



Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 October 2023 at 7.30pm

Present:

Rev. Tony Rindl (TR) - Chair
Eileen Roby (ER) – Churchwarden & Vice Chair
Peter Dean (PD) – Churchwarden
Roger Courtney (RC)
Tilly Elliott (TE)
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)
Marcus Jones (MJ) - PCC Secretary

1. Opening Prayer

1.1 MJ opened the meeting with a reading from Ecclesiastes 3.1-8 and a prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

2.1 Apologies were received from Lesley Gray (LG), Cathy Honeyman, Gill Watson (GW) and Martin Whittick.

3. Conflict of Interest

3.1. None declared.

4. Approval of the Minutes of 25 September 2023

4.1 TE proposed that the minutes of 25 September 2023 be accepted. This was seconded by RC and approved unanimously by the Council.

5. Matters arising

a. Legacy – Updating the legator's family

5.1 MJ reported that he had advised the legator's family that the balance of the legacy would be put into the General Fund until it could be spent appropriately.

b. Staff Pay Rise 2023

5.2 MJ reported that he had advised Richard Watson (RW) of the agreed inflation rise, backdated to 1 September. RW had said this would be paid in the October payroll.

c. Problems with sound system

5.3 In response to the concerns expressed at the last Council meeting, a representative of CAV had visited the church and made changes to the system. These had considerably improved the sound quality although some issues remained. A 'foldback' speaker had been introduced in the chancel to enhance sound for the choir. In discussion, it was noted that the lectern and pulpit microphones were still not working adequately. Additionally, those at the sound desk would benefit from further training by CAV.

Action: PD to ask Phil Hunter to continue to liaise with CAV to ensure the sound problems are fully resolved

6. Correspondence

6.1 None received.

7. Safeguarding

7.1 MJ reported that the October edition of the Diocesan *Safeguarding Newsletter* had advised that churches were not covered for insurance purposes unless they had taken all reasonable precautions in safeguarding. This meant adopting best practice, including being fully compliant and up to date with the relevant training. It was therefore essential that all members of the PCC complete their training as soon as possible.

7.2 MG advised that she would be running a training course in the Church Centre on 26 October to assist those who required support. TE undertook to attend.

8. GDPR

8.1 Nothing to report.

9. Health & Safety

9.1 PD reported two incidents. The organ tuner had been unable to tune the organ because of numerous wasps in organ loft. However, none had been seen since and the problem appeared to have resolved itself. And a member of the Street Angels had slipped on the path outside the Office door and been injured. Watford Borough Council (WBC) had been reminded of its responsibility for ensuring that the path was cleaned and maintained in a safe condition. The Council *noted* these incidents.

10. Committee Reports

a. Standing Committee

10.1 The Council *received* the Standing Committee minutes of 15 October 2023.

b. Finance

i. Finance Committee

10.2 The Council received the Finance Committee (FinCom) minutes of 12 October 2023. PD advised that he was still responding to queries from Myers Clark regarding the 2022 accounts. He would be speaking to them later in the week and anticipated that they would be able to advise a date by which the accounts would be drawn up and examined. TR asked PD to report that date to MJ and him (see also section 14.1 below).

Action: PD to advise TR and MJ when the accounts will be completed

ii. Proposal for Richard Watson and Anthony Wilson to be appointed Joint Treasurers

10.3 PD proposed that the Council appoint RW and Anthony Wilson (AW) as Joint Treasurers, subject to approval of this unusual arrangement by the Diocese. It was confirmed that RW was content with that title and that his role would be to carry out the day-to-day book-keeping (in addition to drawing up the monthly financial report, annual budget etc). PD also proposed that that RW and AW be added as bank signatories. Both proposals were seconded by MJ and unanimously approved.

iii. Budget 2024: Communication with budget holders

10.4 PD advised that FinCom had already prepared a first draft of the 2024 Budget and would be refining it further at their November meeting with a view to sending it to the November meeting of the Council for discussion and approval. He confirmed that GW had asked budget holders to consider what budgets they might need for 2024 and that she had received some replies. ER thanked FinCom for its work.

iv. Brightwell Road

10.5 RC reported that the tenants had vacated the property. He was in dialogue with the agents about the return of their deposit since it was not clear whether they had paid their rent up to the time they had left. The agents had also advised that substantial refurbishment, costing up to £50,000 would be required before the property would be suitable for further rental. RC was seeking a more detailed assessment of the scale of refurbishment that might be needed and a view of what rental income the Council might expect when completed. RC said that the Council had previously been given an estimate for the sale value of the property and he had asked the agents to confirm whether this value was still the same, given current market conditions, and whether it related to the present condition of the property or its condition following refurbishment.

10.6 RC said that a new development had been New Hope's (NH) expression of interest in leasing the property. He advised that the Council were required to charge a market rent. NH had indicated that they might be prepared to undertake the refurbishment themselves although in that case RC considered that they would expect a corresponding adjustment to the rental. Putting the matter very simply, RC said that if NH spent £50,000 on refurbishment, they would want a £50,000 rebate.

10.7 It was observed that this could result in a loss of part or all of the rental income for some time, although it was likely that the cost of refurbishment would be reflected in a higher property value eventually. Consequently, there were a number of factors to consider. No decisions could be taken until we had full information from the agent. RC said that he hoped that he would be able to prepare a report for the next meeting of the Council which would provide the basis for a decision on the future of the property.

v. *Lunchtime concerts: Review and future*

10.8 ER reported that the Standing Committee had considered the future of the concerts and concluded that St Mary's should continue to offer them for the next year, that the Council should budget for a loss this year and next, while seeking to increase the audience and secure sponsorship (see section 7.6 of the Standing Committee minutes of 16 October 2023). This was *noted* by the Council. PD added that in his view the increase in attendance was likely to result in a profit over the next year. However, if it did not, there was surplus cash in the safe from concert donations prior to the pandemic which could be drawn upon. ER and PD said that it would be helpful if volunteers could assist with the concerts as this would save valuable staff time. TR said the concerts should be kept under regular review.

vi. *Appeal to the congregation*

10.9 At the request of AW and RW, the appeal had been postponed until January (see section 11.2 of the Standing Committee minutes of 16 October 2023).

vii. *Church room hires*

10.10 ER presented the revised room hire rates to the Council. It was clarified that where the Church Centre was hired on an hourly basis together with the Church, there was a flat fee of £70 for the latter.

10.11 MJ advised Council members of the Diocesan guidance *What to consider when letting church halls*, circulated by RC, which stated:

Under the various Charities Acts, any "disposal" (which will include sales or lettings) must be at full market value unless the charitable objects of the proposed user can be deemed to be parallel with the charitable objects of the parish.

MJ said that while the Council might approve the revised rates in principle, including the discounted rates, it would be necessary to consider who received discount in the light of this very precise advice and to amend the wording on the table of hire rates accordingly. For example, church members did not appear to qualify. The Council *noted* this.

10.12 Subject to that proviso, PD proposed that the Council approve the revised hire rates. This was seconded by MG and *agreed unanimously*.

10.13 RC said that, as agreed at Standing Committee, there was a need to put church room hires on a formal footing with a written policy and procedures (see sections 7.12 and 7.13 of the Standing Committee minutes of 16 October 2023). Drafts that he had prepared in 2021 had been circulated to the Council and he invited the Council to comment on these. He would then update the drafts and present them for approval at the next meeting.

Action: -Council members to consider drafts and send comments/amendments to RC
-RC to update drafts for November Council meeting

c. Buildings

10.14 The Council received the Report from the Buildings Committee.

10.15 Referring to that Report, RC said that the painting of the clock faces had proved more complex than he had imagined. A faculty was required . That process was underway and he would be seeking the Council's approval for this at the November meeting.

Action: RC to seek approval for a faculty for the painting of the clock faces at the November meeting

10.16 RC also reported that the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) had responded positively to the proposal for a digital display board but had made various comments including that the design shown resembled a mobile phone with its rounded corners. He said further investigation had revealed other designs which might be more acceptable to the DAC but he thought that, since the DAC were content in principle, the next stage was to contact WBC since this was a planning matter. Accordingly, he would do that.

Action: RC to contact WBC to seek planning advice

10.17 RC said that on 18 October, for the third time in around a year, heavy rain had caused water to come into the Church Centre by the moveable partition. An inspection by the roofing contractor after a previous occurrence had revealed no defects in the roof. The contractor had suggested that rain was bouncing off the lounge roof and entering the wall through cracks in the pointing between the flints. RC said that he was in the process of investigating what might be done. For example, a piece of carpet might be placed temporarily on that spot to prevent the rain bouncing and, if that worked, a more permanent solution might be found.

Action: RC to investigate the problem further and report back to the Council in due course

10.18 TR mentioned that he had recently noticed vegetation on the gutter of the Essex Chapel with water pooling at the base of the wall. PD added that there was a leak in the gutter at that point. RC said that this had been noted by the Buildings Committee and action would be taken.

Action: Buildings Committee to investigate problems with the gutters on the Essex Chapel

d. Climate Emergency Committee

10.19 The Council received the *Report and Plan for Gold*. RC explained this was an interim draft report submitted for information. It was due to be discussed further by the Climate Action Group who welcomed any comments from Council members. A final version of the Report would be submitted to the next meeting for discussion and approval.

Action: Council members to submit any comments to RC.

11. Deanery Synod

11.1 PD and TE reported that the last meeting of the Deanery Synod, in which the Cathedral Church of St Albans had asked parish churches how it could better support them, was not particularly helpful.

11.2 TR said that Rev. Vicki Davies had been appointed as priest at Christchurch & St Marks.

12. Policies

a. *Bullying and Grievance & Disciplinary Policies*

12.1 ER reported that she had not had time to update these policies but would do so in due course.

Action: ER to update Bullying and Grievance & Disciplinary policies

b. *Livestreaming Policy*

12.2 PD said that following consultation with CAV he had advised LG that we should pay a nominal fee to a streaming service who will re-transmit our services to Facebook and YouTube.

12.3 It was noted that the Livestreaming Policy was still in draft and the Council were awaiting a finalised version from LG.

Action: LG to finalise policy for the November meeting of the Council

c. *Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy: Memorandum of Understanding*

12.4 TR confirmed that he had looked at the Memorandum and agreed that as the Council no longer contributed to the Lead Chaplain's pay, the Memorandum had been overtaken by events and was defunct. Accordingly, the Council unanimously agreed to rescind the Memorandum.

Action: MJ to notify Pam Rastall that the Memorandum has been rescinded.

12.5 RC noted that the rental agreement with WTCC might need to be revised since it related to a room different from that which they now occupied and added that the Council also has long-term rental agreements with NH and WTRRP which would need to be reviewed.

Action: ER and PD to locate and circulate these agreements

13. Trustee details for Charity Commission

13.1 ER advised the Council that she had placed *Register of Interests* forms in the on-line PCC Folder for October 2023 and asked members to complete them. She explained that

when considering what to enter on the forms, it is for the trustee to decide whether or not a conflict exists with another party. However, the trustee is liable if they are found subsequently to have a conflict of interest that was not declared. It was therefore best to err on the side of caution and enter everything that might potentially lead to a conflict.

Action: Council members to complete a *Register of Interest* form and send to ER.

13.2 ER reported that she had yet to update the trustee details on the Charity Commission's website.

Action: ER to update trustee details on the Charity Commission's website

14. APCM

14.1 TR reported that the letter to the Bishop seeking a further postponement of the APCM had been drafted but not yet sent because the letter needed to include a date by which we would hold the APCM. We were awaiting advice from Myers Clark about when the accounts would be completed (see section 10.2 above).

15. Mission Action Plan (MAP)

15.1 MJ reported that he had circulated a *Summary of Key Points* to everyone who attended the Away Day. He had placed this and the related documents in an Away Day October 2023 Folder in the on-line PCC Folder. He advised that the MAP Working Group would meet on 6 November at 7.30pm. TR asked that it report to him in the first instance.

Action: MAP Working Group to report progress to TR

16. Minibus: Driver shortage

16.1 TE asked what could be done about the shortage of minibus drivers. This was discussed in some detail. It was noted that there are only two drivers who were often unavailable (e.g. due to work) when members of the congregation needed the minibus. It was explained that the driving licence held by older drivers meant that they were eligible to drive a minibus but licence conditions had changed with the consequence that younger drivers were not able to drive a minibus without an additional qualification. Consequently, it was more difficult to recruit younger church members as volunteers. Furthermore, escorts were needed as well as drivers to help with elderly church members. It was agreed that MG would ask a former driver to see if she might join the minibus rota again. In the longer term, more volunteers needed to be recruited and TR agreed to put notices in the weekly Mail Chimp and service sheet.

Action: -MG to approach former driver
-TR to place notices in the weekly MailChimp and service sheet

17. Sunday School: Leader shortage

17.1 MG reported that there was a shortage of leaders for Sunday School. Currently there are only two regular leaders, although a third may become available in due course.

Consequently, there was no Pathfinders group for the older children. MG said she had no solutions to the problem but wanted to make the Council aware.

17.2 In view of the lack of volunteers to help with lunchtime concerts, driving the minibus and Sunday School, TR said we needed to make this a focus at the next CAKE. It was also suggested that we hold a Volunteer Sunday to explain where we need volunteers and to encourage the congregation to serve.

Action: TR to focus on prayer for volunteers at the November CAKE.

19. Vicar's Report

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

19.2 TR added that he had also supported a church member in their *Leave to Remain* application to the Home Office and had been successful. Members of the Council expressed their appreciation and support for this work, especially in the light of the adverse treatment refugees often received from the Home Office.

20. Any other business

a. Prayers for same sex unions

20.1 MJ reported that the Bishops had recently released a *Press Notice* saying that they had approved prayers for use for same sex unions. This was a pastoral measure only and Canon Law had not changed. It would be some time before a full liturgy could be written and agreed by General Synod (see section 12.2 of the Standing Committee minutes of 16 October 2023). TR commented that this issue could be divisive in St Mary's and should be included in the Risk Register, which had not been updated in a number of years. The Council *noted* the *Press Notice*.

b. Christmas Flowers

20.2 TE explained the need to seek donations for Christmas flowers: these were expensive and last year it had cost £200 for only three displays. It was agreed that she would put a notice in the November edition of *St Mary's News* and in the weekly notice sheet from mid-November. If these notices did not produce sufficient donations, additional funding could be discussed at the November meeting.

Action: -TE to write notices for *St Mary's News* and the weekly notice sheet.
-MJ to list Christmas Flowers under Matters Arising on the next agenda

21. Date of next meeting

20.1 The next Council meeting will take place at 7.30pm on 27 November 2023.

The meeting closed at 9.05pm with the *Living God's Love* prayer.

Marcus Jones
PCC Secretary

Signed:

Chair/Vice Chair [*Delete as appropriate*]

Date: