

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting  
Monday 14 July 2014  
Essex Hall, London**

**Present:** Robert Ince (Convenor), James Barry, Rev John Clifford, Joan Cook, Louise Rogers, Alison Thursfield, Rev Martin Whitell, Dr Jacky Woodman,

**In Attendance:** Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute-taker). Marion Baker (GA President), Dr Wendy Sudbury and Rev Daniel Costley (Session 2 item 8) and Martin Sarbicki – Head of Finance and Administration (session 3 item 9).

**Monday**

**Session 1**

*Opening Devotions: Louise read from the book "Serving with Grace" by Erik Walker-Wikstrom*

**1. Apologies:** None

**2. Minutes of the meetings held on 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014**

The word "be" was inserted on page 3 Session 2 item 7, 5<sup>th</sup> bullet point – 3<sup>rd</sup> line and the item in brackets on page 7 Session 6 item 24 5<sup>th</sup> bullet point was removed. The Minutes were signed as a true record of the EC meeting held on the 16 & 17<sup>th</sup> May 2014

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

- The Chief Officer and Louise to liaise with regard to their recent attendance at the UUA Annual Meetings
- Add the Nightingale Centre to the Agenda.
- Add the VSG notes to the Agenda.
- pg 2 item 4 –Diary of significant Unitarian events – John has made some progress, but hopes to have the document in a shareable form for the September EC meeting.
- As requested John had approached an individual with regard to Chairing the LLSG but they had declined.

- pg 2 item 5 – MSG – Jacky reported that she has still not had any response from Stephen Lingwood
- pg 3 item 6 – Alison approached Christine Thompson. Christine is happy to stay on in the LLSG but only as a member.
- pg 3 item 8 – Youth Strategy Group – the Chief Officer reported that the group was still forming and that Cathy Masztalerz has resigned due to pressure of work. It was agreed that Martin Whitell would follow up with the YSG as EC link.
- pg 7 item 22 – IARF Congress – Lizzie Roper had contacted the Chief Officer regarding attendance.

**4. Ministry Strategy Group Notes 20 May 2014 - noted with the following:**

- MJ to email the MSG Strategic plan to Louise.
- The EC agreed to the recommendations of the Interview Panel to the MSG with respect to admission to the Roll, which were conditional on the students named having completed the academic requirements of their courses. Acceptance onto the Roll would be announced when this had been received by the Chief Officer.
- Jacky has still not received any further response with regard to the competencies and there is still a lot of work to be done in this area, It was commented that this situation illustrated that we need to have the right balance between volunteer roles and staff with appropriate expertise in dealing with complex issues and discussion on how they might work together.

**5. Local Leadership Strategy Group update - noted with the following:**

A very productive day was held on the 14 June 2014 attended by the Chief Officer and Louise and recommendations were presented. It was confirmed that those present were supportive of the changes. It was felt that there needed to be closer links with other Strategy Groups. Terms of Reference for the LLSG and four action groups were approved. The new framework for the LLSG will be put on the website with Louise reviewing the document before the re-launch.

A discussion was held around the question of an EC member leading a Strategy Group. Louise had volunteered to chair the LLSG as she will be stepping down from the EC in April. It was agreed that she be appointed as an LLSG member and temporary chair until April 2015 and then chair. Margaret Robinson and Christine Thompson were the other remaining members. The new EC link for the LLSG will be Alison Thursfield.

John wondered if it might be time to review the concept of Strategy Groups as they have not turned out as the EC envisioned and it was thought that issue this could arise at the Vision Day in September 2014.

**6. 2020 Process – noted with the following:**

Louise presented a paper on the monitoring and management of the project and improving the process for future funding rounds. Arrangements for governance were questioned and Martin W assured the EC that the project was being managed by the 2020 Leadership Group and would be monitored by the EC. Louise highlighted her concerns about the local governance. It was explained that this was in conjunction with the Leadership Group and that there was a formal risk assessment associated with the application. The risk assessment was requested for the September EC meeting.

Discussion took place on the future spending and for a specific plan to be presented. As the final accountability was with the EC, the EC will need regular updates and reports; these could be in the form of a quarterly report. Louise to talk to Martin W. on a format.

It was suggested that the issue of creating new congregations be placed on the agenda of the next EC.

**7. VSG 1 July 2014 – noted with the following:**

James asked when it is appropriate to seek EC approval for expenditure and it was explained that the EC approved annually a budget with amounts for specific purposes and accountable groups and/or officers could spend within these limits. The Chief Officer confirmed that expense claim forms were not to be used for major purchases as this meant volunteers were spending possibly large sums of their own money before being reimbursed.

Badge making machine- James was asked to forward the document (item 5.3.4) with regard to costs and how the machine will be utilised to the EC. EC agreed in to the purchase of the badge making machine as agreed by VSG. It was noted that James would have it in his possession to be used by the denomination and its availability would be publicised. It would remain the property of the General Assembly as will the two cameras that James informed the EC he also had which had been purchased by the Communications Commission. A register of assets needed to be maintained to ensure proper control. The insurance requirements will be explored and the Chief Officer indicated that those responsible must be mindful of Health and Safety issues.

**Session 2**

**8. Risk Progress Report - noted with the following:**

A progress report on the risk register was presented. It was noted that the General Assembly had risks as well as issues;

The definition of a risk - things over which we have no control  
The definition of an issue - things over which we have significant control

Louise indicated that she did not consider that the current arrangements conformed to Charity Commission guidelines. Discussion took place and it was agreed that both risks and issues should appear on one register, a revised register to be completed for the September meeting and should as at present be discussed in full at least once a year by the EC.

The most significant risk remained safeguarding and the scoring on the risk register was revised upwards to 20 out of a possible 25. The need for all congregations to give this matter the highest priority was reinforced and a letter to be sent to all Congregations on what they must do. **Action:** Chief Officer. EC Links should liaise with their Districts on how they could support small congregations.

Later in the meeting after item 13. a lengthy discussion was held on issues around the Safeguarding Policy and a review of the situation in light of media attention to historic cases of abuse. The Chief Officer and the Convenor were thanked for their hard work around this issue.

The need to take forward the financial development group was accepted. The IT update addressed many of the risks to business continuity and the Plan was being revised in light of the changes. Chief Officer to explore insurance cover in light of non availability of Essex Hall. The Convenor reported the hierarchy of control in light of an incident. Two items to be added to the register:

- The implications of the Chief Officer leaving
- Lack of Volunteers may prevent the GA from functioning effectively.

## 9. Ministry Strategy Group Presentation –

(Rev Daniel Costley & Dr Wendy Sudbury joined the meeting at this point).

The Convenor welcomed Wendy and Daniel to the EC meeting. Wendy gave a presentation on the future of training for the Ministry. A lengthy discussion took place and the following issues were raised:

- Dialogue with the two colleges
- Costs of current training and how might be met
- Different ways of delivering training
- Assessment of individuals
- Ministerial formation
- Involvement of the General Assembly in the process
- Sustainability

- Developing different types of ministry
- Capacity to support implementation of any changes
- Commitment of all stakeholders recognised

The EC **agreed** to support the Ministry Strategy Group's decision with regard to future intake of Ministerial Students to the Colleges.

**Action:** Convenor and Rev Daniel Costley. Wendy and Daniel were thanked for their presentation.

### **Session 3**

#### **10. IT update & presentation on web-site - Martin Sarbicki joined the meeting at this point -**

Martin S reported on the progress of the IT project; three of the four elements were in place and the remaining would be by end of the financial year. The new web-site went live that day and there have been a few emails congratulating staff on the improvements. He went on to explain how the staff will be utilising the system. The system is Cloud based, with no servers in the office; it is secure and supported externally by competent suppliers. We have reduced reliance on in-house systems, reducing risks. We will be able to promote the visibility of the Movement; the only negative is the absence of fibre optics, affecting speed of use, available locally. A number of features are still to be loaded. A "soft" launch was planned over the summer and it was agreed in due course to publicise the new web-site via a four page colour spread in the Inquirer, on facebook and Uni-news.

John asked that safeguarding information be given prominence. The Convenor thanked Martin S and Essex Hall staff for their hard work in progressing such a complex project.

#### **11. Finance Update – noted with the following:**

Martin S presented an update on the financial position as at 30 April 2014. There were no significant variances although as the year goes on there is less likelihood of receiving a legacy which affects budgeted income. The Annual Meeting figures were not yet finalised.

The proposed budget for 2014/15 would be presented at the September EC and there were considerable budget pressures. The Chief Officer advised that planning on the basis of ongoing deficit budgets was not sustainable. It was recognised that the whole issue of what the Unitarian movement wanted from a headquarters function and what they would fund was a key issue for the Vision Day.

**12. Resolutions Update – noted with the following:**

The Chief Officer presented an update on actions taken following the Resolutions approved at the Annual Meetings. It was agreed that there should be some form of report on Resolution follow up presentation at the GA.

**13. Chief Officer's Report - noted with the following:**

The Chief Officer presented a report on a range of issues regarding the work of Essex Hall, including congregational contacts and visibility including the effects of the lobbying Act 2014. He gave a brief report on his trip to the UUA General Assembly and it was thought that the General Assembly should seek to be represented periodically but not every year.

**Session 4**

**14. Election of EC Convenor – noted with the following:**

Louise presented her views on the process for the appointment of the position of EC Convenor. It was recognised that EC members should be present for EC Meetings but accepted that there will be times when that is not possible and important decisions will be made in their absence. Jacky suggested that in future if an EC member cannot attend a meeting and they have strong feelings about an Agenda item, they should email their points of view to the Chief Officer, Convenor and fellow EC members.

A comparison of the post EC Convenor with the UUA Moderator was made, however, it was felt that they are quite different posts. In the EC all members as Trustees are collectively responsible for all decisions made. The importance of the Chief Officer position should be recognised.

Louise suggested that the Convenor be democratically elected and should present what their vision for the Movement is before the election. The current Convenor stated that his vision would be no more relevant than anyone else's and that the real role of the EC Convenor is to convene the meeting and ensure that everyone gets a chance to contribute..

The general consensus among the EC was that the system used currently for the election of the Convenor should be retained.

### **15. Etiquette on use of IT equipment during EC meetings**

It was noted when this item had been discussed at a previous EC meeting it had been decided that EC members should not use their IT equipment during the meetings, however, agreed that as technology has evolved it was now acceptable as long as use was not intrusive. Mobile phones should still be on silent.

### **16. Nightingale Centre**

The GA President, who is also the Chair of the Nightingale Centre, welcomed the proposal for a joint meeting and reported that as there has been no Nightingale Centre meeting since the last EC meeting they will discuss it at their meeting the following week.

### **17. President's Report**

The President gave a short verbal report on her engagements. She is enjoying meeting the local Unitarians on the ground and people are very enthusiastic about their congregations and their hospitality has been fantastic.

### **18. Key messages to be distributed separately.**

#### **19. A.O.B.**

- Louise will be setting up a research group and put an article in Uni-news.
- James attended a successful social action day at Simple Gifts.
- Alison attended the Joseph Chamberlain Anniversary Service at Birmingham New Meeting.
- The arrangements for an Electoral Panel were raised with a proposal being discussed that the EC elections take place after Christmas in early 2015

### **20. Vision Day – 6 September 2014**

There will be a Skype meeting between the Chief Officer, the Convenor and Simon Wilson (the facilitator) on 15 July 2014 with regard to the Vision Day on the 6 September. Various options were discussed on how to plan the day. The President to email a document to the Chief Officer with concerns both locally and nationally that she has gathered from the denomination, these to be put together with other ideas to form themes for the day.

It was decided that the Vision developed over the coming months will be turned into a presentation for the 2015 GA. UKunitarianTV will make the film with the EC having control of the content. Participants will be told beforehand that filming will be taking place during the day.

**21. Confidential items** – The Chief Officer & MJ left the room at this point

**22. Non-responsive check out**

*Closing Devotions: Alison Thursfield*