



Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2024 at 7.30pm

Present:

Rev. Tony Rindl (TR) - Chair
Eileen Roby (ER) – Churchwarden & Vice Chair
Peter Dean (PD) – Churchwarden
Daniella Clinton (DC)
Tilly Elliott (TE)
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)
Cathy Honeyman (CH)
Gill Watson (GW)
Martin Whittick (MW)
Anthony Wilson (AW) – Joint Treasurer (On Zoom for Agenda Item 10.b only)
Marcus Jones (MJ) - PCC Secretary

1. Opening Prayer

1.1 MG opened the meeting with a reading from Matthew 25.14-30 and a prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

2.1 Apologies were received from Roger Courtney (RC) and Lesley Gray (LG).

3. Conflict of Interest

3.1. None declared.

4. Approval of the Minutes of 27 November & 3 December 2023

4.1 MW proposed that the minutes of 27 November 2023 be accepted. This was seconded by MG and approved unanimously by the Council.

4.2 ER proposed that the minutes of 3 December 2023 be accepted. This was seconded by GW and approved unanimously by the Council.

5 Matters arising

a. Problems with the sound system

- 5.1 PD reported that more use of the system was necessary, especially with the radio microphones, before we could identify what we needed to ask CAV. Problems tended to arise when we were doing something different such as the Climate Change service, and CAV had previously been unable to replicate these when examining the AV system.
- 5.2 PD also considered that readers, preachers, service leaders etc would benefit from a training session in using the microphones. He was supported by other Council members who added that people tended to speak too fast and failed to enunciate. TR considered this was best be done by CAV themselves. Others pointed out that technical training in the use of microphones was different from learning to speak clearly into microphones and, in any event, there could be difficulties because those who were working might not be able to attend any training that CAV put on during working hours.
- 5.3 It was agreed that PD would ask Phil Hunter (PH) to arrange for CAV to look at the sound system again to see if it could be further improved; and to ask them what training they might be able to offer to readers etc. If they were unable to do so, we could provide a training session ourselves, which MJ undertook to arrange.

Action: PD to ask PH to arrange for CAV to look at further improving the sound system and to ask whether they could arrange any technical or practical training in using microphones.

b. Christmas Flowers

- 5.4 TE reported that there had been a good response to the appeal for donations to buy Christmas flowers. She had received £160 in donations and spent £200.

c. Christmas candles

- 5.5 TR reported that Watford Girls' Grammar School had purchased and used non-drip candles at their carol service.

d. Worship Group

- 5.6 DC said that the Worship Group had noted the Council's feedback and had been reviewing how to better engage the congregation in their style of worship. Council members shared some further ideas about this while emphasising the excellent spiritual and musical quality of the Group as a valuable addition to services.

6 Correspondence

a. Christmas services

- 6.1 MJ said he had received correspondence from two members of the congregation about the Christmas services. This expressed concerns about low attendance; the timing,

content and publicity for the services; and asked for a review to be undertaken. MJ added that he had also made some suggestions at the January Standing Committee regarding the use of recorded music.

6.2 TR and the Council welcomed the ideas put forward and shared the disappointment about low attendance. Those ideas were discussed and the following points were made:

- Christmas 2024 should be planned at the beginning of September.
- Its timing was better this year. The Nativity service and Carol service could be held on different Sundays, respectively 15 and 22 December.
- The congregation had changed over the years. Many who came showed less interest in community and did not invite their friends as a previous generation had.
- More consideration should be given to publicising services, including inviting our partner groups and use of social media. The congregation should be encouraged to invite their friends. Good publicity and high quality, enjoyable worship would give people confidence to do this.
- This kind of planning was equally applicable to other major services, such as Easter, for which planning should begin now.

Action:

- MJ to reply to the correspondence in the above terms
- TR to commence planning for Easter services

7 Safeguarding training

7.1 TR confirmed he had written to the relevant trustees and volunteers to advise them to complete their on-line training and/or provide references. Much progress had been made and he thanked those who had completed their training. There remained a small number who had begun but not yet completed their training and he exhorted them to do so.

Action: Council members concerned to complete their training

8 GDPR

8.1 There was nothing to report.

9 Health & Safety

9.1 ER said she and MW had been reviewing H&S matters. She advised that the necessary work had not been done to conform with best practice and consequently we might not be able to make an insurance claim e.g. in the event of fire. This was a serious situation. She and MW were therefore putting a plan in place to remedy this. They were prioritising the kitchen area, including the handling of the food, training the stewards in their fire warden responsibilities and ensuring notices about fire assembly points were consistent. ER undertook to report back to the Council in February. It was agreed that ER and MW would lead in this work, in consultation with TE, as appropriate.

Action: ER to report back to Council in February

10. Committee Reports

a. Standing Committee

10.1 The Council received the Standing Committee minutes of 15 January 2024.

b. Finance

i. Progress on 2022 accounts & APCM

10.2 AW reported that the 2022 accounts were being finalised. However, Myers Clark were busy with other clients' end of year accounts and would not be able to commence an audit of our accounts for 2022 and 2023 until March. Accordingly, both years would now be presented to the congregation at the May APCM.

ii. Brightwell Road

10.3 AW said he was very encouraged by the level of interest from a wide range of potential buyers. He reminded the Council that the sealed bid auction process would close on 31 January.

iii. Approval of 2024 Budget

10.4 AW explained that the Budget for 2024 had been updated and showed a forecast deficit of some £30,000. He advised the Council that it needed to view its finances on both a short term and long term basis. Clearly, the size of the deficit was concerning. He said that the Budget assumed that Brightwell Road could be sold by the middle of the year and that from 1 July 2024 the proceeds would be invested and produce some £10,000 income. It was possible, however, that it would be sold more quickly, in which case we might obtain some £15,000 from investing the proceeds. The outlook should improve somewhat in 2025 because we might obtain £20,000 from the investment for the whole year.

10.5 In addition to the sale of that property, AW said he and the Finance Committee had carefully considered other possible options to reduce the deficit:

- The Pre-School, which was a non-profit making organisation, was substantially in profit, although he recognised that some of this needed to be used e.g. to deal with the low fencing in the playground area which was a health and safety issue. Some of those profits might be used to reduce the Council's deficit.
- There were several toddler groups which used *Rock Up* in the Atria Shopping Centre at the rate of £30 per hour. They might be encouraged to use our premises because we could offer more convenient forecourt parking and a cheaper hourly rate.
- Large discounts were currently being offered to some groups hiring our rooms whose values were aligned with our own. In the longer term, the Council needed to consider reducing those discounts.
- It might also be necessary to consider whether we should keep the church open in the winter months to save on utility bills.

10.6 AW recognised that his explanations and suggestions might be uncomfortable for the Council but, nevertheless, he said he stood by the updated budget. He emphasised that if measures were not taken and deficits continued at the same scale as that forecast for 2024, our reserves of £120,000 would run out in four years.

10.7 Council members fully supported AW's approach and made several points which included the following:

- We had come a long way on improving financial governance since January 2023. We were fully up to date with our records, were in the process of selling Brightwell Road and, together with investing the proceeds, were now considering other options to increase income and reduce the deficit. We were therefore developing a long term strategy for sustainability.
- While we were not happy with the situation, all options had to be considered and we would be even less happy if we ran out of money in four years' time.
- Closing the church during the winter months might save as much as £10,000.
- Consideration should be given to hiring out the church itself on days when it is not in use as it was likely that we could hire out its large, attractive, flexible space at premium prices.
- Rather than taking profits from Pre-School, it would be better to charge it a higher rental. Pre-School might also pay for some work to be done e.g. renewed tiling in the kitchen because it would directly benefit given its regular use of that area.

10.8 TR was cautious about dispensing with discounts for charities because it could result in them ceasing to rent our space with a consequent adverse effect on income. AW clarified that he was not suggesting eliminating discounts for charities but rather reducing them over a period of time and considering each case on its merits. If a charity was doing well financially, it could afford to pay more.

10.9 It was pointed out that the process of reducing discounts to other charities had already begun. Previously we had offered a 50% discount but from 1 January we were offering 40%. Other churches offered substantially smaller discounts of around 10% and we should take note of this.

10.9 It was agreed that it would be helpful to consult with the Diocesan Local Church Income Support Officer (LCISO) who advises on increasing income from church room hires.

Action:

- MJ to send AW contact details for the LCISO.
- AW to contact the LCISO

10.10 AW proposed that the updated Budget for 2024 be approved. This was seconded by MJ and agreed unanimously by the Council.

c. Buildings

10.10 There was no report this month.

10.11 PD advised that the Buildings Committee would meet during the week commencing 29 January.

10.12 TR explained that he had twice invited Watford Councillors and officers to a site meeting to discuss the digital display board without success. He would try again to arrange a date.

Action: TR to contact Watford Councillors

d. *Pre-School*

10.13 The Council received the Pre-School Report. MG added that three quotes for fencing the play area had been received and were under consideration.

e. *Climate Emergency*

10.14. RC's *Climate Change: Note for PCC January 2024* was received by the Council. MJ explained that it gave an update on developments since the Climate Change Sunday last September on what had been done to (i) increase congregational engagement by way of encouraging lifestyle changes and (ii) to increase community engagement, primarily through the *Green Heart of Watford* initiative. He advised that the Climate Change group would be meeting in February to develop a plan for submission to the PCC about achieving ECO Gold.

10.15 MJ also explained that several local groups such as Friends of the Earth had met earlier in January to see what might be done to improve our church grounds for the community. The details were explained in RC's *Note on Green Heart of Watford* which was received by the Council. MJ said It had been planned to discuss the various ideas with Watford Borough Councillors at the site meeting to discuss the digital display board but this might not now be possible given RC's situation.

11. Deanery Synod

11.1 There was nothing to report.

12. Policies

a. *Livestreaming Policy*

12.1 TR reported that LG had drawn up a list of actions required by the policy but he and the Staff Team had yet to consider who should take responsibility for each action and to advise the individuals concerned.

Action: TR & Staff Team to consider who should take responsibility for each action and to advise the individuals concerned

b. *Review of Video Conferencing Policy*

12.2 The Council discussed the Policy and suggested amendments. It was agreed that MJ would amend the policy and send it to GW and MG to consider those sections mentioning children/parents, especially Annex A, and to LG to consider any safeguarding implications.

Action: MJ to amend policy and send to GW, MG and LG

c. *Equal Opportunities Policy*

12.3 The Council suggested some minor amendments to the policy which was then agreed unanimously.

Action: MJ to update policy

13. Mission Action Plan

13.1 MJ explained that he had circulated the Working Group's (WG) Report. He said that the WG had drawn on the points made at the Away Day for each of the 3Ps and had come up with seven draft SMART objectives, the first of which was a consultation with the congregation. The aim of this was to ensure first that everyone has a chance to contribute to the MAP process so that they feel they own it; and secondly to enhance our understanding of people's needs and what they want from the church. He said it was vital to engage the congregation more so that we have the resources to carry out the other objectives. It was also vital to get the means of the consultation right. The WG had spent a lot of time on this and concluded that in the Spring we should hold an informal buffet lunch after a morning service, along the lines of last summer's Global Lunch, to hear views. The WG could draw up a list of questions which Council members at each table could use as a basis for discussion. The Lunch would need to be well publicised in advance. The WG could review the information received, use another Global Lunch in July or so to hold a further discussion with the congregation, and then put together a programme for change for 2025-6.

13.2 The Council unanimously agreed the seven draft objectives and to take the process forward with a church lunch on 21 April.

Action: MJ to arrange for the Working Group to meet to discuss questions for the Lunch

14. Holy Communion

14.1 TR said that attendance at the 9am Holy Communion service was down to one or two people, if any. He had therefore ceased providing this service on a temporary basis and was thinking through how to provide Holy Communion at other services. One possibility was to offer it at 5.30pm on Sundays. He was thinking about experimenting with this during Lent and asking various people to share the story of their faith journey. The Council favoured this approach.

14.2 It was observed that the Noticeboards on the North and West doors, which showed Communion at 8.30am on Sundays, would need to be amended in some way (e.g. covering up that service). This would be discussed at Buildings Committee and actioned.

Action: PD to ensure Buildings Committee amend notices on the North and West doors

15. Vicar's Report

15.1 The Council *noted* the Vicar's Report.

16. Any other business

a. Prayer Ministry

16.1 MW noted that MJ had raised the issue of prayer before services at the Standing Committee on 15 January. He said that he was aware of requests for prayer ministry to be provided after the services and training would be required. TR agreed that these practices had fallen away during the pandemic and should be restored. He undertook to discuss prayer ministry in more detail with MW.

Action: TR and MW to discuss prayer ministry

17. Date of next meeting

20.1 The next Council meeting will take place at 7.30pm on 26 February 2024.

The meeting closed at 9.28pm with the *Living God's Love* prayer.

Marcus Jones
PCC Secretary

Signed:

Chair/Vice Chair [*Delete as appropriate*]

Date: