

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee
Friday 15th & Saturday 16th November 2013
Luther King House, Manchester**

Present: Rev Martin Whitell (Convenor), Joan Cook, Louise Rogers, James Barry (Friday sessions only), Rev John Clifford, Alison Thursfield, Robert Ince, Jacky Woodman (from Session 1 – item 4. 4)

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

Friday

Session 1

Opening Devotions: James read from “ The Perils of poor Governance” – Hobby Horse.

1. **Apologies:** James Barry for the Saturday Session.
2. **Minutes of the meeting held on 13th September 2013 - (Doc EC88/13)** – with a minor correction on page 9 item 11. “accepted” was changed to “excepted” – and page 8. item 9. on observer status, the Minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting held on Friday 13th September 2013. In response to James the Chief Officer explained that his observations on the Annual Meetings on the original draft minutes had been incorporated in the final set presented to the meeting.

Before the main agenda items were discussed, Robert brought an emergency item to the attention of the EC and sought a response to the Typhoon in The Philippines. It was unanimously **agreed** by the EC that an appeal for donations would be made to the Unitarian Movement with immediate effect. **Action: Robert would email the Appeal to the other members of the EC for communication onwards to Districts and place on Facebook, the Convenor put the Appeal on the Ministers Chatline and the Chief Officer and Robert would collaborate on an item to be circulated to the Uni-news list.**

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

- Page 1. Louise again raised the issue of the content of the 2020 website. The Convenor reported that he had spoken to Andy Pakula, however the site was managed by another volunteer and he would pursue with the individual. **Action: Convenor**
- Page 2. Louise asked for impact statements from the beneficiaries of Millennium Grants (or from any funding from the EC) and it was agreed that the requirement for a report 6 – 9 months after the project had commenced be added to the application form. **Action: Chief Officer**
- Page 5. James asked to be informed as soon as possible if he was required to work on the strap line due to other commitments in 2014.

4. Reports of Strategy Groups:

A) Local Leadership Strategy Group (Doc EC89/13)

1) Minutes – noted:

- Item 15 – fm in Scotland – The comment in the minutes “This scheme is being wrapped up in May 2014” was not correct as EC had agreed “that a six month timeline be put in place with a report to the EC on their achievements being received by April 2014”
- Concern about recruitment to RAG

2) Update from Louise – noted:

Louise reported that on the 13 November 2013 Margaret Robinson has resigned as Chair of the LLSG, however she will remain in the Group. She reported that it had been a difficult exercise trying to contact Margaret to arrange to talk. Unfortunately due to illness Louise had been unable to attend the LLSG meeting as planned. It appears that the LLSG had not discussed the draft aims and objectives that she had drawn up as a template to get them moving forward strategically. There was a lot of good work being pursued but was it what congregations required?

The general consensus of the EC was that the LLSG was going through a difficult transition phase as it moved from sustaining longstanding activities to planning for new initiatives or objectives. It was recognised that the EC had to encourage and support the Strategy Groups and be prepared to give more direction within which they could work on strategic objectives and delivery. The EC also had to ensure that the volunteers were supported through periods of change and this required further consideration at a future meeting.

3) Email correspondence – noted

4) LLSG proposal to the EC

Jacky Woodman arrived.

The LLSG presented a proposal for consideration by the EC on the current situation, a proposed way forward and short-term actions. The Strategy Group had only two remaining members. The EC considered that the LLSG needed members who could work at a strategic level and three names were suggested as possibilities. Reconstituting The LLSG was recognised as an EC priority and this was their responsibility.

It was agreed that whilst this was done the action groups should continue to carry on with the programmes that they are currently involved with and have planned for the future. It was agreed that the principle that Strategy Group members should not be on action groups was reaffirmed.

It was acknowledged that the LLSG needed support with strategic work and it was suggested that a one day workshop should be convened of interested parties. **Action: Chief Officer and Louise to liaise on preparation of response and to contact Margaret Robinson and Chris Thompson to progress workshop proposal. MJ to look up the original LLSG planning documents put together by Dot Hewerdine.**

B) Visibility Strategy Group (Doc EC90/13) – noted

A report was received on meeting held by Louise, James and the Chief Officer on 8 October with Diane Bennett and Phil Tomlin. The Group was not operational and it was agreed there was a need to focus on developing a clear strategy and reconstitute the Strategy Group.

James reported that at the recent UCCN he had talked to some who were interested in supporting the work of the Visibility Strategy Group. He put forward suggestions for new action groups:

1. Web-presence action group – to monitor how the movement was using the internet (local and national web sites and social media) and suggest opportunities. Five people had volunteered
2. Promotional material group – to work on posters, leaflets and merchandise etc . Three people have been identified to serve.
3. Media response group – a group of ministers with media experience who can respond to any media request. This proposal was not accepted as current arrangements co-ordinated by the Chief Officer, including awareness of those trained by the Media Trust, were sufficient to meet demand.

James has indicated that he will be more than happy to expend energy on getting these action groups up and running. **Action James to pursue and to ensure that the proposal was back**

to the VSG for their approval. In relation to a possible new member of the VSG the Chief Officer was asked to pursue.

As with the LLSG, the action groups in the VSG are to be encouraged to continue the work that they are currently involved in until there was clarity about the strategic priorities.

It was recognised that the strategy group model required the EC and the strategy groups to work effectively together and suggested that after the 2014 Annual Meetings that a special strategy development day be held for EC and all Strategy Group members. This would contribute to the service planning process for 2014/15.

Session 2

C Ministry Strategy Group

1) Minutes of meetings held on 14 September & 7 October 2013 - (Doc EC91/13) - noted:

EC approved the appointment of the Rev Daniel Costley to the Ministry Strategy Group in place of the Rev Margaret Kirk who was thanked for her contribution. On page 2 – item Ministerial Appointments – the concerns about non-compliance with Guidelines were noted. Page 3 – item 12 – Categories of Ministry – Action: **Chief Officer to ask the Rev Linda Phillips for a copy of the paper.** Robert reported that the Rev Stephen Lingwood would like EC support to address questions raised by the Competency Document and future of training and the Colleges and this was agreed.

Louise suggested that some of the activities undertaken by the Ministry Strategy Group were very operational which did not fit with the standard structure. The work of the Director of Ministry in these areas eg safeguarding was highlighted.

2) Expectations of Competencies for Ministers of the General Assembly (Doc EC92/13) – noted

The Ministry Strategy Group were thanked for the work on the document. A lengthy discussion was held and the proposal was agreed however there is some further work:

- Greater clarity of understanding on what a competency and a skill are and the complexities involved.
- The document should be evidence based and include an evidence column .
- Needs more thought on the core of what the role involves.
- There should be more about attitudes and “soft issues.
- What is the threshold of knowledge and where would you get it?

Jacky indicated that she had experience in developing competency arrangements and agreed to offer her help in finalising the document. **Action: The Chief Officer and Robert to liaise with regard to a response.**

- 5. Responses to Consultation on Youth Strategy Group - (Doc EC93/13) – noted with the following:**

The Chief Officer presented a summary report of the responses to the consultation. There was general agreement to the principle of the new Group. Feedback had been received from the Youth Panel, BUYAN, LLSG and several individuals. The Executive Committee **agreed** to establish a Youth Strategy Group with the remit of developing an overall strategy for work with children, young people and young adults within the Unitarian Movement. Current arrangements for programmes in these areas, such as the National Youth Programme, will remain unchanged. The Youth Strategy Group will have five members. It was agreed that the EC will begin to invite applicants for the membership.
- 6. Service Plan – (Doc EC94/13) – noted with the following:**

The Chief Officer presented a revised Service Plan which incorporated changes made at the last meeting. A monitoring process and review date was required. Any reference to Panels should be removed. Clarity about social responsibility activities at local and national levels was required. The Plan was approved with thanks to the Chief Officer and would be made available on the website. **Action: Chief Officer**
- 7. Appointment of President & Vice-President (Doc EC96/13)**

A proposal was received from the Manchester District Association recommending that the current alternate Minister and Lay Person model for appointment of President and Vice-President be ended. The EC recognised the validity of the arguments made, however thought that we should aspire to a proper mix of ministers and lay persons in the role.
- 8. Appointment of Vice-President 2014/15 – (Doc EC95/13)**

After consideration this item was adjourned until the Saturday session
- 9. Sustentation Fund**

There were two vacancies for EC members and EC **agreed** to the appointment of Joan and Louise to the Sustentation Fund. Thanks were expressed to Rev David Usher.
- 10. Appointment of EC Link person to BUYAN – (Doc EC97/13)**

EC **agreed** to the appointment of James Barry as the EC link to BUYAN for an interim period until the outcome of the initial work of the Youth Strategy Group.

11. Dissolution Clause – (Doc EC98/13)

Louise presented a proposal for a Constitutional amendment for presentation to the 2014 Annual Meetings to insert a Dissolution Clause, which was not in the current document, as this would be required if a move to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) was pursued. The amendment was **agreed**.

Session 3

Mary-Jean was not present during this session

12. Future Strategy – Sunday Assembly – (Doc EC99/13)

A paper prepared by the Chief Officer on the Sunday Assembly, which included a recent article in The Inquirer, was the basis for an informal discussion on any implications for future strategy. It had certainly attracted media attention and had a clear and simple message. There were things that could be learnt from this development. The Chief Officer was asked to write a blog on the GA website on the differences between Unitarianism and the Sunday Assembly.

13. Non-responsive check out

Closing Devotions: John Clifford

Saturday

Opening Devotions: Robert read from Goethe – “Until one is committed there is hesitancy”.

Session 4

EC returned to **Item 7** from Session 2 - **Appointment of Vice-President 2014/15**

After further discussion it was concluded that the EC would not make an appointment at this meeting and would seek further nominations for their next meeting. **Action: Chief Officer**

Concerns were raised about the impact that the two year commitment, especially the year of presidency, had on the life of the nominees, especially if they are in active Ministry as this would impact greatly on the ministers' congregation and now with fewer ministerial colleagues to provide cover. It was agreed to contact a few Past Presidents with regard to a report about the pitfalls etc during their year in post.

14. Nightingale Centre

**1) Recommendations from Management Committee
(Doc EC100/13)**

Investments – the EC authorised the investment of £50,000 in the Newton Global Growth and Income Fund.

Management Committee membership

Sue Cooper was appointed to the Management Committee.

Further information was requested on the role of a consultant representing the needs of non Unitarian guests.

2) Report from EC Link - oral

Mary-Jean was not present during this session

Robert presented proposals for revised terms of reference which incorporated the guidance on “matters reserved for the Board of Trustees” produced by ICSA International. The work undertaken in recent years to improve accountability arrangements between the management committee and the EC was acknowledged and there was greater awareness of responsibilities.

It was agreed to establish a review of governance arrangements to report by May 2014 to include the role of the EC and the management committee. Louise agreed to serve and an additional non-EC member would be appointed.

Robert highlighted the concerns about trading activities and the tax position and the Chief Officer was asked to get an update from the management committee on their review.

15. Finance – Management Accounts to 30 September 2013 - (Doc EC101/13) - noted – Mary-Jean rejoined the meeting

Draft management accounts were presented by Martin Sarbicki but would be subject to change during the audit. A deficit of £15,440 was projected. Whilst the Strategy Groups had under-spent on their projects, which helped the overall picture, it also meant they are not reaching their projected programme targets.

Louise asked why the Retired Minister’s costs are reflected under Governance. The Chief Officer explained that this is being looked at in the new finance system as there will a new coding system.

John raised concerns about the potential liability with regard to the Minister’s Pension Fund. The Chief Officer assured him that this was kept under review as part of the risk register.

16. Millennium Fund Bids**1) Simple Gifts – London District Provincial Assembly - (Doc EC102/13)**

It was **agreed** that this bid will be sent back for a more specific application. The Chief Officer was asked to suggest that they come forward with a proposal for Social Action Labs that will be available for the whole Movement to access.

2) Evershed Arts/Billingshurst Chapel – (Doc EC103/13)

It was **agreed** to send this bid back to Billingshurst Chapel and request a formal application that met the criteria as building work could not be funded. Louise offered to help them put a bid forward to other funders.

3) Unitarian Chapel Oldham - (Doc EC104/13)

It was **agreed** to award £5686.80 to Unitarian Chapel Oldham. This is one of the most sizeable Grants given by the EC to date.

4) Pepper Hill – (Doc 105/13) -

It was **agreed** to award £250 to Pepper Hill assuming planning permission is granted

Louise suggested that congregations could also be looking elsewhere for funding and she is more than happy to help any congregation that needed help.

Session 5**17. Annual Meeting Group 12 September 2103 - (Doc EC106/13) - noted**

The Group had at their recent meeting considered the issues of measures of success with the areas of finance, quality of experience, numbers etc to be explored with some targets to be set out for their January meeting. Involvement of UKunitarianTV had been discussed and feedback will be given to them.

Louise mentioned a Solutions Focus workshop and she will email the Chief Officer. **Action: Louise**

The Chief Officer, Robert and Andrew Mason had undertaken a risk assessment of the Annual Meetings and a plan is in place to address issues. The insurance agreed at the last EC meeting is in place.

18. IT Update - (Doc EC107/13) – noted

Training has been set up for Essex Hall staff on the 2 and 3rd December. Online payment would not be “live” for 2014 Annual

meeting. The Chief Officer was asked to send John the website design. **Action: Chief Officer**

19. Chief Officer Report - (Doc EC108/13) –noted

The Chief Officer presented his report and highlighted the discussions on the future of “excepted” status which would affect many local churches and chapels that were not registered charities. He had also been involved in discussions on implementation of the same sex marriage legislation. The new Directory incorporated information formerly published in the Handbook which had not been produced for ten years. Louise would like a pdf copy of the Directory. **Action: MJ to email to all EC members except Alison.**

The EC congratulated the Chief Officer on his runner up status at the National Diversity Awards and noted that he has also been asked to contribute to their official Blog site.

John raised the issue of the momentum for the Assisted Dying Resolution. Robert responded that he has had a very positive meeting with members of an interfaith group nationally, however legislation has been delayed till June 2014, with more interest likely from April 2014.

20. EC Link Report - (Doc EC109/13) - noted

Scottish fm pilot – In the original documents it was stated that the pilot would run from 8 November 2011, so the SUA were under the impression that the end date was November 2014 however the appeal mentioned in the report will not go forward.

The President and Chief Officer were thanked for attending the SUA Bicentenary Celebrations in Edinburgh.

21. President & Vice-President Reports - (Doc EC110/13) - noted

22. Key Messages to be circulated separately.

23. A.O.B.

Louise asked that the following be placed on the Agenda as standing items:

Risk Management – The Chief Officer agreed that there would be an update at each meeting in his report with the full annual discussion at the May EC meeting and a mid-term review as separate agenda items.

Report from the 2020 Group each meeting along with the Strategy Group reports – reports had been requested for EC meetings.

In reviewing the Service Plan there was no conclusion and little reference to faith and this would be included (see above item 6).

It would be useful to review the outcomes of the EC/District Meeting held on 17 November 2012 at the January 2014 EC meeting.

24. Confidential Items

Mary-Jean and the Chief Officer left the meeting at this point.

25. CO Appraisal

26. Date and time of next meeting

9.00am – 5.00pm on 17 January 2014 and 9.00am to 12noon on 18 January 2014 at Essex Hall.

27. Non-responsive check out

Closing Devotions: Alison Thursfield