

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

**Approved Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting  
Monday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2016  
Essex Hall, London**

**Present:** Robert Ince (Convenor), Marion Baker, Joan Cook, Philip Colfox, Peter Hanley (Honorary Treasurer), Gwynn Pritchard, Lynne Readett, Jacky Woodman.

**In Attendance:** Dot Hewardine (General Assembly President), Derek McAuley (Chief Officer), Simon Bland, Ministry and Congregational Support Officer (item 14.) and Mary-Jean Hennis (Minute taker).

**Session 1**

*Opening Devotions: Gwynn read out the statement from the Rev Wyn Thomas, Chair of Unitarians in Wales, on the morning of the 9 November 2016, after the results of the American election were made known, in which he appealed for Unitarians and supporters to put their values and ethos into practice.*

**1. Apologies - None**

**2. Minutes of the meetings held on 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> Sept 2016 – (DOC EC78/16)**

The Minutes were signed as a true record of the meeting on the 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup> September 2016.

**3. Matters arising for noting or to include in Agenda for later discussion: None**

**4. EC Action List - (DOCEC79/16) – noted and up-dated**

It was agreed that the safeguarding audit be postponed until 2017 with 31 March as a deadline for return of audit forms.

**5. President/Vice-President 2017/18 -**

There has been an oral nomination received from a District, however, this needs this to be an official communication accompanied by a statement from the nominee outlining their message for the General Assembly, particularly how they will support “The Next Steps”. The Chief Officer to liaise with the District Secretary and the Convenor to liaise with the nominee with a decision being made at the January EC meeting.

**6. MSG & LLSG Notes - (DOC EC80/16) – Noted with the following:**

**6.1 MSG** - The concerns of the MSG have been noted by the EC and it was agreed that Lynne would have a conversation with Rev Sarah Tinker.

It was noted that the MSG had only five members rather than seven as required which may be increasing the pressure. The Chief Officer to invite Rev Daniel Costley and Rev Sarah Tinker to the January EC meeting.

The recommendation by the MSG that the EC consider providing funding for improved facilitation training of mentors was supported with a proposal required. **Action – MSG and Simon Bland**

**6.2 LLSG** – The issue of the Summer School and accountability was being addressed and Janet Costley was in touch with Louise Rogers. Louise has been advised that the Chairs of the Groups will not be required to speak at the GA but should be ready to answer questions.

It has been noted that the LLSG is engaging with “The Next Steps” and the Help is at Hand manual update is progressing, with particular attention to the role of Treasurer to be included. **Action: Marion to liaise with Louise and to have a conversation with Margaret Robinson on the LEAP programme.**

**7. Training and Development Project – (DOC EC81/16) - report from Rachel Skelton – Noted with the following:**

The Project Organisational Structure report was received. It was proposed that some form of higher level purpose be included in the strategic plan “first point of reference in matters of spirituality” or “default denomination that people gravitate to”.

It was agreed to invite Rev Daniel Costley to the TED meeting as a representative of the MSG. Rachel will continue to liaise with HMCO.

EC thanked Rachel Skelton for producing the report and approved the project structure.

Discussion took place on the web project. There was a requirement for work by a professional web developer. The Hon Treasurer highlighted the need for a procurement process. It was reported that the Hibbert Trust had recently gone through a similar procurement process and it was agreed given the timescales involved that the company they had selected and subsequently used, who had proved very effective and now understood the Unitarian ethos, be approached for a proposal to undertake this work.

**8. Volunteer Pool – (DOC EC82/16) - noted with the following:**

It was noted that the flow of offers has now stopped and that once people see the list being used, it's worth will be recognised. There are many people who are already volunteering who do not appear on the list. The Pool would be promoted by EC members to link districts and at the Annual Meetings. Simon Bland would be managing it in future and he was asked to liaise with Melda Grantham, Welsh Department Secretary with regard to volunteers from Wales. Philip stressed the need to generate excitement amongst those who had already volunteered and that they needed to be contacted.

## 9. Next Steps Update

**9.1 Engagement Groups** – There has been an offer from the Summer School to lead facilitation training and there will be an exploration meeting to look at ways in which to progress this. This will need support and funding; they already have material and the original training documents. The EC indicated that it was open to a discussion with the Summer School team with regard to this offer and it was agreed that people attending the meeting will be able to claim travel expenses. This would then enable the EC members to step back.

### Session 2

**9.2 Identity** - It was agreed that the identity priority should be progressed and that professional help would be procured. Philip was thanked for the proposal he brought to the meeting. It was acknowledged that ultimately this was a deeply theological issue; our objective being a free and inquiring religion; rather than simply a branding exercise

It was agreed that the specification for the work and possible contractors need to be identified and delegated the Chief Officer, the Convenor, Philip and Lynne to liaise on the process. The individual or company would ideally have previously worked for a not for profit organisation. These recommendations to be emailed to the EC for a decision or brought back to the January EC meeting. It was agreed that an amount of £6,000 be made available

It was agreed that the Chief Officer would reserve a single slot session at the Annual Meetings on "Ethos and Identity".

**9.3 Campus Ministry** – Joan had responded to the MDA and she will be attending a meeting on the 11 February 2017

**9.4 Building sustainability** – The Building Advisory Group chaired by Mike Barber will need more help on the priority but was very positive.

More generally it was felt that there was good progress being made on "The Next Steps". Gwynn reported that he had withdrawn from any direct input to "Next Steps" as he is prioritising his congregation and their new minister.

### Session 2

**10. Financial Report – (DOC EC83/16) -noted with the following:**

Management Account to the 30 September 2016 was received. The Finance Manager is working to validate the congregational quota figures. The financial profile is moving away from live giving to increased support from the Essex Hall Trust and the B&FUA. Trustee expenses will be defined separately in the Annual Report.

The Convenor had raised some questions which the Chief Officer will be answering outside the meeting after he has spoken with the Finance Manager.

**11. Trustee Duties regarding Investment Matters – (DOC EC84/16) – noted with the following:**

Advice had been received from Charles Russell Speechlys on Trustee duties regarding investment matters. The Chief Officer was thanked for his work on this item. The recommendations were accepted.

The document produced by the Hon Treasurer was distributed (Appendix G (2)) – EC members were asked to consider the paper and email comments to the Hon Treasurer.

It was agreed that EC would obtain advice from an Independent Financial consultant or advisor. The Chief Officer and the Hon Treasurer were tasked to liaise with regard to a shortlist as a matter of urgency and commission the work .

It was agreed to reinvest the donation back in the money market for another month and thereafter at the discretion of the Chief Officer and the Hon Treasurer decisions would be made.

It was agreed to pay 20% of the costs of the research report commissioned by the MPF as it had proved useful in seeking the legal advice.

**12. Nightingale Centre Minutes - (DOC EC85/16) – noted with the following:**

It was noted that the Critical Incident Plan, when developed, would be presented to the EC.

The Centre Manager, Stella Burnley will be discussing issues affecting the youth programme with Rev John Harley.

**13. Nightingale Centre Budget 2016/17 – (DOC EC86/16) – noted with the following:**

The success of SACH (Send a child to Hucklow) was highlighted and could provide stories of the difference the Centre makes.

EC formally approved the Nightingale Centre Budget for 2016/17.

### **Session 3**

#### **14. Financial Sustainability -- (DOC EC87/16) – noted with the following:**

Simon Bland joined the meeting at this point and was introduced by the Chief as the newly appointed Ministry and Congregational Support Officer. The EC in turn introduced themselves.

The Convenor and Philip had produced a paper indicating the financial status across the Districts and Congregations having reviewed Annual Accounts that were available. Overall the summary showed that there were substantial resources and a surplus was being produced. This should help change the conversation at the Annual Meetings. Congregations need to be convinced to play their part and share in the vision the EC has for the future of the Movement. There needed to be a change to the current culture so that their money works for them and the Movement. Selling a building should be seen as a long-term loss, despite an immediate financial gain. .

Surprisingly, legacies have a very small part in congregational finances which opens opportunities at all levels.

Simon suggested starting an efficiency review could be valuable using principles of mutual support. He had already been in discussion with a major utility company with potential savings for congregations of 25%.

There are many ways to take this forward, by a coalition of the willing and good property management.

It was agreed that the Convenor would work with the Chief Officer and Simon on this issue for the January EC meeting.

The Convenor and Philip were thanked for doing this body of work.

Simon Bland left the meeting at this point.

#### **15. Conflict Management System – (DOC EC88/16) - note of meeting with Chief Officer – noted with the following:**

It was agreed that the report of the meeting held by the Chief Officer which highlighted the need for a process to address culture change rather than simply a traditional policy and training approach is to be forwarded to the MSG. The LLSG are also to be encouraged to work with this. **The Chief Officer to action.**

#### **16. Sustentation Fund Request - (DOC EC89/16)**

EC agreed to the request from the Sustentation Fund to be accepted as a restricted fund (thereby ending it's separate charity status). **The Chief Officer to respond.**

**17. Chief Officer Report – (DOC EC90/16) – noted**

The Chief Officer reported that he had met with Charles Russell Speechlys to obtain legal advice on the implications of CIO status.

Mary-Jean Hennis and Jacky Woodman left the meeting at this point

**18. Presidents Report – (DOC EC91/16)**

The President reported on the Ceremony at the National Cenotaph the previous day which had been an enormous privilege.

**19. District Reports – (DOC EC92/16)**

The difficulty in filling posts, particularly that of treasurer, had been highlighted at several districts.

It was noted that seventeen participants had been confirmed for the Findhorn Unitarian Network Experience Week and that the Covenant was a useful tool to ensure beneficiaries of grants reported back. This declaration would be circulated.

**Session 4**

**20. Annual Meeting Minutes – (DOC EC93/16) – noted**

It was noted that a consultation paper on future arrangements for the Annual Meetings had subsequently been issued.

**21 .Key Messages – as agreed**

**22. Confidential Items**

Discussion took place on issues of accountability for volunteer led groups outside of formal structures, particularly if funding support from the General Assembly was requested or liabilities incurred.

**23. Non responsive check-out**

*Closing Devotions – Marion Baker “In the Holy Quiet of This Hour” by R S Gilbert*