

The Governance Board
Meeting 004: 9th December 2021, via Zoom
MINUTES

Present:		Apologies
Mr Tony O'Connor (Chair)	Mr David Best	Rev Harold Agnew
General Secretary: Rev Dr Heather Morris (Convener)	Rev David Campton	
President: Rev Dr Sahr Yambasu	Mr John Clarke	
Lay Leader: Ms Hazel Loney	Mr Paul Cummings	
President Designate: Rev David Nixon	Ms Laura Griffith	
Chair of the Standing Committee of the Statutory Trustees: Mr Tom Millar	Ms Gillian Kingston	
	Rev Nigel Mackey	

In attendance: Ms Elaine Barnett (Secretary to the Board)
To present particular items of business: Ms Gillian Laney (Chief Financial Officer) – Item 7 Rev Dr Stephen Skuce – Item 9

1. Opening Prayers

Rev Nigel Mackey led the meeting in prayer.

2. Welcome and Apologies

Mr Tony O'Connor welcomed all to the meeting and apologies were received.

3. Minutes of the last meeting and matters arising

The Minutes were agreed with one minor amendment, and there were no matters arising which would not be covered by the agenda.

4. Conflicts of Interest

All ministerial members of the Board with regard item 7a.

5. General Secretary's Report

Dr Morris reported on a wide range of issues:

- 1) A draft framework for a partnership programme between the Methodist Church in Ireland (CSR), the Trussell Trust, and Christians Against Poverty was tabled. It is aimed at equipping local churches to work towards the elimination of poverty in Northern Ireland. The proposal was broadly welcomed, although it was felt clarity should be sought around any declared shared interests under our current charitable status.
- 2) Heather updated the Board on 3 matters being dealt with by the office of the General Secretary and the President's Advisory Committee:
 - a. Rev Andrew Dougherty, DS Southern District, is supporting the congregation in Sandymount through the process of change from being in the Alternating Ministry Scheme. An existing Presbyterian disciplinary matter continues to be under the remit of PCI.
 - b. an update was given on changes to Surf Project personnel
 - c. paperwork for the third aspect of the legal issue being dealt with by the President's Advisory Committee has now been received

Tribute was paid to HR Manager, Ms Gillian Skillen, for the huge amount of work she has undertaken, and gratitude was expressed for the work of the employment solicitor, Mr Mark Mason.

- 3) An issue which had been highlighted through the Charity Registration process involved the Church's Insurance. Mr Graham Hohm, an Insurance Broker, has agreed to undertake an extensive Insurance Review, and has been given permission to speak on our behalf to both Methodist Insurance and Ecclesiastical Insurance. Mr Hohm has declined remuneration suggesting that, instead, MCI might like to make a donation to the Fields of Life Charity.
- 4) A discussion document will be brought to the Governance Board in the new year aimed at fostering good conversation, at Conference 2022, on human sexuality.
- 5) Dr Morris requested the authority of the Board to draw up the Conference Allocation.

Agreed

- 6) A Conference Arrangements Committee is being formed to meet early in the new year. It was proposed that Rev David Campton be the representative from the Governance Board.

Agreed

- 7) Finally, she invited the participation of Mr Tom Millar, Chair of the Standing Committee of the Statutory Trustees, who reported that the Church's investments, through Epworth Investment Management, are now fully divested of fossil fuels.

6. Administrative Items

- a. Consequential changes to the Manual of Laws

None

- b. Chair of Safeguarding Board

Dr Morris reported that Mr Lindsay Conway has agreed to take on this role from 1st January 2022. Mr Conway, who is a member of the Safeguarding Board for NI, has just retired as Secretary to the Council on Social Witness of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI), where he had oversight of the administration of PCI Safeguarding Policy. He will receive remuneration at the equivalent of 1 day per week on a consultancy basis.

7. Finance

Ms Gillian Laney (CFO) updated the Board on progress being made with the new accounting system and the timings they are working towards:

- outline budgets for connexional funds (plus some circuits and societies) to the Governance Board in January 2022
- consolidated management accounts (to 31 December) to the Governance Board in April 2022
- detailed budgets for all circuits and societies and connexional funds by the end of September 2022 (this to allow time for training – which probably won't take place January - March when accounts are being prepared)
- consolidated audited figures (to 31 December) to the Finance sub-Committee and Audit & Assurance sub-Committee at the end of May
- consolidated figures (to 31 December) to Charity Trustees (ie the Governance Board) in early June

This timetable is dependent upon societies and circuits submitting their accounts on time. She reported that feedback from those circuits who attended a training session has been broadly positive – and those circuits will submit their balances on the new system spreadsheets. Others are being asked to send in the information as soon as possible, even on an account by account basis. The pro-formas are not to be used.

Once fully established, the new accounting system will offer a very powerful reporting tool and will be a great asset to both the connexion as a whole and to individual departments, societies and circuits. However, because it is such a complex system, the set-up process has been very time consuming with various codes needing to be created for accounts, funds, employees, investments, fixed assets etc. Gillian and the whole team were thanked and commended for all the work and commitment which has gone into it.

David Best reported that a joint meeting of the FC and AAC has been planned for 25th May which will include examination of the consolidated audited accounts.

7. a. Stipends and allowances review (*paper 004!21.12_7a previously circulated*)

Mr Paul Cummings, Chair of the Finance sub-Committee, reported on a recent review of stipends, salaries and allowances in the light of rises in the cost of living. They had sought to balance the desirability of increasing stipends with the affordability of such increases for circuits and societies, and also to consider differences in tax and benefits in the two jurisdictions. The sub-committee proposed that the rates of stipends due to come into effect in January 2022, as agreed at Conference 2021, should remain, but that ministers in Northern Ireland should receive an additional 1% Taxable Manse Expense Allowance (TMAE) from January 2022, bringing it to 9% instead of 8% of top stipend.

At their meeting they had expressed concern that the salaries for some Lay Employees are only just at Minimum Wage level, and with the expected increase in the UK minimum next April, they would fall below it. It was felt that, in any case, the Church should be paying at Living Wage level. The sub-committee were therefore proposing an increase of 1% on salaries for Lay Workers.

Proposal: that an additional increase of 1% on the Conference-approved rates at 1st January 2022 should be applied for all lay employees and that the TMEA in Northern Ireland should be increased to 9%.

Agreed

In discussion it was recognised that a more thorough review of the whole system of stipends should be undertaken, taking into account various allowances and the discrepancies between RoI and NI. There was broad agreement that it needs to be a fundamental review, whilst wanting to maintain the principle of stipend. With regard to lay employees, gratitude was expressed for the development of HR within the Church, but that paying at Minimum Wage rate does not communicate the value we place upon them.

Action: Tony O'Connor, Heather Morris and Paul Cummings to draw up terms of reference for a Working Party to undertake the review. This to be brought to the January meeting, along with suggested names for the WP.

8. Policy Reviews

Three policy documents had been circulated:

a. Governance Board Policy (*paper 004_21.12_8a Board Policy Manual Draft 1*)

In discussion, it was agreed a voting quorum should be 66% of those with no conflict of interest, with a minimum of 7 people.

Adopted - the policy was adopted with a few minor amendments which were noted by Tony for inclusion.

b. Conflict of Interest Policy (*paper 004_21.12_8b Conflict of Interest Policy*)

It was felt that a more generalised version for circuits and societies would be worth developing for introduction at a later date.

Action: Tony to draft for consideration by the Board at a future meeting.

Adopted - Tony noted a few minor changes and, allowing for those, the policy was adopted.

c. Risk Policy (*paper 004_21.12_8c MCI Risk Management Policy*)

David Best introduced this document which had already been reviewed by the General Assurance sub-Committee and Audit & Assurance sub-Committee. It was felt the policy was flexible enough to be used in the various parts of the church, but that any introduction should start with the major risk holders. David reported that training with a church rather than business focus had been already developed for use by the then Board of Ministry, Learning & Development, and that this might be used.

Adopted – the policy was adopted allowing for the minor amendments noted by David and Nigel Mackey.

9. Past Cases Review

Rev Dr Stephen Skuce updated the Board on progress of this Review, reporting that establishing the initial admin processes had taken a little longer than he had hoped, but that he and the independent chairperson, Dr Deborah Webster, had examined a case as a pilot study 2-3 weeks previously. The pilot had proved useful in shaping the review documentation to be used. However, it had raised concerns about the inadequacy of the documentation which had been received. A further sampling of more recent cases had revealed similar minimal recording of information.

Dr Webster had therefore required that changes be introduced as to how cases are recorded, with immediate effect, and this is being progressed through liaison with the Safeguarding Officer.

The aim is for a final report to Conference 2023, with an interim report for Conference 2022 being considered by the Board in March/April 2022.

10. Connexional Team Report

Dr Morris reported that the Connexional Team work on developing the strategy is progressing well and it is hoped this can be presented to the Board at the February meeting.

The Ministries Team have been exploring a potential new partnership with Cliff College with the aim of developing a variety of pathways for ministerial formation. If approved, the Ministries Team will progress this, with accountability to the Connexional Team. However, because it is a new partnership with a new partner, namely Cliff College, formal approval was being sought.

Proposal: approval in principle to proceed in the development of the partnership with Cliff College.

Agreed

11. Committee Reporting Programme (*paper 004_21.12_11 previously circulated*)

In discussion, it was agreed that the aim of the Board is to have some oversight of the governance of the various Connexional committees: how they are constituted and operating, as well as hearing the 'headlines' of their current work.

Action: Tony and Heather to review the timetable set out in the paper and to notify the committees of the proposed dates.

12. Any Other Business

Clarification was sought regarding draft Minutes of sub-Committees. It was agreed that draft Minutes should only be uploaded to the relevant sub-Committee Teams channel, with approved Minutes then being made available to the full Board.

13. Next Meeting:

13th January in Belfast

Additional 1-hour meeting by Zoom to approve the Consolidated Audited Accounts: 2nd June at 10.30am

14. Closing prayer

Mr O'Connor thanked everyone for their participation and, there being no other business, invited Rev Nigel Mackey to close the meeting in prayer.

Tony O'Connor
13th January 2022