

Chair Agreed Minutes Council Meeting 19-20 April 2024

**Minutes of the Council Meeting
19-20 April 2024
Congregational Centre, Cleaves Hall, Nottingham**

Present	Representing	Zoom	Representing
Jim Lyon	Chair	Gerry Simonis	CF Scotland
Sue Austin	Chair of FSSC	Margaret McGuinness	CF Scotland
Ruth Green	Chair of CSC	Roo MacRae	CF Scotland
Mark Taylor	President & East Mids.	(from 2.30pm Friday 19 th)	
Chris Gillham	CF Wales	Brendan Mason	CF Wales
(from 2.30pm Friday 19 th)			
Eric Fenwick	Eastern	Participant Observers	
(from 2.30pm Friday 19 th)		Yvonne Campbell	General Secretary
Ruth Leeming	North East	Mark Tucker	Operations Manager/ CFL Company
Foday Kamara	North West		Finance Section only
Hilary Biggin	North West Midlands	Gary Baker	
Chris Damp	South East	Apologies	
Caroline Stott	South West	Elisabeth Sweeney – Smith	President Elect
		Judi Holloway	South West Midlands President
		Oliver Kinchin	
		Minutes	(Friday) Sam Coleman (Saturday) Clare Edwards

Session 1 Friday 19th April

1. Welcome & Introductions

The General Secretary, Yvonne Campbell opened the meeting with readings from John 20:19-23 and 2 Corinthians 3:17, prayer and reflection.

It was noted that Chris Gillham will be arriving later in the afternoon and that Roo MacRae would join by Zoom around 2.30pm.

The Chair gave a special welcome to Ruth Leeming attending her first meeting representing the North East Area.

2. Apologies & Declarations of Interests

Apologies were noted as above.

Declarations of Interests.

There were no declarations made at this stage of the meeting.

3. Minutes of last Meeting 24-25 Nov 2023 (Paper B)

Decision: The minutes from the meeting held in November 2023 were unanimously accepted as accurate and correct.

4. Matters Arising

From Minutes of last Meeting

Update letter has been received from the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Churches in Ireland wanting not be part of MOU, no further action taken.

5. Declarations of AOB

5.1 A letter has been received from South West Area questioning the cost of Council meetings and asking why all meetings are not held in the CF Nottingham offices in line with other committees and CIPT student training.

The Chair of Council presented a PowerPoint of the recent history of decisions regarding Council meeting locations. In response to the letter, he looked at the history of Council meetings.

The meeting costings were presented as follows.

- Total cost of last 2 Council meetings approximately £10,000
- Total expenditure of CF is approximately £1.3M
- Governance cost therefore <0.1% of total expenditure
- There is no hard and fast guidance on this, but the Charity Commission investigated charities where the governance costs exceeded 20% of expenditure and research suggests a normal figure is 1% to 3%.
- Council meeting expenses for 2018 were £13,5k and 2019 £20k.

The General Secretary following 2022 Council meetings was asked to identify locations which would optimise travel for the group (council that time)

- Stoke on Trent and London were identified as the two optimal locations.
- 2023 meetings were held at these locations.

Discussions on location of future Council meetings at November 2023 meeting

- It was agreed to hold one council meeting per year in Nottingham, as the facilities in the conference centre allow people unable to travel to join on Zoom.
- It was agreed that, given that CF operates in 3 countries of the UK it would be appropriate to hold some council meetings in Scotland and Wales.
- Chair observation 1. While this is a good plan, for it to be meaningful, there needs to be some opportunity for people from Scotland/Wales to interact with council for this to be valuable.
- Chair observation 2. It may be that areas in England would like to invite council to meet in their area – this could also provide for useful interaction.
- Conclusion:
- The current cost of council meetings is a very small percentage of our overall expenditure.
- The choice of locations should be made balancing ease of access for participants with the opportunity to provide useful connection with members of CF churches from different geographical areas.
- If we want to provide a Zoom option, the Conference Centre in Nottingham has excellent facilities.

The next Council meeting in November 2024 will be held in Scotland and in, April 2025 will be held in Nottingham. After these two meetings Council agreed to review the above and decide what happens going forward.

5.2 A letter has been received from Aberdeen, Danestone Congregational Church which had been sent to all Council members advising they wish to withdraw from CF membership as of 1st April 2024.

The letter was acknowledged and noted by Council.

6. Finance & Support Services

(Paper D to D9)

6.1 Minutes of Meeting 6 April 2024

(Paper D)

Chair of FSSC, Sue Austin, presented the Minutes and the Action points.

The minutes of the FSSC meeting held on 6 April 2024 were received by Council.
(Paper D)

Eric Fenwick (Eastern Area) and Chris Gillham (CF in Wales) joined the meeting in person during item 6; Roo MacRae (CF in Scotland) joined the meeting via Zoom.

6.2 Decision Sheet item 1

Paper D2 – Finance Report

Paper D3 – Finance Strategy and Operating Deficits

Paper D4 – Congregational Federation Financial Summary Report

Paper D5 – Congregational Federation Balance Sheet

Decision:

Council received the CF Finance Report, Finance Strategy, Accounts & Balance Sheet 2023, Forecasts 2024 and 2025 Budgets - which have been noted and received by the FSSC – April 2024 (Papers D2 - D5) (one abstention on the basis that the trustee did not feel qualified to receive the accounts)

It was noted that while income from Closed Church Funds has a positive impact on CF finances it is not positive that churches are closing, and it was suggested that the wording around this be amended to reflect this.

6.3 Decision Sheet Item 2

Paper D6 – Congregational Federation, Report of the Trustees and Audited Financial Statements Year Ending 31 December 2023.

Decision: Council received the CF Statutory Accounts for 2023. (Paper D6)

6.4 Decision Sheet Item 3

Coming from the ITTB minutes in March 2024 and subsequently from the FSSC minutes in April 2024 – That the ITTB has the authority to review the process of all investments from time to time as a matter of good practice.

Decision:

The Council reaffirmed they have confidence in both ITTB and FSSC and fully support them.

Council requested that any major change in financial strategy continue to be flagged up to Council.

6.5 Decision Sheet Item 4

(Paper D7)

Congregational Federation Audit Finding Report Year Ending 31 December 2023.

Decision:

Council received the UHY audit findings report for 2023. Noting the comment regards the Trustees annual related party declarations and the recommendation from FSSC “That all CF trustees complete them annually.”

The one missing declaration was completed and returned at the meeting.

6.6 Decision Sheet Item 5

(Paper D8)

Chair of Finance Report to Assembly

There are 5 recommendations, Council requested that the previous year's fees are included to show the increase difference.

Recommendations for Assembly

- 1. That the accounts for the Year Ended 31 December 2023 are received.**
- 2. That the budget for 2025 be adopted.**
- 3. That the Assembly approves the re-appointment of UHY Hacker Young as the Federation's auditors.**
- 4. That the affiliation fees for 2025 to be £170 per church and £9.25 per member.**
- 5. Personal membership for 2025 to be £45**

Decision:

Council received the FSSC Chair report to Assembly, including the 5 recommendations above.

Action: Chair of FSSC to take Council Recommendations to Assembly.

6.7 CF Investment Performance

(Paper D9)

Council received the Investment Performance Graph.

The graph illustrates CF investment performance on total returns over the long period as this is a key financial strategy of CF. Currently, it shows that CF are within the required range in order to finance CF Core Operations.

The council asked if it would be possible for the CF Investment Performance to be compared with the performance results of similar business/charities investments. It was confirmed that the graph is not intended for that purpose and that in any case the ITTB are routinely provided with investment performance comparing against market bench markets and had recently outperformed them.

Council was informed that on a very positive note, Number 4 Castle Gate, Nottingham has been leased to a church, continuing the buildings use for Christian purposes.

The Financial Controller, Gary Baker, left the meeting.

7. Church Support Committee

(Papers E & E1)

The Chair of CSC took Council through the minutes and the report to Assembly and highlighted certain points.

Recommendations from the Minutes

7.1 The Chair of APCCG has stepped down from the role. CSC request Council assist in finding replacement. General Secretary advised the importance of the role.

Council agreed to give names of any suitable replacement to General Secretary.

7.2 Amended Wording to the Disciplinary Policy.

Below is the amended wording.

Should the Safeguarding Officer of CF become aware that someone on the Accredited Roll of Ministries is being investigated by the police for an offence serious enough to affect a DBS application they should alert the General Secretary and Chair of the APCCG. They may decide to suspend the person from the Roll of Ministries with immediate effect. Suspension is a neutral act which is undertaken to protect both the person and the church or other organisation where the person is exercising their ministry.

7.3 The following were recommended by APCCG to be accredited.

Robert Cross – Minister (Minister at Brierley Green, Buxworth)
Gwyn Davis – Minister (Minister at Clarendon Park, Leicester)
Lynn Robertson – Minister (Associate Minister at Gilfillan, Dundee)
Thander Tun – Minister (Minister at St. Hellier)
Stephane Vickers – Minister (Minister at Hay Mills, Birmingham)
Alister Weighton – Minister (Minister at Coatdyke, Airdrie)

The recommendation to accredit all 6 to the Roll of Ministries as Ministers was unanimously agreed by Council.

7.4 The increase of Starter Grants £400 to £500 (plus £250 disability supplement) and the increase of Mini Grants from £100 to £150 was **unanimously agreed by Council.**

7.5 Applications for Impact Grants

7.5.1 Hope, Bristol

Requesting £1,000 towards the cost of specialist licenses for specific missional training.

Council agreed with CSC recommendation to award this grant.

7.5.2 Corfe Castle

Requesting £18,000 over 3 years towards the costs of their new minister,

Council agreed with the CSC recommendation to award the grant on the condition that the Minister join CF training course and be involved with Area Meetings.

7.5.3 Anchor, Wandsworth

Requesting £6,000 as a one-off grant towards the cost of white goods and other equipment to start a church café and warm space.

Council agreed with the CSC recommendation to award this grant.

7.5.4 Tabernacle, Haverfordwest.

Brendan Mason and Chris Gillham declared an interest in this item and abstained from the vote.

Requesting £18,000 over two years towards the cost of their new minister's stipend.

Council agreed to the CSC recommendation to award the grant with the new minister being asked to join CF training and engage with CF in Wales events.

7.6 Christian Aid Project

Council agreed with the CSC decision to support two projects consecutively. The first project runs till October 2025 is Rural Enterprise Assistance Project (REAP) Malawi; this will help households in Mulanje and Phalombe districts lift themselves out of extreme poverty and will support them as they rebuild their lives and livelihoods in the aftermath of the deadly cyclone.

All donations will be matched pound for pound by AquAid and the Africa Trusta

Kevin Dudman has volunteered to host prayer meetings for the Christian Aid projects.

7.7 Youth Representative.

Following discussions Council agreed that Harry Booton be encouraged to develop the role to connect youth in CF Churches.

Consideration needs to be made for future nominations to the role. Council asked for the title to be changed to Ambassador from Representative.

Decision:

Harry Booton is the new Youth Ambassador for the Congregational Federation.

7.8 Honest Church

Following discussion Council agreed this could be a useful tool for some churches to start a conversation.

Decision:

That details of Honest Church be included in a future issue of Intouch and Refresh. This to be a signpost, and not to be in any way promoted by CF.

Action: General Secretary to pass details of Honest Church to the Church Support Worker and Refresh Editor.

8. Pioneering Jonny Baker (Britian Hub Mission Direct)

A discussion took place with Jonny Baker around who are Pioneer Ministers, how to identify Pioneers and how the Pioneering Group can progress.

Decision: Chair of Council to talk with the Pioneer Group regarding the communication error, encouraging their work.
Timescale: as soon as possible.

9. Constitutional Changes (Paper F)

Reported at item 13.

10. Area Updates – Joys and Challenges

10.1 CF in Scotland (Margaret McGuinness , Gerry Simonis & Roo MacRae)

- Stanley Fielding and Bill Shirlow have recently gone to glory
- CF in Scotland Assembly will be held in Kirkcaldy on 1st June
- Planned a CF roadshow to visit churches
- Hawick will be closing in the next year
- Help has been given to churches on new land legislation

10.2 CF in Wales (Chris Gillham & Brendan Mason)

- Wales have a new church joining the CF at Assembly
- There has been trouble with Barclays bank closing small church accounts
- One church just opened a café in city centre Swansea
- Saddened that Wales lost 3 churches through the safeguarding policy
- President and Nigel Lindsay as CWM PIM attending Welsh Spring Assembly

Proposal – the FSSC produce a helpful leaflet about banks which are church/charity friendly.

10.3 Eastern Area (Eric Fenwick)

- Feels there isn't an area at the moment
- The Council rep keeps in touch with some of the area churches
- General Secretary has started a monthly prayer meeting with the area
- Luzia and Elisabeth Sweeney-Smith have visited some churches
- Discussion took place on how we support churches more and encouraged action from SE area to reach out to the area churches

10.4 East Midlands (Mark Taylor)

- The previous secretary stepped down and area not yet running as smoothly as it should be with the replacement secretary.

10.5 North East (Ruth Leeming)

- Looking for a venue for 2026 national assembly
- Nigel CWM PIM spoke at church in Sheffield
- Day in York planned
- Annual members meeting planned in York in July
- Area chair position is vacant but other positions are covered
- Peter Thomas at Grassington led a resources day for the area and beyond in March and also seminars on getting kids through church were held via zoom.

10.6 North West (Foday Kamara)

- New Chair David Gould
- New pastoral care representative
- Some queries about safeguarding – difficult when some churches are still working without emails
- Restarting area minister gathering
- Still looking to employ a Y&C worker
- The Likewise event had low attendance

10.7 North West Midlands (Hilary Biggin)

- 2 new Ministers
- Church news shared
- New council rep will be sought

10.8 South East (Chris Damp)

- Now have a full compliment of officers
- Thinking about whether to employ an area worker
- Church news shared

10.9 South West (Caroline Stott)

- Have 4 students on the training course
- Had lots of positive feedback from churches
- 2 churches applying for impact grants for new ministry and new youth and children's worker
- Now have a treasurer but still struggling with paying expenses and managing account
- Planning AGM

A discussion took place highlighting there are CF churches that are geographically nearer to and may engage with Areas different to their own.

Proposal from Chris Damp:

South East Area to talk about churches they would like to welcome from other Areas to support them and what that might look like.

Decision: Council agreed unanimously

Action: Chris Damp to take to next Area meeting

Timescale: At next South East Area Meeting

Session 2 Saturday 20th April

11. CF Ltd – separate minutes

12. Action Plan Review

(No paper)

The General secretary reported that following the SWOC (strengths, weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges) analysis carried out at the last meeting the Church Support Team, looking at the action plan review table which is an ongoing piece of work.

12.1. Marketing Proposal

(Paper G)

The marketing proposal outlines the steps for a goal setting workshop and draft plan in order to build a foundation for increasing CF membership.

The General Secretary asked Council for volunteers to form a working group. The Chair of Council put his name forward and suggested approaching a church who has recently joined CF and a church who are questioning the reason for paying affiliation fees.

Proposal: To nominate a working group and plan the workshop.

Decision: Council agreed unanimously.

Action: General Secretary to contact churches.

Timescale: ASAP

12.2 New Church Application

(Paper NC, NC1, NC2)

Penclawdd (CF in Wales) application for membership has been received, endorsed by CF Wales, Church Support Committee and FSSC.

Decision: Council formally agreed to accept Penclawdd into the Congregational Federation family. This was a unanimous decision.

Action: General Secretary to communicate the decision to Penclawdd church with details of the 2024 Assembly where they will be formally welcomed.

Timescale: ASAP

12.3. Archiving

The General Secretary reported that Janet Wootton's former archiving group has dissolved. Janet Wootton is happy to be involved again but will need the assistance of a small group. Part of the groups remit will be to find the archives the areas started to gather when the first group was set up.

It was noted that CF Wales archives are in the National library of Wales and CF Scotland are in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow.

Proposals from The General Secretary

12.3.1 To agree to the formation of a small archiving group to work alongside Janet Wootton.

12.3.2 To agree to reach out to a professional to obtain an archiving quote.

Proposal from Chris Damp

12.3.3 That the CF Archives will be deposited in the Congregational library, so they sit with other Congregational archives.

Decision: Council agreed unanimously to all the above proposals.

Action: General Secretary to send an email out to find volunteers for the group and to email Paul Silcoates to ask if he is willing to take on the archiving and at what cost.

Timescale: ASAP

13. CF Constitution

(No paper)

The Chair of Council, following discussions, made the following proposed changes to the Constitution:-

- *Article 2 – the principle of the church and definition of who the membership comprises of.*
- *Article 3 – the removal of any reference to building.*
- *Article 5 – the addition of the word calendar, in each ‘calendar’ year for clarification.*
- *Article 6 – Establishing a group of officers that has not been established before, such Officers as recommended by Council which would normally include the Chair of Council, chairs of key committees and the Immediate Past President.*
- *The Council comprises the Officers, The President, two representatives from Congregational Federation in Scotland, two from the Congregational Federation in Wales and one representative from each Area Association in England who shall serve as the charity trustees, In addition, The General Secretary, and a representative of Congregational Federation Limited are included as non-voting participating members. Council is empowered to invite others to meetings as deemed appropriate.*
The removal of the reference to the Youth Association and Personal Members. The Youth Association is covered by ‘Council is empowered to invite others as deemed appropriate’ and the point was made that the Personal Members group do not communicate with each or have a large enough group to have a representative on Council.
- *Article 8 - % change from 90 to 67; ‘At least 67% of the votes cast must be in favour of the proposed alteration’.*

Timetable to process proposed changes to the CF Constitution

Activity	Date(s)
Introduce proposed amendments to Assembly	May 2024
Window for feedback to Council ahead of formal process	May – October 2024
Council to Review Feedback and Potentially Amend Proposed Changes	November 2024
Proposed changes to be formally notified to churches and personal members allowing minimum 56 days before Assembly	January 2025
Changes to be discussed at Assembly	May 2025
Church Voting Period of 6 months	May 2025 – November 2025
Votes to be counted and if changes agreed to be adopted as new constitution by Council	November 2025

Recommendation: Council agree the proposed changes and the process to take the changes forward in line with the planned timetable.

Decision: Council agreed unanimously.

Action: General Secretary to send to churches in the 2024 Assembly Review.

Timescale: ASAP

Mark Taylor left the Meeting.

14. Assembly Update

The General Secretary updated Council on the plans from Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon.

Friday afternoon - talk about ministry in Art and Chess to inspire us from 2-4pm at Wivenhoe Congregational Church

Friday evening - Tour of Colchester, historic buildings associated with CH Spurgeon

Saturday - Commences at 10.00am (earlier than last year to build in more worship time) University of Essex Business Building. Assembly to be live streamed. The three people who visited Grenada are excited to share their experiences. Youth & Children Assembly also taking place.

Saturday evening meal and entertainment at Wivenhoe CC.

Sunday - Oliver Kinchin will lead morning worship at Wivenhoe CC, Elisabeth Sweeney-Smith at Tollesbury CC .

At 2pm there will be a Messy Church Fresh Expression of church service from Wivenhoe Congregational Church.

14.1 Chairs Assembly report

Council discussed the Chair's report and the need to be clear on the timetable with regards to the changes to the Constitution.

The Chair of Council amended his Assembly report, and this was unanimously agreed.

The Chair of Council regrettably advised he is unable to attend Assembly. Ruairidh MacRae and Chris Damp will be attending and will present the Chair's report including the proposed amended Constitution.

The point was made that it would be good for council members to be easily identifiable at Assembly.

Recommendation: That all Council members attending Assembly wear a lanyard with their name and that they serve on Council.

Decision: Council agreed unanimously.

Action: Admin to ensure Council Members are given a lanyard.

Timescale: At 2024 Assembly.

14.2 Assembly Future discussions

The General Secretary asked Council to think about the format and future of Assembly and raised the following points:

- Should Assembly continue to move around England, Scotland, Wales
- The Live streaming is expensive – how effective is it?
- Churches are not engaging with the Presidential nominations and President voting.

A discussion took place and points made included:

- Ask Assembly for feedback / how it can be improved.
- Always look at CF churches in the first instance as an Assembly venue – The General Secretary confirmed this is already in place however so much more is needed than the main venue. Lunches, room for stands, break-out rooms, good transport links and car parking all must be taken into consideration.

Recommendation: To put a feedback form in the Assembly bags and to use survey monkey for those attending online.

Decision: Council agreed unanimously.

Action: General Secretary to produce a feedback form.

Timescale: Before the 2024 Assembly.

15. Follow up conversations

15.1. Venue of next meeting

The next meeting of Council will be in Scotland 15/16 November 2024, venue to be confirmed nearer the time.

Eric Fenwick left the meeting.

15.2 2026 dates

The General Secretary to advise Council of 2026 dates when available.

15.3 Chair Elect

The Chair advised it would be good to start considering who might be good for the role and to have a Vice Chair in place for April 2025 to enable a handover period.

Council closed by singing the hymn Shalom My Friend.