

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting
Friday 16th & Saturday 17th May 2014
Essex Hall, London**

Present: Rev Martin Whitell (Convenor until item 3), Joan Cook, Rev John Clifford, Alison Thursfield, Robert Ince (Convenor from item 3), Jacky Woodman, James Barry (from 9.20am)

In Attendance: Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute-taker). Marion Baker GA President (for the Friday Session).

Friday

Session 1

Opening Devotions: Jacky gave the EC some of her thoughts from her recent travels in particular her trip to Georgia and the diverse nature of sexuality, she quoted from the Kinsey Report "We cannot divide people into sheep and goats" and said that we should think of diversity in all it's forms, think of our strengths, think of our weaknesses and draw strength from those weaknesses.

- 1. Apologies:** Louise Rogers
- 2. Appointment of EC Convenor**

Before standing down as the EC Convenor, Martin thanked the EC for all their support over the past years, and praised them for the way that as an Executive they have all worked together. He thanked the Chief Officer with whom he has had the privilege to work closely with and who was a great asset to the Unitarian Community.

Nominations were sought for the position of Convenor of the Executive Committee. Robert Ince was proposed by Joan Cook and seconded by Alison Thursfield. Louise Rogers was proposed by John Clifford but was not seconded. Robert Ince was put to the meeting and elected with 5 votes for, 1 abstention and 2 absentees. Robert was welcomed by Martin as the new EC Convenor. He thanked the Executive Committee for their confidence in electing him.

John enquired as to whether holding the position of Convenor would impact on the role of Acting Treasurer? It was pointed out that Robert had raised his

intention to step down from that position at the 2014 Annual Meetings. Finding an Honorary Treasurer remains a top priority for the EC. Martin has agreed to act as Acting Treasurer till the July EC meeting.

The GA President Marion Baker joined the meeting at this point

James Barry arrived at this point

3. Minutes of the meetings held on 21st & 22nd February and 13 April 2014 (DOC34/14)

The Minutes were signed as a true record of the meetings held on the 21st, 22nd February and the 13 April 2014.

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

- pg 7 item 14 – President & Vice-President Report's – (Doc EC32/14) – John to undertake the diary of significant Unitarian events. **Action: John Clifford**

5. Ministry Strategy Group (DOCEC35/14) – Noted with the following:

Jacky reported that there had not yet been any follow up from Stephen Lingwood on work on the revised draft of the Competency Document. This was becoming a matter of urgency as the whole process of assessment was vital to ensuring a robust and fair process. This would require a significant amount of work to progress. The Convenor announced that Stephen has indicated that he is going to step down as the Ministry Strategy Group Chair due to other commitments.

Action: Jacky to contact Stephen on Monday regarding progress on the final draft of the competency document.

Action: The Chief Officer to approach MSG on seeking nominations for a new chair.

Ministry Strategy Group (DOCEC36/14) - Announcement regarding training – noted with the following:

It was understood that the MSG were dealing with this matter and it should be seen within the context of the overall review of ministerial training. **Action: Chief Officer to clarify position of the Ministry Strategy Group**

6. Local Leadership Strategy Group (DOC37/14) – noted with the following:

Correspondence regarding the LLSG was received. The general consensus was that the LLSG needed to be refreshed. It was agreed that the strategy day planned for the 14 June 2014, facilitated by Louise Rogers and the Chief Officer, should go ahead with those who had confirmed attendance. Martin indicated that the 2020 Group has training programmes which ideally fitted

with some of the work of the LLSG. **Action: The EC agreed to actively seek names of people who they think would be interested. The Convenor to have a discussion with Margaret Robinson. Alison was asked to talk to Christine Thompson the other remaining member.**

The GA President indicated that she would be able to attend the Strategy Day.

Session 2

7. Visibility Strategy Group (DOCEC38/14) – a) noted with the following:

- The EC approved Philip Colfox as a member of the Visibility Strategy Group.
- It was agreed that James would act as Chair of the VSG until the September EC meeting.
- In terms of other possible members someone with appropriate skills has indicated that she would like to join the group and can be contacted in August to confirm whether she is indeed available.
- Martin proposed that in light of the fact that James is acting chair of the group, another member of the EC should act as the EC link, this was agreed.
- An idea of some form of “Alpha” type course had been raised. Greater clarity was required and it was felt that this should not be in the form of an “Alpha” type course”. There was also learning from the “Life/Spirit” Hibbert Trust project
Action: James to bring a written proposal to the September EC meeting.

b) Resignation (DOCEC39/14)

The EC accepted the resignation of Phil Tomlin from the VSG.

8. Youth strategy Group – The Chief Officer gave a verbal update and stated that the YSG are determining the process for the development of the strategy and trying to get together for an initial conversation, it is moving but is still in the early stages.

9. fm Scottish Pilot Report (DOCEC40/14) – noted with the following:

The project had been completed on the 1 April 2014 and a final report received from Iain Brown. There did not appear to be any general lessons to be learnt from the pilot although some good training had been delivered locally. **Action: The budget will still have to be sorted (any balance distributed pro rata to contributors) the Chief Officer will contact Iain Brown with regard to outstanding expense forms. The Chief Officer will prepare a summary for wider circulation eg in The Inquirer.**

Session 3**10. Annual Meetings Update (DOCEC41/14)** – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer asked the EC for their feedback on the 2014 Annual Meetings which would feed into the overall evaluation. The general consensus was that it was a well organised and successful meeting. The venue was well received by everyone. There were some issues with the vegetarian meals, but generally the food was good. The distance between rooms was felt to be a bit of a problem but at least it was all under one roof. Signage could have been better with a description outside each session room of what was happening inside. There was a sense of spirituality not felt in recent years.

In the main auditorium, the chairs were squashed together and the lighting was pretty poor, these are things that can be sorted out if we go back. Other issues were transport problems, no lifeguard when one was promised, the bookstall was not in a very good spot, more coffee stations would have been welcomed and poor mobile reception. All in all a successful meeting and Andrew Mason and the Essex Hall staff are to be congratulated and thanked for their hard work.

The President Bill Darlison did an excellent job of ensuring that the proceedings went according to plan.

Action: The Chief Officer is to raise an issue with the Steering Group – Standing Orders – could there be a limit on the amount of times an individual can speak?

It was noted that there is a provisional booking at Whittlebury Hall for the 2015 Annual Meetings and that Andrew Mason is looking into similar venues for future Annual Meetings.

11. Safeguarding Update (DOCEC42/14) – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer provided an update on current safeguarding issues, including reputational risk. It was emphasised that the General Assembly has a revised Safeguarding Policy in place and it was agreed that this should be re-emphasised within the denomination. An audit of congregational compliance would take place in late 2014 and the Districts were to be encouraged to take the lead in ensuring that responses were received from their congregations. The Chief Officer was asked to contact CCPAS regarding its advice on managing the risks surrounding the allegations involving a prominent Unitarian. **Action: Chief Officer**

12. Congregational Survey (DOC43/14) – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer presented a report on the results of the congregational survey. The findings did not alter following the second call for information on

attendance. These results will need to be built into the strategic planning process as they offered some useful insights.

13. Financial Report to 31 March 2014 (DOCEC44/14) – noted with the following

The deficit appearing on page 2 was as a result of the omission of the Bowland Trust Income which did not appear in the Outlook year to 30.09.14 column. 89% of the Quota had been received, however there is still some chasing up to be done. The Essex Hall Trust will be increasing their Grant to the GA by £10,000 this year and were thanked. Budget was on target. Planning for 2014/15 had begun with pressures being identified. James asked about the funds for the EC election support and whether this could be done in-house, however, it was explained that the General Assembly did not have capacity and an external agency provided “independence” to the process.

14. Service Planning 2014/15 (DOCEC45/14) – noted with the following:

It was agreed that Simon Wilson will facilitate the Vision Day to be held in Manchester on the 6 September 2014 and that the Chief Officer, the Convenor and Louise will liaise with him on process. The day will be by invitation and a list of attendees was agreed including District representatives, all strategy group members and some staff. It was agreed that one of the outcomes of the day should be a video to be shown at the 2015 Annual Meetings and UKunitarianTV to be approached.

15. IT Update (DOCEC46/14) - noted

It was confirmed that a project plan was in place and that arrangements were in place for external support for the new systems.

Session 4

16. President’s Report (DOC47/14) – noted with the following:

The GA President, Marion Baker was welcomed to the EC meeting. The Convenor thanked the President for her diary and asked if she could send the EC a summary of feedback from her visits to the various congregations. The President said that she is determined to give the greetings of the GA to the congregations and bodies she has been invited to and to thank them for their invaluable contribution to the Movement.

The President asked whether there was any specific policy on Presidential Expenses. **Action: Mary Jean Hennis to email the guidance to Marion and copy in the EC.**

17. Chief Officer Report (DOCEC48/14) – noted with the following:

The Chief Officer presented a report and highlighted the closure of the Halliwell Road Free Church in Bolton and the proposed sale of the church building. He had circulated advice on registration of buildings for same sex

marriage and assisted some congregations. The President asked to informed which congregations had registered. **Action: Chief Officer to action.**

The Chief Officer referred to his work with the British Humanist Association , the Red Cross and the All-Party Group on the Bahai's. The whole issue of external partnerships, including with other Unitarian bodies and the IARF, would form part of the strategic discussion in September's Vision Day. r
Action: Chief Officer to bring report on follow-up action on Resolutions passed at previous Annual Meetings to the July 2014 EC meeting.

18. Arrangements for Presidency/Vice-Presidency - 2015/16 (DOC49/14) – noted with the following:

Correspondence from Stand Unitarian Chapel received.

Various amendments were made to the draft letter. **Action: letter to be finalised and sent by the Chief Officer. The EC links are to emphasise with their Districts the importance and urgency of the speed of their suggestions to reach the EC.**

With regard to a review of the current process the Chief Officer had identified that the previous GA Council and then the Task Force had carried out work and **this would be located and circulated for a discussion in November 2014. Action Chief Officer**

It was noted that Mary-Jean Hennis would keep a diary of events to be confirmed if contacted by those wishing to invite the new President and this would be included in a future uni-news. **Action: Mary Jean Hennis and Chief Officer**

19. Non-responsive check-out

Closing Devotions: John stated that people go to church for many valid reasons but essentially they are seeking some sense of how it all fits together.

Saturday

Opening Devotions: Joan read a piece from Hearts and Minds by Kay Millard – "Sudoku".

Session 5

20. Nightingale Centre

1) Nightingale Centre Minutes- (DOC50/14) – noted with the following: Louise and Christine Hayhurst will produce a paper with regard to the Governance Review. It was noted that there is a need to establish the Nightingale Centre's views of the current governance. It was agreed that a meeting of the full EC and the full Nightingale Centre Management Committee should take place. **Action: The Convenor to approach Marion Baker (the Nightingale Centre Chair) to discuss.**

2) Nightingale Annual Report & Accounts (DOCEC51/14)

The EC formally approved the Nightingale Centre Annual Report and Accounts as at 30 September 2013.

21. Sustentation Fund - appointment of Trustee

The EC approved the appointment of Alan Eastwood to the Sustentation Fund.

22. IARF – Congress Resolution of Support (DOCEC52/14)

A Resolution of Support for the IARF Congress in Birmingham was approved.

It was noted the attendance of young adults was to be encouraged and two scholarships would be offered from the Humphrey Winder Restricted Fund to BUYAN members to cover the costs **Action: The Chief Officer to contact BUYAN**

Session 6**23. Key messages to be distributed separately.****24. A.O.B.**

- Alison has received an email from Ralph Catts with an invitation to attend the Anniversary service of Joseph Chamberlain in Birmingham which she has accepted.
- Alison put forward a name to be considered as a member for the LLSG.
Action: John to approach the person.
- The Convenor distributed a document "Report of the Inquiry into Charity Senior Executive Pay and Guidance for Trustees on setting remuneration" for discussion at a future EC meeting. The Chief Officer was sympathetic to the recommendation within the document and would discuss further with the Convenor.
- It was agreed that the role of the EC Links to the Districts would remain unchanged. Joan is willing to accept this but asked that it noted that she feels it is inappropriate to be a Link person within your own District.
- The EC Links to the Strategy Groups are as follows:
 - a) LLSG – Louise
 - b) VSG - John MSG -
 - c) Joan
 - d) YSG - Martin
- Meeting etiquette including use of tablets/laptops etc in meetings – this issue to be an agenda item at the next meeting

25. Date & time of future meetings –

13 & 14th February 2015 - venue tbc

Mary-Jean left the meeting at this point

26. Confidential items

1. Referral from Ministry Strategy Group

The meeting agreed an approach to the confidential matter raised by the **MSG. Action: Chief Officer to respond**

The Chief Officer left the meeting at this point.

2. Staff remuneration

Staff were awarded a increase in salary from 1 July 2014 of 1.75%. **Action: Convenor to inform Chief Officer**

3. Correspondence

Correspondence was received and considered. **Action: Convenor would reply.**

27. Non-responsive check out

Closing Devotions: James Barry