



Parochial Church Council

Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 April 2023 at 7.30pm

Present:

Rev. Tony Rindl (TR) - Chair
Peter Dean (PD) – Churchwarden, Vice Chair
Tilly Elliott (TE)
Margaret Greenstreet (MG)
Cathy Honeyman (CH)
Abie Idris (AI) – on Zoom
Dave King (DK)
Eileen Roby (ER)
Gill Watson (GW)
Marcus Jones (MJ) - PCC Secretary

1. Opening Prayer

CH opened the meeting with a reading from Psalm 139 and a prayer.

2. Apologies for absence

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

3. Conflict of Interest

TR reminded the Council that conflicts of interest should be declared.

4. Approval of the Minutes of 27 March 2023

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

5. Matters arising

(i) *Purchase of a card reader*

5.1 TR reported that he and PD had met with Kate Ford (KF), the Diocesan Giving Adviser, who had advised about two types of card readers, one costing around £300 and the other around £400. There was a 1% commission charge on each donation but KF advised that typically card readers brought in £1,200 in additional donations each year. KF would be

bring working models to demonstrate to TR and PD after which a purchase would be made. The Council agreed that the Standing Committee could approve the purchase.

(ii) *Communications*

5.2 MJ explained that there had been difficulties and delays communicating the Council's decisions to the Finance Committee (FinCom). The Council agreed that in future GW would communicate decisions to FinCom as soon as possible after each Council meeting.

Action (ongoing): GW to communicate Council decisions to FinCom.

6. Correspondence

None.

7. Safeguarding

7.1 The Council noted LG's report in which she explained she had sought advice from the Diocesan Safeguarding Team (DST) about aspects of the current safeguarding arrangements for Sunday School. The DST had advised that these did not comply with the House of Bishops' guidance. The DST had said that an open door between the youth and children's meeting areas was inadequate: two adults must be present at all times and should this not be possible to arrange, the event must be cancelled.

7.2 MG explained the difficulty she had experienced in drawing up the Sunday School rota but said she now ensured that two adults were on duty for each part of Sunday School. MG undertook to advise the Sunday School Team of the DST's advice. It was pointed out that if there was shortage of adults, Council members were DBS checked and could be called upon. TR expressed his appreciation of MG's work in regularly managing to draw up a rota with limited resources. He emphasised the importance of abiding by the Bishops' guidance at all times and mentioned that he was still hoping the legacy of £50,000 received in 2022 might be used for children's work.

Action: MG undertook to advise the Sunday School Team of the DST's advice.

8. GDPR

There was nothing to report.

9. Committee reports

a. Finance

(i) Finance Report

9.1 The Council noted the report of the meeting of the Finance Committee (FinCom) on 20 April. PD introduced the Financial Report for the period to 31 December 2022. He explained that Jacky Faria (JF) had completed the day-to-day records for this period which had enabled the Finance Report to be completed up to the end of 2022. Gift Aid had been added to income. There was some good news in that Church/Room hires had dramatically

increased from the forecast of £3,500 to over £24,000, and monies from Sunday collections had increased. Nevertheless, overall the deficit had also increased and stood at £46,415, excluding legacies. GW added that in the annual accounts, legacies would be added to the General Fund so that it would show a technical surplus of some £5,000.

9.2 PD advised that the various restricted funds e.g. Israel, the Hardship Fund were now included in the Finance Report.

9.3 PD explained some monies received for missions had not always been paid out and there had been a surplus for a number of years. These were restricted funds but unfortunately, there was no extant record of which mission the donors had intended to support. FinCom had therefore suggested that these monies be distributed equally among the Council's list of missions. Accordingly, PD proposed that these surplus identified funds should be distributed equally to the Council's list of missions. This was seconded by TE and approved unanimously by the Council.

Action: FinCom to arrange distribution of monies.

9.4 The Council acknowledged with grateful thanks the hard work done by JF who had often worked in her own time to ensure the records were updated as soon as possible. The Council unanimously approved funds for a gift. Similarly, the Council acknowledged with grateful thanks the work of Helen Baldwin (HB) and Richard Watson (RW) who had acted respectively in supporting and consultative roles.

9.5 In answer to a question, PD explained that *restricted funds* are those where the donor had specified how the monies should be used; whereas *designated funds* are those which are given without any restriction but which the Council decides to put aside for a specific purpose: for example, a legacy for a particular project.

9.6 PD was asked whether and at what point in 2022 the reserves policy had been breached and also, given that staff wages would be substantially lower for 2023, what the new reserve figure, calculated at two months' expenditure and one month's wages, would be for 2023. PD undertook to report this to the next meeting.

Action: PD to advise the May meeting (i) whether the reserves threshold had been breached in 2022 and, if so, when and (ii) what the reserves threshold will be in 2023.

9.7 It was pointed out that Note 6 of the Financial Report might be taken as a hint that the £46,000 deficit might be covered by the £50,000 legacy. TR clarified that in fact, it would likely be covered by the Council's reserves. It was observed that there needed to be sufficient funds in the reserves to cover such a large deficit and accordingly the Council should be advised of the current figure. It was also requested that the Financial Report should include the bank balance.

Action:

- (i) PD to advise the May meeting of the sum held in the Council's reserves.
- (ii) FinCom to include the bank balance in the monthly Financial Report.

9.8 There was a discussion about who might draw up the annual accounts this year. It was suggested that perhaps JF might be able to do so with support from HB but otherwise the Council would need to pay to have this done.

Action: FinCom to look into the arrangements for drawing up the annual accounts for 2022.

(ii) Budget 2023 & consideration of proposals to reduce deficit

9.9 PD introduced the draft 2023 Budget which forecast a deficit of some £13,000 and explained that FinCom had made six suggestions to reduce that sum by increasing income and reducing expenditure.

9.10 The Council welcomed the draft Budget and recorded its thanks to RW for his initiative. This was a very helpful start but further work needed to be done. In particular, several items of expenditure had been based on 2022 figures and these needed to be increased to allow for current inflation levels. The figure for utilities appeared low given the further increase in prices in April and the cessation of government grants to consumers and needed to be revised.

9.11. It was observed that FinCom had been asked for “proposals to address the long-term deficit” rather than merely recommendations. While such recommendations were broadly helpful, the Council:

- noted that no figures were offered: these needed to be estimated in each case and incorporated into the Budget where appropriate so as to provide a firm basis for the Council to take the necessary decisions at the next meeting;
- were concerned that if legacies were automatically paid into the General Fund they could unintentionally be consumed on general expenditure; and therefore considered that legacies should go into the general fund unless or until designated for a specific purpose by the PCC which will be done on a case-by-case basis;
- expressed reservations about a church lottery;
- agreed that the minibus would likely be discontinued; and that the few people who used it should be advised accordingly; and
- agreed that the agent for Brightwell Road should be asked about the scope for increasing the rental.

Action:

- (i) FinCom to update the 2023 Budget to increase expenditure in line with inflation, where appropriate; to reconsider the estimated expenditure on utilities; and to estimate and include figures for the suggestions to increase income and cut expenditure.
- (ii) TR and PD to advise those using the minibus that its use is likely to be discontinued.
- (iii) RC to seek advice from the agent for Brightwell Road about the scope for increasing rental and to advise FinCom.

9.12 GW reported a problem that had arisen regarding the effective pay of a staff member. It was agreed that ER, in consultation with RW and others, would write a paper for the Council which set out the issue(s), examined the background, considered the legal and financial implications and made recommendations, including backdating of pay, if relevant.

Action: By 14 May, ER to write a paper as above.

9.13 TR requested that the Council consider the end of year rental refund to Watford Town Centre Chaplaincy (WTCC). He was asked about WTCC's financial situation and whether it was in surplus. TR replied that WTCC had reserves for the next two years.

9.14 At the request of Council, TR stepped aside as Chair and left the meeting in view of his conflict of interest as a trustee of WTCC. PD took the Chair.

9.15 The Council gave careful consideration to this issue. The arrangement came about when WTCC moved from Cloisters to St Mary's smaller office. (The organisation currently renting out Cloisters pays the Council some £6,000 a year). It was recognised that while under the Memorandum of Understanding with WTCC, we would normally refund the rental, we were under no obligation to do so. It appeared that in comparison with the Council's large deficit, WTCC's financial situation was more favourable. Some felt that it would be irresponsible to make the refund given our financial situation. We should not give what we had not got and it would be wrong to expect the congregation, many of whom had had under inflation pay rises, if any, to effectively make up the difference. Others observed that if we did not, it was possible that WTCC would either seek a review of the rent or cease using St Mary's offices and we would lose income. However, it was pointed out that any such loss would need to be seen in the light of the rental received from Cloisters. The Council was reminded that a similar decision had yet to be made regarding the Watford & Three Rivers Refugee Partnership and we needed to be consistent.

9.16 The Council considered a number of options. Eventually, GW proposed that the Council make no refund to WTCC for the year ending 31 December 2022 but that rent for 2023 would be set at a quarter of the current rent i.e. around £1,000. This was seconded by TE. There were seven votes in favour and one abstention. (*Secretary's note:* TR and AI did not take part. AI was temporarily unavailable on Zoom). Accordingly, this resolution was approved. It was also agreed that the congregation should be encouraged to increase their giving to WTCC at the APCM.

Action: MJ to advise Pam Rastall (PR) of the Council's decision.

9.17 TR returned and took back the Chair.

b. Buildings

9.18 The Council noted RC's report.

c. Pre-School

9.19. MG reported that the Pre-School had been inspected by OFSTED and was awaiting its formal decision.

d. Climate Emergency Committee

9.20 MJ reported that the Climate Emergency Committee was working up ideas for services during the Harvest/Creationtide period and was in the process of booking Martin and Margot Hogson for the morning service and evening Encounter Service on 24 September. TR added that the Worship For All Team would be doing a Harvest service on 1 October and that a further climate themed service later in October would be helpful.

e. Missions

9.21 There was nothing to report.

f. Health & Safety

9.22 There was nothing to report.

10. Deanery Synod

10.1 TR reported that Father David Stevenson, Vicar of St John's, had been appointed as Team Rector at St James, Bushey and would be installed on 12 July.

11. Policies

11.1 GW reported that FinCom were content with the revised draft *Use of PCC Bank Accounts Policy*. Accordingly, the Council adopted the policy.

Action: MJ to send the policy to PR.

12. APCM

(i) Postponement of presentation of 2022 accounts: Response from Bishop

12.1 TR said he had received MJ's draft letter to the Bishop, would adapt it as necessary and would send it to the Bishop shortly.

(ii) Churchwarden vacancy

12.2 The Council noted the need for a second churchwarden, especially as PD's term as churchwarden will end in 2024 and a period of handover was desirable. However, no names were put forward. It was agreed that Alison Saunders' (AS) article about a churchwarden's duties would be re-published in St Mary's News.

Action: TR to advise PR to re-publish AS's article.

(iii) PCC vacancies

12.3 There was a discussion about PCC vacancies. It was noted that AI and Clinton Dan-Jumbo had come to the end of their period of service. AI said she would not be standing again. DK advised that he would resign in advance of the APCM. It was anticipated that

there could be as many as five vacancies and TR would take the necessary action to confirm this.

Action: TR to confirm the number of vacancies.

(iv) *Draft Annual Report*

12.4 The draft Annual Report was discussed and a few errors were pointed out.

Action: MJ to correct errors and send the draft Report to PR.

(v) *APCM minutes*

12.5 MJ explained he had problems with the church acoustic and requested assistance with making a record of the APCM to ensure the minutes were accurate. It was agreed that microphones would be provided to those asking questions and that the meeting would be recorded.

Action: PD to arrange for microphones to be available at the APCM and for the meeting to be recorded.

13. New AV system: Practical issues

13.1 TR said that while he was mindful of the representations from Leah Watson and Andy Roby (see Item 10 of the meeting of 9 January 2023), the AV Team would be offered training in the new system and this would be a work in progress while the Team adapted to it. PD explained that consent would need to be given from those filmed in and around the staged area (readers, pray-ers, choir etc). It was agreed that this agenda item should be re-visited at a later date.

14. Vicar's Report

14.1 Among other highlights in the last month, TR reported he had attended a service at St Alban's Abbey on Maundy Thursday to renew his priestly vows of commitment; a lunch on Easter Monday at Holywell Lodge for some 70 Iranian Christians within the Diocese, including 10 from St Mary's; an ifta meal organised by the Muslim Youth Centre; a Rotary quiz at the Watford Holiday Inn; and the first meeting of Christians Across Watford under its new Chair, Nadia Dyatt.

14.2 TR also reported that Geert Tap from Stanborough Park Seventh Day Adventist Church had been appointed as Lead Chaplain of WTCC; and that he and the MP, Dean Russell (DR), had arranged to shadow one another.

15. Any other business

None.

16. Date of next meeting

16.1 The next Council meeting will take place at noon on Sunday 14 May 2023 and DR will be attending.

The meeting closed at 10.25pm with the *Living God's Love* prayer.

Marcus Jones
PCC Secretary