

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee
Friday 22nd & Saturday 23rd February 2013
Luther King House, Manchester**

Present: Rev Martin Whitell (Convenor), Rev David Usher (for Friday session only), Joan Cook, Rev John Clifford, Robert Ince (Acting Treasurer), Alison Thursfield, Cathie Masztalerz.

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

In Attendance for the first part of the Friday session only:
Elisabeth Dyson-Jones (GA President), the Rev Bill Darlison (GA Vice-President), Margaret Robinson (Co-Chair – LLSG)

Friday

Session 1

Opening Devotions: David read from Marcus Aurelius – To serve mankind

1. Apologies: David Usher for the Saturday session

Changes were agreed to the agenda in view of the attendance of guests.

2. Annual Meeting

The Chief Officer updated the meeting on arrangements for the Annual Meeting, including:

1) Opening ceremony –

Christina and Julian Smith were busy organising the content of the opening celebration highlighting different types of ministry. The Annual Meetings has not yet received a detailed summary of the event.

2) Anniversary service – organised with Service of Recognition

3) Social evening –

An hour long session with a classical feel to it – a request for a fundraising event from young people for 2020 in the form of a “Talent contest” and been agreed.

4) Volunteers –

There had been little response to the request for volunteers – follow up with the District. The East Midland District is having their AGM next week, David to approach them in this regard – it was agreed that the contribution of volunteers needed to be acknowledged.

5) Business Sessions –

The Chief Officer talked through the draft Agenda for the Business Sessions, it was noted that there was no report from the Youth Department and it was agreed that they should present a report in the same session as the Strategy Groups.

6) Motions –

A discussion was held on Motions and it was noted that guidelines on how motions should be presented would be useful and should be drawn up — this item to be put on the Agenda for the May 2013 EC meeting.

7) Associate Membership –

The general consensus of the EC is that there is a need to find a way to encourage more people to become Associate Members.

Session 2

3. Reports of Strategy Groups (Document EC20/13)

3.1 Local Leadership Strategy Group - Noted with the following:

Margaret Robinson the Co-Chair reported on the various activities of the LLSG including prospectus, new courses, three worship studies courses and two workshops at the Annual Meeting. Thanks were given to all LLSG members and volunteers for their work to date. They were asked to give further consideration to Scotland and Wales when the courses are planned.

A discussion took place on updating the “Help is at Hand” manual – the GA President informed the EC that the original group that put the manual together have stated that they will all be available for updates as and when they are necessary although at least one member had now withdrawn. It was agreed that the Chief Officer would undertake an initial review.

The Chief Officer to take the following issues from the EC to the LLSG when he attends their next meeting:

- a) What does success look like? EC would like a statement of strategy with a focus on outcomes.
- b) How can LLSG work with the MSG to mutual benefit?
- c) Offering new programmes
- d) Succession planning – is there a plan in place for when people stand down?

The Convenor thanked Margaret for attending the meeting and asked her to convey his thanks and the thanks of the EC for the continuing good work of the LLSG.

The three guests left at this point.

3.2 Ministry Strategy Group – Noted with the following:

The MSG was congratulated on its progress.

Correspondence was received from Stephen Lingwood on timetabling to facilitate earlier notification of decisions on roll. As EC likely to agree to hold the January EC meeting after the Interview Panel and if MSG deal with issues by email this would be possible – The Chief Officer to inform Stephen.

The recommendations of the MSG for entry onto the Minister/Lay Pastors Roll and for ministerial training were considered. The Executive Committee approved the inclusion of Rev Daniel Costley, Rev Danny Crosby and Rev Bob Pounder on the Roll of Ministers with full status. Rev Lewis Rees was added to the Roll of Ministers with probationary status. The following were offered training to become a minister; Kate Buchanan and Kate McKenna at Oxford and Phil Waldron at Manchester. Further discussions to take place with the chair of the Interview Panel on process.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 4th & 5th January 2013 (Document EC19/13)

After minor amendments the Minutes were signed as a true reflection of the meeting held on the 4th and 5th of January 2013

5. Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later

- a) page 1 Youth Panel response to invitation** – it was agreed that the Youth Panel members Rev John Harley & Vanessa Rothwell would be invited to the July 2013 EC meeting
- b) page 4 – Wood Green Trust** – confirmation has been received that they will be making a substantial grant in 2013.
- c) page 5** There will be a 2020 workshop on Friday 12th April at the Annual Meetings
- d) page 4 - Nightingale Centre** – the Chief Officer to follow up with Marion baker.
- e) page 5** – with regard to the Paypal situation - this has been progressed.
- f) page 5** – The Annual Meetings Panel had considered a proposal to “live stream” the GA Opening celebrations – it was agreed that at this late stage there was insufficient time to agree and implement terms & conditions for this year given the other commitments of staff, but that the EC would consider the matter for the 2014 GA.
- g) page 5** – letter objecting to the assisted dying motion had been received from a congregation.

Session 3

6. 2020 Congregational Development Report (Document EC21/13)

6.1 Report was noted with the following:

- a) a letter had been received indicating that it was misleading in governance to use the term 2020 Board and it was suggested that it may be better for the managing group to be called an "Operational Board".
- b) There was considerable interest within the Movement and there were over 100 hits on the web-site launch day.
- c) The Convenor talked through the process of application, selection and moving forward and reported that information on what was a robust process will be ready for the May 2013 EC meeting. Unsuccessful applicants should be told why they were unsuccessful
- d) The Convenor & the acting Treasurer will mention the 2020 when they are doing the Annual Report introduction.

6.2 Jane Couper was appointed to the 2020 Board

7. Management Accts – 31 Jan 2013 (Document EC22/13)

Noted and Martin Sarbicki was thanked. At this stage the outlook was for a year end deficit of £15k.

8. Monitoring Report on Quota numbers (Document EC23/13)

The Chief Officer presented a monitoring report drawing upon the quota return for the last five years which showed ongoing decline. The report was noted

The EC acknowledged that the continuing decline was impacting on income and subsequent Bowland Trust matching it was agreed that a robust financial development plan was required and proposals would be presented to the July EC meeting. **Action: Acting Treasurer and Chief Officer.**

9. Stipend Review Committee Report (Document EC24/13)

Noted with the following:

(David, Martin & John declared an interest in this item)

The EC approved the Stipend Review Report recommendations for 2013 for presentation to the Annual Meeting. It was noted that last years stipend increase was swallowed up because of the increase in pension payments. The Committee members were thanked for their work.

A note be placed on the Ministers chat-line that if removal costs total more than the £3,700 allowable some of that additional cost can be recouped through the tax system provided that receipts are available.
– John Clifford to action.

10. Electoral Panel Report – Post-Election Review

(Document EC25/13)

(Joan & Robert declared an interest in this item)

Report was noted. Concern was expressed at the failure of some congregations to engage in the electoral process and to reply to the Panel. The general recommendations were supported for further work by the Electoral Panel. The Chief Officer would be convening a Panel well in advance of the next election to give them time to consider improvements to the process.

11. Congregational Partnerships

David reported that Jim Robinson had suggested that there was potential for small congregations in the US and the UK to partner and the Convenor and the Chief Officer were asked to liaise with them on a proposal for the next meeting. **Action: Convenor**

12. David Usher

David was thanked for his service on the Executive Committee with good wishes for the future.

13. Non-responsive check out

Closing Devotions: Joan read from the book – “Benedictus” by John O’Donohue

Saturday

Session 4

Opening Devotions: Cathie read from two devotional leaflets –

- 1) “Look to this day for it is life”*
- 2) “We come to this time and this place”*

14. IT Upgrade

(Document EC26/13)

Robert introduced the report IT Developments which had been agreed by the project group following the work of the external consultants. This would provide a platform for a 5 year period. This would have particular benefits both operationally and on the image we want to demonstrate to the outside world and to Unitarians in particular.

Discussion took place on security, outcomes and funding. It was noted that the funding would have revenue and depreciation elements over several years and bring major financial benefits of improved efficiency of working.

The recommendations as set out on page 5 of the report were approved with the project group (The Chief Officer, John Clifford, the acting Treasurer and Martin Sarbicki) having delegated authority to progress. All involved were thanked for their work to date.

**15. Charitable Incorporated Organisations - noted
(Document EC27/13)**

A report was received from the Chief Officer. CIO would have benefits for both congregations and the General Assembly, particularly limited liability for trustees. Scottish congregations were progressing with SCIO status.

In view of other priorities and the work involved it was agreed to look towards the 2015 Annual Meetings for any changes which affected the General Assembly. There were likely to be major legal costs of any revised constitutional documents and this would need to be identified as part of the budget setting for 2013/14 and 2014/15. The Chief Officer will respond to congregations who contact for advice on this matter.

16. Ministers Pension Fund appointment of Trustees

It was agreed to appoint Joyce Ashworth and Roland Kay as Managing Trustees to the Ministers Pension Fund. John Clifford has indicated his willingness to carry on but would prefer it if someone else could be appointed.

17. Letter from Essex Hall Trust (Document EC28/13)

The Chief Officer declared an interest in this item as a trustee of the Essex Hall Trust.

Correspondence was received from the Essex Hall Trust following their meeting on 6 February 2013 on the motion to be presented to the Annual Meeting on signage at Essex Hall. They highlighted that this was a matter for the General Assembly but that they had other considerations to bear in mind; planning law and the views of its paying clients.

The EC agreed in principle that a more visible message be placed on the window of the Reception area of Essex Hall, which was under their control unlike the exterior of the building, and proposed that the strap line that the VSG are working on and the website address be placed there.

Session 5

18. Chief Officer's Report - Noted with the following:
Document EC29/13)

Item 6 – Safeguarding:

The significant progress was commended. It was suggested that an audit be done on which congregations had sent representatives – this would form part of the planned audit later in 2013. The course “Thinking the unthinkable” is to be recommended to people enquiring about Safeguarding courses.

Item 4. Visibility

The Chief Officer was commended for his evidence given at the House of Commons Committee on the Same Sex Marriage Bill which is available on Parliamentary Television.

It was noted that preparatory discussions had taken place to take forward the Resolutions agreed at the Annual Meeting, particularly that on assisted dying.

19. Other reports - (Document EC30/13)

- a) Minutes of the Welsh Dept meeting 12/01/13 – noted**
- b) GA Presidents Report – noted** in particular the President's visit to Meghalaya and the Khasi Hills
- c) The Chief Officer was asked to ensure that the Youth Panel minutes were presented.**

20. EC Induction

The induction of the newly elected EC members will take place at Essex Hall on Thursday 28th February 2013 at 12:00 till 16:00pm.

The Code of Conduct was reviewed and would be distributed at the induction. All members would be asked to sign at the first EC meeting.

Session 6

21. Key Messages - as distributed

22. Dates of Future Meetings

May 17th 2.00pm – 6.00pm – 18th 9.00am – 4.00pm - London

Further dates to be discussed with newly formed EC at the May EC meeting. Robert requested that the July meeting be either 6th or 13th in view of other commitments during the latter part of the month. He offered his apologies for the May EC meeting.

23. A.O.B.

Nightingale Centre

The Acting Treasurer was asked to liaise with the Nightingale Centre on their investment policy.

24. Cathie Masztalerz

Cathie was thanked for her service on the Executive committee with good wishes for the future.

25. Non-responsive check out

Closing Devotions: Robert read "As we come to the end of our meeting....."