

Chair Approved

Church Support Committee Minutes

Time: 10.30am – 2.30pm

Date: Saturday 28th September 2024

Location: Hybrid - Nottingham Office/Zoom

Attendees:

Ruth Green
Steve Richards
Ivy Barclay (Zoom)
Margaret McGuiness (zoom,
Kevin Dudman
Keith Bradley (Zoom)
Alan Kennedy
Peter Young
Joy Howell
Jan Hocking (Zoom)
Ian Jones
Anna Lachowski (Zoom)
Harry Booton

Representing:

Chair
CF in Wales
CF in Scotland (representative)
CF in Scotland (rotational)
South West Area
North East Area
North West Area/ICB Chair
South East Area
South West Midlands Area
North West Midlands Area
Eastern Area
East Midlands Area
Youth Ambassador

Staff:

Yvonne Campbell (Zoom) General Secretary
Catherine Booton L & D Manager
Maddy Varley L & D Administrator / Minutes
Neil Chappell Website and Social Media Officer
Lisa Vickers (Zoom) Safeguarding Officer

Guest:

Nigel Lindsay
Clemy Gilmore (from 11.30am)
Elisabeth Sweeny Smith (Zoom from 2.30pm)

Apologies

Nick Gleich
Eric Fenwick
Luzia Watt
Caroline Stott (President Elect)

Abbreviations:

APCCG Accreditation and Pastoral Care Coordinator Group
CC Congregational Church
CF Congregational Federation
CIPT MB Congregational Institute of Practical Theology Management Board
CSC Church Support Committee
CSW Church Support Worker
GS General Secretary

1. Opening devotions

The Chair opened the meeting with a reading and prayer.

2. Apologies

As noted above.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting (23/03/2023) (Paper B)

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

4. Matters arising not elsewhere on the agenda (Paper C)

Peter Young volunteered to become the CF representative for the Robinson's Trust.

Action:

GS to write to Robinson's Trust to confirm PY as CF Representative.

5. Notice of Any Other Business (not elsewhere on the agenda)

GS – Staffing changes.

6. Accreditation and Pastoral Care Coordinators Group

Stephen Haward has volunteered to take on the role of APCCG chair.

Nomination accepted: Unanimous

The North-West APCCG role has been filled by Rob Cross.

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The new long-service pathway for accreditation has been approved by APCCG and Council. Paper C2 is a flow chart outlining the whole accreditation process, not just for long-service accreditation. This chart can be shared with others to give clear, transparent guidance about the process.

Application forms for long-service accreditation are now available. Those who are interested in this should be encouraged to apply before the deadline of 30th November, in line with standard applications.

Agreed: Unanimous

7. Budget Papers – (Paper D)

The budget papers had been made available to the committee and the GS talked through some key points.

CIPT expenditure has increased; this is due to there being an increase in students, however as students pay their own hospitality costs the income has increased in line with this expenditure. There are some costs that are fixed regardless of the number of students, and some that are historical and unrelated to the running of the course.

There has been an increase in Safeguarding expenditure as there has been heavy investment in training. There are also increases in the cost of the ministers counselling service. This expenditure is unpredictable due to its nature, and the service is sometimes extended to the families of ministers if appropriate.

The grants income lines show almost equal income from both home donations and CWM donations through the Ministry and mission fund. Seven churches have made donations into the fund, which helps to support impact grants. The CSW will be working to encourage more churches to donate into the fund. £28,000 is forecast to come into the fund in 2025 from closed churches.

The APCCG is showing a higher expenditure than usual, however this is due to the fact that more interviews were held, and travel expenses an accommodation are covered for interviewees.

CSC costs were as forecast for the previous meeting.

The Youth and Children's lines also incorporate international projects, and therefore some of the costs of the mission trip to support NL in Grenada are included. CWM supported this visit with 40% of the flight costs, along with substantial grants towards the mission trip to Brazil, and therefore the cost to the CF has been kept to a minimum.

It was confirmed the forecasts and budgets will be increased accordingly once more youth projects are planned.

8. Impact Grants – (Paper E)

The CSW was not present at the meeting, but all papers were submitted in advance of the meeting.

The Committee was advised that there is £77,000 remaining in the grant fund, much of which will be allocated in this round of grant allocations. It is proposed that we pause applications for Spring 2025 but honour the two the CSW has already started working with.

The previous grant awarded to Corfe Castle is now not going ahead, therefore the

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remaining amount of the grant (£14,500) will be added back into this budget line. There will eventually be more funds available from closed churches in the future.

There are five impact grants to consider, and seven churches have closed which have provided the funds.

Driffield – request £18,000 over 3 years (paper J1a)

Driffield have a new minister who is also a full-time teacher. The church is seeking to create an outreach project and safe space via a community café. This will be staffed by volunteers, and the church is funding the necessary preparation work to the building in advance. The church has a 5 year plan for the project, by which time they expect it to be self-funding. The project has also been supported by the Area and other grants have been applied for.

The church membership is small, but they are well known within the community, and believe the safe space café will help to grow church attendance.

Approved: £18,000 over 3 years

Unanimous

Grassington – request £18,000 over 3 years (paper J1b)

The grant request is to fund a new post of Wellbeing and Reflection Worker to increase outreach and creating resources to deliver in schools and other community groups and businesses. Some resources would also be sold to schools and other organizations to generate income. The post would be filled by Peter Thomas who is a very experienced minister and outreach worker.

There was some discussion as to whether resources could be offered to CF churches free of charge or at reduced rates, however this will need to be confirmed at a later date and may be difficult as some of the resources need to be delivered in person.

Approved: £18,000 over 3 years

Unanimous

Southam – request £18,000 over 3 years (paper J1c)

NC declared an interest as the church minister but is not a voting member of the committee.

The grant request is for £18,000 over 3 years to fund a part-time Children and Families worker for 10 hours per week. The church has grown its outreach with children and young people through the different groups it offers. The congregation is very enthusiastic and supportive of these, but is aging and it is hoped a Children and Families Worker could help to continue relationships with the children and their families as they get older and in between the age groups and their attendance at the groups.

Approved: £18,000 over 3 years

Unanimous

Zion Miner's Chapel – Request £1000 (paper J1d)

The church have recently started to create a community garden to be used by the church family and local community groups, and are applying for a one-off payment of £1000 for benches to be used in quiet reflection spaces within the garden project.

The grants committee have enquired as to whether any further assistance is required as they will not be able to apply for another impact grant for 5 years, but this was declined. A starter grant was used towards the garden project, and therefore the church cannot apply for this again until next year.

Approved: one-off payment of £1000

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Majority
Against: 1

Stalbridge – request £15,000 over 3 years (paper not available prior to meeting)

Stalbridge started a bump - toddler group several years ago. As the children got older this evolved into Messy Church and a breakfast club, but as the children grow older the church have been looking at ways to keep them engaged and involved. The church is looking to employ a Youth Worker for 24 hours per month. The grant would fund this post for 3 years. They have a candidate in mind for the role, and they will be encouraged to contact CIPT for any relevant training, as well as engaging with the CF Youth ambassador and associated resources.

There is much enthusiasm within the church for youth work, but they do need support.

Approved £15,000 over 3 years:

Unanimous

9. Newbiggin Course

There is now one new CF student attending this external pioneering course (from Hutton Free Church). RG is a Coach on the course, and agrees that it is a very inspiring course, and would encourage others to complete it. The final CF grant of £300 has been awarded for the course fees.

10. Christian Aid (Paper G)

£1000 was raised at the National Assembly for the Malawi project.

New posters for the project were distributed to the committee and have been sent out to churches.

As we have previously agreed to prayer support alongside financial donations, an online prayer evening will be held in conjunction with Christian Aid on the evening of 5th December. An afternoon event will also take place, and more information will be provided via the CF website, social media and Refresh etc.

Action: Reps to encourage churches in their Area to donate if they can, and to join in the prayer events.

11. CWM (Paper H)

There were four people representing the CF at the quadrennial CWM assembly, including two church members, the President and the Company Secretary. There was no cost to the CF for attending this event, as CWM funded all travel, accommodation and meals.

MCI grant

We were successful in applying for a Member Church initiative grant, which has funded a large proportion of the cost of the mission trip to Brazil and the recent mission trip to Grenada. Without this financial support we would not be able to offer these mission trips.

Young People

Other work within this partnership is ongoing as we currently have a young person from Newark CC working as an intern with CWM, a young person from Union Chapel on the TIM programme and a member from Penge CC has participated in a volunteer environmental research trip to South Africa, for example. It is a great encouragement that young people are getting involved in such projects.

Report from NL (Paper H1)

NL had submitted a report regarding his mission work and there was some discussion

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about how his work in Grenada might be continued. He had hoped that local people would step forward to work alongside him and then take over the work he had been doing. Although three local people had taken over the planning and running of services, it was felt that this would not be long term. NL hoped that the seeds had been planted and change would continue gradually. While he had the opportunity to extend his mission trip, he felt that staying longer would not have any benefit.

There is an annual evaluation carried out by CWM, but this appears to be limited and results of this do not appear to create any action plans or have much impact, although NL had made suggestions for change. He felt very strongly that more mechanisms need to be put into the community to support it after a partner leaves, to ensure the work completed is sustainable.

It was suggested the GS could write to CWM outlining these concerns.

It was felt that some church members do not understand what the Ministry and Mission fund is for and how it is used. A suggestion was made that NL could work with NC to produce a podcast about his experiences to highlight the process and explain how people can get involved, or write an article for Refresh. There is the opportunity for NL to continue his mission work for up to 9 years, so he is currently considering another project in Nauru, but is waiting for further confirmation from CWM.

MSP4 Update

Clemy Gilmore introduced herself as she is heading up the discipleship project funded by CWM through the MSP4 grant.

The project is entitled 'All for Jesus, Jesus for all', demonstrating passion for ministry and care for the church.

A presentation was made to CWM when they visited the Nottingham offices recently, and they were impressed with the proposals, that aim to help churches go deeper with God.

There will be three stages to the programme delivered through 6-8 interactive sessions. Stage one – engage with the discipleship course designed to draw the church closer to God and for motivation through the Holy Spirit.

Stage two - encourages people/churches to step out in faith with God and discover where they want to take it and consider how it could be achieved.

Stage three – to respond to the previous stages by engaging with the local community in whatever way God is calling the church to do, big or small.

The project will include webinars and podcasts on subjects such as listening well. All ages should be able to engage with the project. Materials will be available in hard copy as well as online. Grant funding will be available to support projects and resources.

The course can be delivered in a variety of ways, such as Bible studies, church services or as a stand-alone full course. It is designed to be as inclusive and flexible as possible.

A pilot with 4 churches (Ladypool Road, Woodham Ferres, Haymills and Newark) is planned for early 2025. Other churches were requested to volunteer to pilot the project in different settings:

Ashby will trial the course delivered in a Sunday service

RG will work with churches to deliver the course in a rural setting

HB will look at the possibility of delivering the course online with youth.

Wimbledon was suggested to trial the course in an eco setting.

It is hoped that it can also be trialed by a Scottish and Welsh church, and these will be

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contacted in due course to find volunteer churches.

Volunteer writers for the project are also sought.

Articles will appear in Refresh and the project promoted in different ways. CG would like to attend Area Assemblies if possible and can also provide scripts for conversation starters if needed.

CG can be contacted by email at clemmy-cf@gmail.com if more details are needed, or to volunteer to get involved.

12. Area Reports (Paper I)

Wales:

Some positive work has been happening, even among smaller congregations, for example Freystrop, Bethel, where they have been supporting local farmers.

Haverfordwest has celebrated its 250th anniversary, with the minister taking up a 250 mile sponsored walk as part of the celebrations.

The Area reps have been visiting various churches, however there are sometimes issues with bilingual churches as only one of the reps is a Welsh speaker. Concerns were raised around some churches in South Wales as they are struggling but have no vision for growth. Some elderly congregations feel that they are happy as they are and do not want new members, which can be challenging.

There is no Area Worker in Wales now.

Scotland:

As with other Areas, there are concerns around aging populations, but two churches now have new ministers, which is positive.

The Roadshow is still in its planning stages, but it is hoped that a full launch will take place at the conference.

There are some ongoing issues with changes to PVG registration for volunteer workers in Scotland and these new regulations need to be met by April 2025.

Weekly online services continue, which has attracted new interest from care homes.

A request for prayer for Marion Kerr was raised.

North East Area

Area involvement has been significantly reduced, and there is now only one meeting per year, which is the summer gathering, however the Exec meets regularly online and in person, and minutes are shared with churches.

Currently nearly all churches have a minister or pastor, but there is concern that this might not remain the case.

The celebration of life for Isaac Nockels was attended by about 400 people. His family are coping well under the circumstances.

The celebration was held in a local school, and it was felt that this could be a potential venue for the assembly in 2026.

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North West:

There are issues for small congregations which have problems with buildings and finances. There is a shortage of people to lead worship. The Area does have funds available and is able to give grants to churches for a range of projects.

The Area is advertising for a part-time Church Support Worker and readvertising for a Children and Youth Worker as this post was not filled when previously advertised.

There is a new Area Secretary and APCCG rep.

The Exec meets frequently online and in person, and they try to hold meetings at the more remote churches to ensure that they are included in Area activities.

South East:

Some churches are struggling to find ministers and others have issues with their buildings. However, some have new members and new projects up and running. Many buildings are well used by other community groups such as AA and toddler groups. There is lots of work going on in local communities.

South West Midlands:

The Area usually holds three gatherings per year, but the last meeting was only represented by two churches - despite this a good and worshipful day was had by those who attended.

Some churches are going great work in the community, but this is not always translating to Sunday worship.

Online services do not work for everyone, and there is also a lack of people with the technological skills required. The committee were reminded that the sermon vault is available, and people can also access 'Worship Notes' from the URC website.

Kingswood CC in Wootton Under Edge, have asked for prayers for a local family – a young mother recently passed away following cosmetic surgery leaving 5 daughters, 3 of whom attend the church youth group and her sister attends the church.

North West Midlands

JH was recently ordained at Hay Mills. The online community continues to grow alongside the onsite services.

Marten CC has celebrated 150 years in its building and Bilston has celebrated 60 years.

There are positive initiatives across the Area, including Ministerly holding a monthly Prayer and share evening, which takes place in member's homes, and praying for the whole village by dividing the streets up and separate groups praying for specific streets.

There are issues with aging congregations, a lack of children in churches and some with building repairs needed.

Eastern

The Area enjoyed hosting the National Assembly.

The Exec had previously not met in person for several years but have met following the Assembly and are holding an Area Assembly in October.

One church is closing, but trying to do this well by passing their building to the local council so that it can be used as a community hub.

There are 4 members from Wellcome Church who have joined the CIPT FD course.

South West

All churches reported positive news, although there are issues with aging congregations, building issues, and a lack of knowledge about Congregationalism in some cases.

Beer are still working towards their safeguarding certificate, but are making progress. Corfe Castle are very enthusiastic despite their new minister not working out. KD has been called as the Minister at Cawsands.

The Area Assembly was very positive.

East Midlands

An Area Secretary and Treasurer are still sought.

There is a lot of good work taking place but some are still considering closing. Newton Burgoland has closed, and Narborough is considering closing within the next year.

Strategy

The GS thanked all the representatives for their reports and contacting all the churches. The themes for the Church Support Team strategy plan Autumn/Winter 24 include

- Aging congregations – few people to do everything
- New growth new people new members
- Lots of new children's groups
- Prayer please
- Lots of anniversary services
- Some big building refurbishments
- Question being asked a lot "How do we attract new people?"
- Highlight that CF Scotland record an online service every week!

13. Church Support Team (Papers J – J4)

Church Support Worker (Paper J1)

The CSW had submitted her report in advance of the meeting. She was not present as she was on the mission trip to Brazil.

There were no questions about the report.

Website and Social Media Officer (Paper J2)

This report had been submitted in advance, and there were no questions about this. It was confirmed that there are not many dates to fill for Life-light articles as the response has been excellent.

Safeguarding (Paper J3)

The Safeguarding Officer confirmed that there is now a new page on the CF website containing useful links to other organizations related to safeguarding.

There have been 5 applications for the role of Safeguarding Checker from the North East Area. There is only one vacancy so a recruitment process will take place. The SO thanked the Area for an excellent response.

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It was suggested that checkers perhaps checkers could cross Area boundaries to assist other Areas should there be more than one suitable candidate. The SO will look at the locations involved to see if this is feasible.

Action:

SO to look at possibility of Safeguarding Checkers to work across Area boundaries where possible.

The SO was asked if an internal in-person meeting for all Checkers could be arranged. Although annual training with 31:8 is provided, it was felt that a refresher course of internal process and the opportunity to learn from more experienced checkers would be beneficial.

Action:

SO to organize internal training event.

A question was raised regarding a church that had achieved its Safe From Harm certificate from the CF, but the fire service have claimed the building requires significant updates and investment in fire safety to be compliant with health and safety law.

The SO explained that there is a difference between safeguarding and health and safety law. The CF only has the capacity to cover safeguarding and health and safety is the responsibility of the individual church, as is any obligations within the terms of their insurance policy. She aim to make the limitations of safeguarding clearer within the policy.

Action:

SO to make clear the limitations of the safeguarding policy with regard to health and safety.

Learning and Development (paper J4)

The L&D report was submitted in advance of the meeting.

There were no questions about the report.

The L&D Manager asked Area Reps to encourage any CIPT Alumni to attend the relaunch event on 15th October. A flier for the event was distributed.

The L&D Manager confirmed the Newark CC will be trialing the new Being Congregational Course, which will be launched in early 2025.

14. Youth Report (no paper)

HB attended the URC conference as our ecumenical Youth Ambassador, and since then has visited various churches and the South West Midlands Assembly to talk about the plan to relaunch CF Youth. He has preached at Ashby twice and will attend the East Midlands Area Assembly.

HB introduced the new CF Youth mascot, Oli and showed the new logo to the committee.

The aims of the Youth Ambassador are:

- To hold youth events, mainly online
- To hold a youth assembly in the future
- To promote the Honest Church scheme from the Student Christian Union.

HB's presentations have been well received, and he has gained approval from the President Elect, whose theme is inclusion.

There was some discussion regarding the purpose and helpfulness of the Honest Church Scheme. It was explained that there is no obligation for any church to join the scheme, or to be persuaded to a certain viewpoint, but that it can help church members to start

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honest conversations and agree on the view of the church.

It was hoped that churches would be open to listening to the opinions of youth, who are often more open and honest when discussing difficult subjects. It was felt that the Honest Church Scheme could help churches to become equipped to hold such conversations and tackle preconceptions.

The Youth Ambassador hopes to raise awareness of faith by asking what people think church is and what their preconceptions are. For many young people their only church experiences have been negative, and therefore positive connections with churches from an early age are important.

The full launch for CF Youth will be coming soon, and reps were asked to raise awareness within their Areas.

The Youth Ambassador can be contacted by email on youth@congregational.org.uk .

It was discussed that representatives from churches without any children or youth could attend youth meetings in order to learn and support their community engagement. The point was made that the youth are the future of our churches and are needed for the running of churches both now and in the future.

15. CIPT Management Board (paper L)

The report had been submitted in advance by the Chair of the CIPT Management Board, but had sent apologies for the meeting.

The L&D Manager confirmed that the Chair had resigned from the board and the purpose of the Board and the way forward was being discussed. A proposal for the way forward will be brought to the next Church Support Committee.

Action:

L&D Manager to work with Chair of CIPT Management Board and Course Board to agree a proposal for the future of the CIPT Management Board.

16. Inter Church Board (paper M)

The report was submitted in advance of the meeting. There were no questions about the report.

The Free Churches Group had held a meeting after the report was submitted. The GS sent an update to the committee prior to the meeting.

Anthony Batterton has been appointed as the rep for Churches Together in Wales by the Exec, replacing Chris Gillham.

As the CF rep on the United Board, Martin Spain has submitted a report, in which he states that the military are understaffed for Chaplains and applications from Congregational ministers are welcome.

He also reported that the expected contribution for membership of the board will be raised to £1000 per year.

There was some discussion about this as it was unclear what the current contribution is, and what the contribution provides.

It was agreed that it is important that the CF is represented and has a voice, particularly

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considering that Congregationalists were founding members, but that the amount of the current contribution should be checked with the Financial Controller and discussed with the GS before a final decision is reached.

Action:

Financial Controller to provide GS with the current contribution cost.

Agreed in Principle: Majority

Abstention: 1

17. AOB

There are significant staff changes coming up, with both Mark Tucker (CFL Manager/Company Secretary) and Philip Stainer (Finance Officer/Property Manager) resigning. Philip is leaving to start a new role at the end of October, and Mark is retiring at the end of December.

Both are experienced members of staff who will be missed. These staffing gaps are likely to affect our service and output for several months while we recruit and induct new staff. Churches and Areas are asked to bear with us as we adjust to the changes.

The posts and role descriptions have been updated, with the Property Manager/Finance Assistant role becoming Part Time Assistant to Financial Controller (currently advertised), and the CFL Manager/Company Secretary role becoming Trust and Property Manager, which will be advertised next week (W/C 30/09/2024).

The GS will take on some additional responsibilities with these changes and requested prayers and patience from churches.

The Committee prayed into the situation.

A flyer outlining events for the autumn has been sent out to churches.

The President, Elisabeth Sweeney Smith joined the meeting online. She introduced herself and updated the committee on what she had been doing.

The meeting was closed in prayer.

Dates of next meetings:

Saturday 29th March 2025

Saturday 27th September 2025