



Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 June 2023 at 7pm

Present:

Rev. Tony Rindl (TR) - Chair
Eileen Roby (ER) – Churchwarden & Vice Chair
Peter Dean (PD) – Churchwarden
Daniella Clinton (DC)
Roger Courtney (RC)
Tilly Elliott (TE)
Lesley Gray (LG)
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)
Cathy Honeyman (CH)
Gill Watson (GW)
Martin Whittick (MW)
Marcus Jones (MJ) - PCC Secretary

1. Holy Communion

1.1 The Council began the meeting with a service of Holy Communion.

2. Welcome to new members

2.1 TR welcomed ER following her election as Churchwarden and ex-officio Council member; and also Martin Whittick and Daniella Clinton as Council members.

3. Apologies for absence

3.1 No apologies were received.

(i) Post-APCM business items

4. Trustee responsibilities & declaration of Conflict of Interest

4.1 TR explained that details of trustees' responsibilities were set out at www.parishresources.org.uk under 'PCC/APCMs'. He also explained the need for Council members to declare conflicts of interest when they arose, with examples.

5. Confidentiality

5.1 TR explained there was a certain need for confidentiality before the minutes of a meeting were approved by the Council and an absolute need for confidentiality in some areas such as issues relating to staff.

6. Elections

6.1 ER was proposed as Vice Chair by PD, was seconded by RC and unanimously elected by the Council.

6.2 It was agreed that PD would hold the office of Treasurer on a temporary basis until the Council could appoint someone permanently. An appeal to the congregation had been made in a recent service.

6.3 MJ was proposed as Secretary by RC, was seconded by TE and unanimously elected by the Council.

7. Election of Standing Committee

7.1 TR explained that the Standing Committee normally comprised the Vicar, the Churchwardens, the Treasurer, the PCC Secretary and at least two other Council members. Accordingly, he, ER, PD (Churchwarden/Treasurer) and MJ would be members and he suggested that RC and TE continue as members. This was agreed unanimously.

8. Periods of service of new members

8.1 TR explained that ER was elected as Churchwarden annually and that DC, RC and MW had been elected for three years i.e. until May 2026.

9. Committee structure and membership

9.1 TR explained that in addition to the Standing Committee, the Council's other committees were Finance, Buildings, Pre-School, Climate Emergency and Missions. He considered it would be useful to re-form the Staff Committee in due course. TR invited the Chairs of the committees to summarise their function and membership.

10. Dates of Council meetings 2023-24

10.1 The Council received a schedule of dates for Council meetings in 2023-24. TR explained that starting in September, meetings would normally take place on the fourth Monday of the month to accommodate the Choir practice schedule and to give Finance Committee (FinCom) sufficient time to prepare the previous month's financial report. The Council agreed with this arrangement and noted the dates of future meetings.

11. APCM

11.1 PD and MW reported that the minutes of the APCM were currently being written up by Jenny Whittick (JW) from the recording of the meeting and would be sent to the PCC Secretary by the end of the week.

Action: PD to send APCM minutes to MJ when complete.

11.2 TR asked whether the financial statements for 2022 would be prepared in time to be approved at a Special Parochial Church Meeting in September. PD reported that he had contacted Myers, Clark (MC) and was hopeful that the statements would be ready.

(ii) Regular Business Items

12. Approval of the Minutes of 14 May 2023

12.1 RC requested a footnote to section 4.4 to clarify that references to 'the Treasurer' in sections 4.4-4.6 reflected St Mary's practice at the time of the meeting of using that title for the person who keeps the accounts i.e. 'the Book-keeper'; and that the Council subsequently adopted the title for the person overseeing finance, previously termed 'the Chair of Finance'.

12.2 ER proposed that the minutes be accepted. This was seconded by GW and approved unanimously by the Council.

13. Matters arising

13.1 Following explanations from TR, MW proposed that the Council approve the purchase of the more robust and expensive type of card reader for £393 to enable donations to be made by credit or debit card. This was seconded by CH and approved unanimously.

14. Correspondence

14.1 MJ reported that the correspondence he had received was best dealt with under Item 19 (see below).

15. Safeguarding

15.1 LG referred the Council to her May Report and Action Plan and reported that while she had made progress, more remained to be done. The key priority was to ensure DBS checks were complete and up to date, including Connect Group Leaders and official minibus drivers, which she estimated would be by September. The Diocese was assisting us in this process. LG was grateful to JW who had volunteered to be DBS administrator. A number of people's DBS checks were out of date and required renewal. One Sunday School leader had not been DBS checked and LG had informed the Diocese about this.

15.2 LG said that the next step was to ensure that all those who needed to do so should undertake their safeguarding training and the Diocese would also assist with this. JW would keep track of this.

15.3 LG also said that she had now received a list of activities from the Facilities Manager (FM) and these were now included in the Dashboard: Sunday School, Toddler Tuesday, Wednesday Fellowship and Thursday Connect. The operation of the minibus needed to be added as it was targeted at vulnerable adults. As a church activity, Pre-School, also needed to be added although it was responsible for its own safeguarding. LG added that she also needed to check St Mary's insurance policy.

Action: PD to send LG St Mary's insurance policy.

15.4 Subject to the above additions, the Council approved the list of activities.

16. GDPR

16.1 Nothing to report.

17. Committee Reports

a. Standing Committee

17.1 The Council received the Standing Committee minutes of 12 June.

b. Finance

17.2 The Council received FinCom's March Report which showed a year-to-date deficit of £8,479. PD explained that the day-to-day records had since been completed up to 30 April but FinCom had not had time to update the monthly report. PD gave a number of explanations regarding the details of the March Report, including the difficulty Jacky Faria (JF) had had in allocating building expenditure to the correct budgets due to a lack of detail on some invoices. RC commented that on the occasions he received invoices for approval, when passing for payment, he indicated where the expenditure should be booked. Sometimes, however, he did not see them.

17.3 RC commented that the Council needed to direct its attention not on the detail of the March Report but at the bigger picture. The church had made a loss of £46,000 last year and the 2023 Budget anticipated a further loss of £23,000, excluding expenditure on the minibus. The March report showed that this forecast loss was likely to be, if anything, an underestimate. He asked what FinCom was doing to address this situation and quoted from the minutes of the meeting in January with Colin Bird (CB), Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance:

“CB emphasised that it was the PCC's duty as trustees to achieve sustainability. What was needed was a strategic plan for the next three years to reduce or even eliminate the deficit: to say “This is where we are. We don't want to continue like this. What steps do we need to take in the next three years to ensure sustainability?”.”

RC asked what steps FinCom were taking towards developing that strategic plan for sustainability.

17.4 There followed a long discussion in which a number of points were made and differing views were expressed, including that:

- The Council had responsibility for taking financial decisions, not FinCom. It was FinCom's task to make recommendations to the Council. The Budget had included suggestions for cuts in expenditure but these were difficult to quantify.
- The Scourfield Report had recommended, among other things, that St Mary's strategy need to be discussed and decided before finance was considered. It was therefore important to return to discussing and updating the Mission Action Plan. Budgets could then be allocated to the agreed priorities.
- There were two issues: the short term need to reduce the deficit and the longer term need to discuss the MAP and financial strategy. A timeline should be agreed to tackle these. Some members felt that the Council should accept there was little it could do to tackle the deficit this year and that it should now look at how it might do so in 2024.
- Some members expressed frustration at the lack of progress in taking the necessary decisions to increase income and cut expenditure. The Scourfield report of 2021, the Finance Proposals of October 2022 and the Budget of 2023 had all been debated but few decisions had been taken. One member commented that all they seemed able to do was point out the scale of overspends: they felt powerless to prevent them.
- There was some scope for increasing income from room hire, but it was not great.
- In accounting terms, the church made a small profit in 2022 because of the £50,000 legacy which had been allocated to the General Fund. This approach to legacies was consistent with the advice of CB.
- When the Council received a legacy, it needed to take a decision about what to do with it. Too often, the Council had not done so, and the result was that the legacy remained in the General Fund supporting general expenditure.
- Regular giving had been stagnant for 10 years owing to a shift in the make-up of the congregation. One way to tackle this was to ask for donations for a specific purpose.
- Some felt that the congregation might not be sufficiently aware of the scale of our financial difficulties as there was little direct communication about it. If, for example, church services were moved into the Church Centre in the autumn to save heating costs, it would send a visible sign to the congregation of the urgency of the situation.

17.5 In summary, TR said that the financial situation was drifting and the Council did not know what to do about it. The Council needed to inform the Diocese specifically about our projected losses, tell them that we have been unable to take the decisions that need to be made and seek their advice. The Council needed the space and time to address the finances

more fully and should therefore set aside an Away Day. The related MAP should also be considered. It was agreed that this would be held on 30 September.

Action: Council Members to reserve 30th September for an Away Day.

17.6 The future of the minibus was also discussed. The Council had previously agreed that the minibus was unsustainable. However, following concerns raised by members of the congregation at the APCM, a donation of £10,000 had been received. The donor had specified that £4,000 should be spent on maintaining the minibus and accordingly that part of the donation was restricted. The Council agreed that this sum should be sufficient to keep the minibus in operation for the time being. It was also reported that the family whose parent had left the £50,000 legacy had recently asked that the Council consider buying a minibus for around £35,000 and using the remainder to operate and maintain it. This was noted by the Council. FinCom is also exploring other ways to fund a possible replacement in due course. The Council also noted that without more volunteer drivers, it would not be possible to keep this service going in the longer term.

17.7 Regarding outstanding action points from previous meetings, PD confirmed that FinCom had arranged distribution of mission monies; that the Council had not breached its reserves threshold in 2022; and that at present it held sufficient funds to last around 18 months (i.e. until the end of 2024). He also advised that there was sufficient in the bank to pay the bills although the bank balance had not been included in the Monthly Report. PD considered that this figure gave little additional useful information, although others disagreed with that view.

17.8 The Council considered that the decision about Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership's refund for 2022 should be consistent with that of the Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy's refund (see sections 9.13-9.16 of the minutes for April 2023).

17.9 It was confirmed that the tithes of room hires had not been and would not be paid for 2022. The situation for 2023 could be discussed at the Away Day.

17.10 PD reported that JF would be resigning as book-keeper on 6 July and that MC had been contacted to see whether they could provide a book-keeping service and an estimate of costs. Revised arrangements would also be needed for authorising payments from the Council's bank accounts. He recommended that there should be three signatories: TR, PD and ER. This was proposed by GW, seconded by MW and agreed unanimously by the Council.

c. Buildings

17.11 The Council received the Report from the Buildings Committee.

17.12 RC reported that the installation of the floodlights was in progress.

17.13 RC noted that the clock faces on the church tower were almost illegible and needed repainting and regilding. He had received a quote for this work which was lower than he had expected and he and Phil Hunter were looking into the possibility of obtaining grants to fund this. It was also possible that a donor might be found to fund the work as a memorial with a plaque put in an appropriate position.

17.14 As previously requested, RC had contacted the agent about the possibility of increasing rent on the Brightwell Road property. The agent had advised that there was scope to do this but that the tenant was likely to appeal any increase.

17.15 PD requested that RC obtain a valuation for Brightwell Road following the enquiry of a developer (see sections 6.4 and 6.5 of the minutes of the meeting of 21 November 2022) in order to meet the Council's obligations as trustees. RC agreed to pursue this.

Action: RC to obtain a valuation for Brightwell Road

d. Pre-School

17.16 MG explained that her report had not been posted to the PCC Folder. MJ apologised for this oversight and undertook to ensure this was done.

Action: MJ to post June Report to the June PCC Folder

17.17 MG reported that OFSTED had awarded Pre-School a 'Good' rating for overall effectiveness following its inspection. The financial position was healthy and the Committee had agreed to increase its rental payment by 10% to £10,168 for 2023. Staff still wanted to be paid in 12 equal instalments across the year. It was observed that this was not straightforward and would entail much extra work for Richard Watson and that the staff would have to formally agree to the new arrangements.

17.18 MG advised that the Pre-School Committee had agreed that the security issues with the existing fencing was best dealt with by installing higher fencing. It was also considering the possibility of installing CCTV. TR said that he had been in contact with Watford Council's Safety Officer. It was likely that the Council would offer assistance e.g. by installing the fence purchased by Pre-School.

e. Climate Emergency

17.19 RC reported that the CE Committee's focus was on planning climate-related services for 24 September. The speakers would be Martin and Margot Hodson, authors of *A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues*, studied by some of the Connect Groups. The morning service would be attended by the Deputy Mayor and the Diocesan Environment Officer who would present the bronze and silver ECO Church awards to St Mary's. The evening Encounter service would include a question and answer panel, including Ian Stotesbury, a LibDem Councillor who had lead responsibility for environmental matters within Watford Borough Council. There would also be a lunch with Dean Russell MP.

f. Missions

17.20 There was nothing to report.

g. Health & safety

17.21 There was nothing to report.

18. Deanery Synod

18.1 Deanery Synod had not met.

19. Staffing

19.1 ER presented her report about the Facility Manager's working hours to the Council. She proposed that of the three possibilities considered, term-time working was the only practical option. This was seconded by MJ and agreed unanimously by the Council.

19.2 The Council noted that another staffing issue had arisen and been resolved. The Council agreed that the Standing Committee could authorise any expenditure on external assistance should the situation recur.

20. Policies

20.1 LG referred to the action point outstanding from January to update the draft Livestreaming policy and bring it forward for adoption as required. She said that following the installation of the new AV system the Council needed to decide about whether St Mary's would be livestreaming services. PD confirmed the AV system had the capability but for now we had decided to continue with Zoomed services. LG was concerned to ensure that whether services were Livestreamed or Zoomed, children present or taking part at the front were not filmed. She undertook to communicate this to the AV Team.

Action: LG to advise AV Team not to film children during services.

21. Vicar's Report

21.1 Among other highlights, TR reported that the Founders' Day services for Watford Boys' and Girls' Grammar Schools had gone well; that he had attended interfaith events at Lambeth Palace and Luton; shadowed Dean Russell MP at Parliament; attended a week's silent retreat; and led prayers at Watford Town Hall for Armed Forces Day. TR said he was intending to invite New Hope's Chaplain to speak at a future CAKE.

22. Any other business

22.1 TE explained she would be arranging to speak with the Mayor, Peter Taylor, about the problem of the lack of car parking facilities at St Mary's and invited Council members to email her with any ideas they might have so that these could be fed into the discussion.

22.2 TR reminded the Council of Cath da Costa's priesting and David Scourfield's ordination, respectively on 30 June and 1 July. The Council approved a gift for Dave Scourfield and discussed gifts for certain other people's occasions.

22.3 DC asked for and received advice about several issues regarding the new worship group, including safeguarding.

23. Date of next meeting

23.1 The next Council meeting will take place at 7.30pm on 17 July 2023.

The meeting closed at 10.20pm with the *Living God's Love* prayer.

Marcus Jones
PCC Secretary