**UNITARIANS IN EDINBURGH**

**Minutes: Council Meeting 12/12/23 at 7pm on Zoom**

*(Any conflicts of interest to be noted as the meeting proceeds)*

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

Present: Julie Finneran *(Convenor),* Ann Sinclair *(Acting Treasurer),* Mandy Orr, Elyse Jacks (*minute taker)*, Brian Robertson, Joan Cook

Apologies: *none*

Opening Words were provided by Brian, reflecting on hatred and the war in Gaza. Brian recited musings of British philosopher A.C. Grayling, who took further a quote from Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset: “Hatred is a sentiment which leads to the extinction of values”.

1. **Minutes of Council meeting 14/11/23**

The minutes from the previous Council meeting were agreed as correct, proposed by Julie, seconded by Ann.

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1. **Personnel Changes**

Update that Brian is standing down from Council. Council members thanked Brian for his service and respected his decision to stand down.

Further update that Hazel Jane, who is the Website Coordinator for Unitarians in Edinburgh and helps to manage and update our web content, is also stepping back from her role as she will be redirecting her energies towards her business. Hazel informed Julie that she could continue a bit of work into January. Ann confirmed that our website is operating through Squarespace. Elyse offered to stand in to help manage the web content in Hazel’s absence; Julie can also make a few tweaks if necessary. Julie will introduce Elyse to Hazel via email and they will work through what is needed.

1. **Update from Ann on roof repairs, financial position and insurance company visit:** Ann submitted a full report on the upper hall roof repairs, as well as a finance update.

The first invoice of £27,696.30 (inc. VAT) has been paid for upper hall repairs. We expect a second invoice shortly. Ann’s report reminded us that we can reclaim VAT on work done to restore the fabric of our Grade B listed building.

Site visits took place in October and November, with another visit planned for Thursday 14 December, 10AM. Euan and Ann plan to attend. The November site visit confirmed that cornicing work will be delayed until January 2024.

Our insurance company has been informed of the works and agreed to offer cover over the period. A resurvey will be taken by Williams Pitt towards the end of the work and a questionnaire is being completed.

Expecting costs for heating and electricity to go up considerably and these will need to be shared by hirers.

The monitor and stand purchase is taking place; however, Euan is waiting for sales in the new year.

There was also a brief discussion of the layout of the church, and its halls, for the new members of Council.

1. **Review of St. Mark’s policies**

Elyse and Ann were not able to fully review the policies before this meeting, but did review at the start of the year. Joan informed Council that all policies are currently set to an annual review and proposed changing the frequency of reviews. Council approved the policies listed on the website and came to an agreement that the following would be reviewed on a three-year basis: Code of Conduct Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy (with the caveat that the included register of conflict list should be reviewed on an as needed basis); the following would be reviewed on a two-year basis: Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Policy; and the Safeguarding Policy will remain reviewed on an annual basis.

A clarifying point was raised by Mandy regarding the point of contact information in the Safeguarding policy. Joan clarified that the Safeguarding Team includes longer-serving members, whereas the Leadership Team (i.e. Council) can change on an annual basis. This is why the Safeguarding Team is the point of contact in the Safeguarding Policy. Mandy proposed that ‘Leadership Team’ be changed to ‘Council’ in the Policy, as this will help people reading the policy have an understanding of what we mean. Joan confirmed that she will change this, and once changed, Council will approve the Policy.

There were two policies which were not covered in this discussion as they were not listed on the website: Bullying and Harassment Policy, and Complaints and Grievances Policy. Joan will send these to the rest of Council for review and we will confirm approval at the next meeting.

Joan requested Julie’s signature on the last page to officially sign off the new frequency of policy reviews.

Finally, Julie confirmed that the website needs updating to reflect who is currently on Council. Elyse and Mandy to send photos to be uploaded to the website.

1. **Questionnaire for ‘the Way Ahead’?**

Elyse sent the draft questionnaire for Council to review ahead of the meeting, with a more detailed review during the meeting. Julie and Joan expressed being pleased with the questions and Mandy commented that inviting survey respondents to dream about the future of St. Mark’s will inspire people to attend the facilitated meeting in January.

Elyse asked Council if there was any preference to remove questions or make optional (as the setting of the draft has most questions as obligatory to provide an answer to submit the form). Council confirmed that the questions should be changed to optional, except for any yes/no questions. Elyse will update this draft and finalise for distribution in the new year.

Council confirmed that the main channels the questionnaire will be distributed through are the Bulletin, service announcements and a handful of paper copies to be kept in the church.

There was a brief discussion regarding accessibility in the church, and the hope that the survey and facilitated workshop regarding ‘the Way Ahead’ will help address these challenges.

Finally, Council discussed the possibility of developing a separate questionnaire to be distributed to other groups utilising the church; as well as scoping the development of a survey for performers utilising the church as a venue.

Council agreed the questionnaire will be distributed at the turn of the year and give respondents 2 weeks to complete before the SMART goals workshop.

1. **New SMART goals.**

Workshop on 21st January 2024 (Note subsequently from Council is that this date will have to be amended due to the ongoing roof work) and all members and those in church will be welcome to attend.

1. **Contractor rates**

Minimum wage will increase to £11.44 next April and Ann provided Council with a list of the rates we pay our Caretaker, Cleaner, Pianist and Website Coordinator (from January, after Hazel Jane leaves, this position will be empty). There is also the Children’s Coordinator position; however this remains empty at present.

Rates for 2024 were agreed.

1. **Any Team Updates not covered already:**

**Management team**

Joan thanked Brian for his work on the negotiating and sorting the internet connection in the church, as well as all the other work he’s contributed to Council.

Other members of Council echoed this as well.

**Financial team**

Ann noted that she completed the corporation tax return and requested support on this in future. Elyse offered to assist where needed and will reach out to Ann.

**Ministry team/Pastoral team**

Julie noted that the team met last night and are sending batches of Christmas cards, and that Joan has planned some great services ahead.

**Communications team**

Julie informed Council of the personnel change regarding Hazel Jane (see Item 3). Monika is still engaging with Facebook and posting there.

1. **Upcoming social events**

There will be a ‘Christmas Coffee & Chat’ and Christmas Tree decorating on the morning of Saturday 16th December. Following our Christmas Celebration on 17th December, we will hold a special lunch in the Church after the service, as we will still not be able to access the hall.

Request from Ann to add a note to the Bulletin regarding Mrs. Weatherby’s shows on the 16th and 17th. Julie to action.

1. **Safeguarding issues**

 There were no issues to report.

1. **Any Other Competent business**

Julie noted that she conversed with Ross (who helps manage the Fringe events hosted by St. Mark’s) regarding scope for working with a producer for events, particularly during the Fringe, at a recent tea and coffee chat. This might help performers visiting Edinburgh, or are not overly familiar with the “scene” to have guidance on how and where to advertise; additionally, this could help ensure St. Mark’s has a healthy pool of events staff, which could be sourced with or via the producer, to assist with Fringe events. We could scope the possibility of linking with a young producer or person who is keen to “make their name” as a producer and publicise this on our site. Julie asked what the other Council members thought of this.

Ann commented that generally performers using St. Mark’s are self-managed; if we wanted to link with a producer, there is the risk that our rates could go up and we’d be charging more for events, particularly during the Fringe. Ann also reminded Council that the entertainment license is taken out by an individual (herself).

Mandy commented that she would be interested in having a conversation about this and we would need a feasibility study, as it may be slightly complicated and would need a well thought out approach.

Elyse agreed and suggested this could be set as an agenda item for our next meeting.

1. **Date of next meeting? Who will do next ‘words’**

Next meeting date is Monday 15th January at 7:00PM on Zoom.

Mandy will do next words.

 **Closing words by Brian**

Brian provided last words, sharing that the other word on his mind has been “revenge”. Brian quoted Francis Bacon, AC Grayling and Charles Dickens, as well. “The rage for revenge always makes bad things worse.”

*EJ*

*14/12/23*