland Union.

How district links should work needed to be looked at, if indeed if this was still the best method. There was a sense that districts were feeling a disconnect. While there was some Covid impact, it was noted that the patterns of meeting, often in-person only on a weekday evening, could make it difficult for EC members to consistently attend meetings. As meetings were infrequent, this could leave a large gap.

It was **AGREED** that Liz would discuss individually with EC members to see what has been useful in communicating, and then ask Districts what would help. A forum for districts could be created, and this question raised at the first meeting. **ACTION: Liz**

The following were also suggested: sending detailed Key Messages from the EC Meetings directly to District Secretaries, rather than just via Uni-News; have a District Representatives' Meeting at the Annual Meetings (though not all would attend); set up a Doodle poll to get a date for District Representatives to meet with GA Staff and EC Representatives.

## **10. Ethics group**

A report from the Ethics Steering Group had been circulated, along with a report from Jo. There were two proposals: to part-fund qualitative analysis software for the survey and to report on their work to the Annual Meetings.

Discussion took place over the survey software. Alternative approaches had been costed at much higher levels. It was **AGREED** to fund the purchase of the software and to report progress to the 2023 Annual Meetings. The GA Staff would purchase the software and the details would be followed up later. **ACTION: Liz & Andrew**

It was felt that the report to the Annual Meetings was better suited to a workshop than a plenary session, as it would allow more time and also more interaction with attenders.

**ACTION: Liz**

## **11. Other Matters**

Vice President – The formal nomination from the Manchester District had not been received and Liz would speak to Natasha Stanley.

**ACTION: Liz**

January – It was suggested that the January meeting be changed from a Zoom meeting to an in-person meeting. Today's short Zoom meeting had made it difficult to unpack discussions. Liz would look into this. **ACTION: Liz**

Key Messages - Liz would produce and distribute Key Messages. **ACTION: Liz**

## **12. Check-out**

Check-out took place.

Jo James gave Closing Devotions and the meeting finished.