

Church Support Committee Minutes**Time:** 10.30am – 2.30pm**Date:** Saturday 23rd March 2024**Location:** Nottingham Office**Attendees:**

Colin Brown
 Steve Richards
 Roo MacRae (zoom)
 Keith Bradley (Zoom)
 Alan Kennedy
 Peter Young
 Joy Howell
 Ruth Green
 Jan Hocking (Zoom)
 Ian Jones
 Kevin Dudman
 Ivy Barclay (Zoom)

Representing:

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

Staff:

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

Guest:

Harry Booton

Apologies

Nick Gleich
 Barbara Bridges
 Eric Fenwick
 Luzia Watt
 Anna Lachowski

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
FX	Fresh Expressions

1. Opening devotions

The Chair opened the meeting with a reading and prayer.

2. Apologies

As noted above.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting (30th September 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)

- **Reps needed** - It was confirmed that the Robinsons Trust and Christian Aid are both still seeking representatives from the CF. The GS is aware of someone who may be interested in becoming the Christian Aid Rep.
- **Pioneering** -The definition of pioneering created by the Pioneering Working Group was rejected by Council. The group have arranged for the Christian Mission Society to speak at the next Council meeting, when it is hoped that an agreement on the definition can be reached.
- **Fire Safety Training** - This training will be repeated on 3rd July. More information will follow in due course.

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

The GS had six pieces of AOB, and IJ had one.

6. Accreditation and Pastoral Care Coordinators Group

BB was not present at the meeting, but KB confirmed that the minutes from the most recent APCCG meeting were available with the CSC papers.

BB has stepped down as Chair from the group for personal reasons. There were no volunteers from the existing group to take on the role, and therefore it is for CSC to appoint a new Chair, and the situation will be discussed Council. There were no immediate names suggested, although the GS and CB have someone in mind to approach.

The role will be promoted with a clear definition provided, as the successful candidate will need to have skills and experience in pastoral care, accreditation, and disciplinary matters.

Proposal - to bring to Council and ask for support

By who – Chair of CSC

By when – April Council meeting

An update of the wording used in the disciplinary process was proposed (paper C1). It was agreed that the wording was clear and fair. It was confirmed that any suspension decisions would be made in liaison between the GS, APCCG Chair and Safeguarding Officer.

Proposal: To accept amendments to the wording in the disciplinary policy.

Agreed: Unanimously, on the understanding that the sentence ‘they should alert the General Secretary and Chair of the APCCG’ will be amended to read ‘...**and/or** Chair of the APCCG’.

A review of the Accreditation process has taken place and a report sent to Council. The proposal was presented to the APCCG and after lengthy discussions it was agreed that a new pathway for accreditation is required; however, the proposal for restructuring the group by separating the roles for accreditation and pastoral care was rejected by the group. A working group has been set up to investigate new possible processes and to understand the reasons the proposal was rejected.

The GS and CB will continue work on how this review can be moved forward.

There has been difficulty in recruiting people into the Pastoral Care team; there are pastoral difficulties within Areas and a need to encourage and support students, therefore it is important that people are inspired to get involved in pastoral care within their Area.

It was confirmed that the proposal would not require each Area to provide reps for Accreditation, but that there would be a national group who were specifically trained in the required skills. This would offer parity to all of those undergoing the accreditation process and would strengthen both the accreditation and pastoral care offerings within the Areas as the roles become more specialized. The Area would continue to have involvement in the accreditation process at the form A stage.

The following names were proposed by the APCCG to become accredited:

Robert Cross – Minister (Minister at Briery Green)

Gwyn Davis – Minister (Minister at Clarendon Park)

Lynn Robertson – Minister (Associate Minister at Gilfillan)

Thandar Tun – Minister (Minister at St Helier)
Stephane Vickers – Minister (Minister at Hay Mills)
Alister Weighton – Minister (Minister at Coatdyke)

Proposal: That all of the above are recommended to Council for Accreditation.

Agreed: Unanimous.

Action: The GS will seek clarification regarding whether the CSC Chair is required to write to those recommended to Council for accreditation to confirm the recommendation.

AOB – IJ confirmed that BB is a member of the Congregational Fund Board due to her role as Chair of the APCCG. She has stated that she is happy to continue to sit on this board if approved to do so by CSC.

Agreed: Unanimous.

The Chair thanked KB for stepping in to present the APCCG report.

Post Meeting Note:

BB has confirmed that letters are required at this stage and they have been sent.

7. Budget Papers – (Paper D)

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

The GS confirmed that the forecasts are set 12 months in advance, and therefore there are sometimes differences between the forecast and actual figures.

The Church Support Worker line shows a significant increase for 2025, this is due to allowing £25000 for consultancy work etc, which is funded by the reduction from two full time posts to one part time post in the Church Support Worker role. The increase allows for an increase and variety in the type of projects undertaken.

There is a planned increase in investment in Youth and Children's work, plus the planned trip to Brazil and the Youth and Children's Workers retreat.

Further investment is planned into the forecasts, and buffer amounts are also built in.

CIPT has seen an increase in students for this academic year, which comes with an increase in costs. The Protected Income Interest is generated from when a church is closed and sold. 90% of this income goes into the protected fund. Interest from this fund is spread across various projects including CIPT. It was observed that the overhead figure cancels out the income from the protected funds in this instance.

In 2023 CIPT spent less than was budgeted for, however there may be an overspend this year as the department has more plans to invest in development and produce quality opportunities and resources.

The Church Support General budget does not benefit from the protected programme fund interest. Meeting costs have increased as more are returning to being held in person, leading to increased travel and hospitality costs. There are similar reasons for the increase in expenditure from the ICB budget.

The Church Support Department does benefit from the protected programme funds interest. This budget includes some staff salaries and pensions.

There will be increases in expenditure on marketing, publishing and consultancy, and also Youth and Children's International Projects, which has not been used for a number of years. Forecasting in these lines has included budgeting for upcoming international trips.

The Safeguarding budget does benefit from the protected programme interest funds, but also has overhead charges. There is increased investment in safeguarding training, which now takes place every year. Specific training for trustees has also been introduced this year.

The spending on ministerial counselling has increased, and it is pleasing to see that ministers are making more use of this service.

Church Support Grants are made up from protected programme interest funds and Ministry and Mission funds. The majority of Ministry and Mission donations are now home donations, however CF do support CWM in other ways.

A question was raised with the summary report, as to why the budget for the Minister's Pension was only £98 in 2023, but significantly more in other years.

Action: The GS to seek clarification on Minister's Pensions for 2023 with the Financial Controller.

8. Impact Grants – (Paper E)

The CSW was not present at the meeting, but all papers were submitted in advance of the meeting. The GS talked through the papers. She was able to confirm that she had received thank you letters and reports (papers E6 and E7) regarding grants awarded, and expressed to the committee how much the grants are appreciated by the churches.

There is currently approximately £122,000 available for grants. The committee was reminded that this fund is made up from 10% of the income generated from closed churches plus Ministry and Mission funds.

There are two amendments required to paper E2:

- The Area for Isle of Sheppey needs to be changed to South East Area.
- The entry of £36,000 for CREDITON is an error and should read £18,000 each for CREDITON and HAY MILLS.

Action: The GS to ensure that these errors are corrected in liaison with the Financial Controller.

Area Reps were reminded to encourage churches to apply for grants.

Mini grants of up to £100 can be used for anything related to Youth and Children, including replenishing resources.

Starter grants of up to £400 are available are available to help get new projects off the ground and reduce the financial risk for churches.

At the last CSC meeting it was proposed and agreed for the maximum amount for impact grants was increased. Mini and starter grant amounts have not been increased for around ten years. It was proposed that the maximum amount for both of these grants is increased.

Proposal: Ruth Green

For the maximum amount for a starter grant to be raised from £400 to £500, plus £250 disability supplement.

Agreed: Unanimous

Proposal: Ruth Green

For the maximum amount for a mini grant to be raised from £100 to £150.

Agreed: Unanimous

There were four applications for Impact Grants since the last meeting:

Hope Bristol (Paper E1)

The church has requested an extraordinary starter grant amount of £1000 towards the cost of specialist licenses for specific missional training as part of their church weekend away.

The church has agreed to share the resource once training is complete.

It was confirmed to the committee that this training cannot be delivered in house by CIPT, and that it is a recognized professional course. The church has researched the project and has confirmed that it would genuinely have value for the wider CF as well as their own Church.

Agreed: Unanimous

Corfe Castle (Paper E3)

The church has requested an impact grant of £18,000 paid over three years towards the cost of their new minister.

The church is doing well, and the grant application meets all eligibility criteria.

The new minister has expressed his intention to enroll on the Foundation Degree for September 2024, but has yet to make contact with CIPT. Engagement with training is a condition of a successful application.

Corfe Castle does not currently engage well with the Area but has agreed to should their grant application be successful. The Area want to offer support but need to ensure that the church and minister engage with them and CIPT.

Their church has the potential to hold Area events, and their services are available online, so can be viewed more widely.

Agreed: Unanimous

Anchor CC (paper E4)

The application is for £6000 as a one off grant towards the cost of white goods and other equipment to start a church café and warm space.

Concern was raised that the church accounts have not been made available, although bank statements have been provided, demonstrating the balances in the church accounts. It was confirmed that the issue with providing the accounts has been caused by difficulties as the church is currently without a treasurer. It is understood that they are now working with a volunteer treasurer from another church.

Receipt of the grant would be a great encouragement to the church and would allow them to continue and expand the good work they already do in the local community.

Agreed: Unanimous.

Tabernacle (Paper E5)

Colin Brown declared an interest in this application.

The church have applied for a grant of £18,000 paid over two years (£9,000 per year)

towards the cost of the minister's stipend for their new minister.

Although the church accounts shows a balance of £112,644, most of this has already been allocated towards the costs of the minister and a big building project.

There was some discussion as the Minister is considering studying for the Foundation Degree, but has been in touch with CB regarding APEL, and has not yet responded to her reply.

Agreed: Unanimous

Churches who have been in receipt of grants are encouraged to share their stories of how this has helped support and grow the church.

9. CIPT Management Board (Paper F)

The Chair of the CIPT Management Board was not present at the meeting but had submitted a report in advance of the meeting.

There were no questions about this report.

10. Inter-Church Board (Paper G)

The ICB report was submitted in advance of the meeting, however the ICB Chair wished to draw attention to the meeting he had attended the previous day with the CTE Enabling Group. The theme had been on safeguarding with presentations from 31:8, and Helen Cameron on the theological basis for safeguarding. Recordings of this conference will be available on the CTE website and a transcript of Helen's presentation are included as an appendix to these minutes.

The delayed visit to the USA has now been confirmed to take place on 5th – 8th August 2024. The trip will include a walking tour, a reception at the Boston library and the opportunity to meet up with other local Congregationalists along with some free time to explore. It is hoped that others will join the trip, and this will be promoted at Assembly etc. Participants will need to be able to fund their own travel and accommodation, plus some other costs for activities.

Committee members were also reminded of the trip to the ICF conference in Greece in May. Both trips will be promoted further once more details are available.

Helen Cameron is stepping down as moderator of the Free Churches Group and will be replaced by Tessa Henry-Robertson from the URC, from 2025.

Chris Gillham has stepped down as the CF Rep on the CYTUN committee. Papers from this meeting have been made available to the CSC (Paper G1).

The Chair of ICB is working on making their work more widely known and will be writing a report for the summer edition of the refresh magazine. Articles from various members will appear in future editions.

11. Christian Aid Project (Paper H)

The decision of which CA project to support was delayed at the last meeting in order for Reps to seek opinions from the Areas.

The SW Area offered the suggestion of supporting both consecutively, as they are not both run at the same time, and this could cover both 2024 and 2025.

Proposed: Ruth Green

Agreed: Unanimous

Action: YC to contact Christian Aid to make appropriate arrangements.

To support Christian Aid through action and prayer it was suggested by the SW Area that CIPT students could organize regular online prayer meetings, making them available for all to access, and a CF month of prayer could be hosted for each project on the CF website.

Action: KD to speak to student reps re online prayer meetings, and NC to investigate month of prayer for CF.

12. CWM (Paper I)

Rich Gascoyne and Trevor Pailing from Newark Congregational Church, and Vince Carrington from Taunton went to Grenada to work with Nigel Lindsay. They are keen to share their experience and will make a presentation at the Assembly. They are also happy to visit individual churches and Area Assemblies.

MSP4 – Clemy Gilmore has accepted the role of lead on the Discipleship project and arrangements are in their final stages. We are just waiting for the final confirmation from CWM and payments to begin again.

The CWM Assembly will be held in South Africa this year.

Onesimus Project – This is the project that is the CWM response to the legacies of slavery. Churches can apply for a grant to support research into any connection between the church and slavery, which can then be acknowledged with a plaque.

It was acknowledged that there may be opportunities to also work with the Congregational History Society, and committee members were reminded that some Congregationalists were instrumental in the abolition of slavery, so there is an interesting and varied history to research.

Archives – CWM have vast archives which are accessed by many students each year. A project has been carried out to ascertain the reason for their visits. These are varied, but one group are Met Office researchers who are using records from missionaries to help investigate climate change. The CF are hosting a trip on 15th July which includes a visit to the archives and CWM offices. Area reps were encouraged to share the details within their Areas.

13. Area Reports

Full reports had been submitted in advance, and joys and challenges from around the Areas were shared with the Committee.

North West Midlands Area: There are a lot of positives in the Area, with a couple of new ministers, and new projects bringing growth to churches. Some churches are struggling with low membership and an ageing population. The Area thanked the GS for her support.

North East Area: Changes in the constitution have been discussed. The next summer event is being planned following its success last year.

Scotland: In Scotland all churches must register their trustees. This needs to be done by April and therefore work is taking place to ensure this deadline is met.

A Scottish roadshow is being held which includes volunteers visiting different churches and taking services to demonstrate the benefits of becoming more involved with the CF in Scotland and to encourage participation.

There are a lot of positive community activities taking place.

South East Area: Nigel Lindsay sometimes joins online Area meetings which is always a joy. Most churches continue to use Zoom for services in some form, but there is also lots of encouraging work taking place in the community with warm spaces and asylum seekers etc.

A number of people from the Area have joined the FD course, and there are others considering joining for the next academic year.

Alan Argent has produced a new book on the history of Brixton Chapel, which will be available to buy at Assembly. Other churches are challenged to write their own history!

Wales: Tabernacle is celebrating its 250th anniversary this year. The new minister is embarking on a 250 mile walk to celebrate, fundraise, and promote the church.

There is sadness as some churches have ceased affiliation with the CF for various reasons, but two are partly due to the lack of safeguarding policies and certificates.

There are positives as there are areas of growth, and positive support from the Area.

South West Area: There is positive news from most churches. Some are still working towards achieving their safeguarding certificate but are being supported through the process. There are challenges, however churches are being supported and encouraged.

Area accounts are overdue due to a lack of access following the death of the Area Treasurer, but solutions are being considered, including buying in outside expertise.

North West Area: There are lots of positives despite the usual challenges.

The Area is fortunate that it is able to support churches and students with grants, and they are keen to help.

The Area Church Support Worker brings positive energy and enthusiasm. The role of Part Time Children's worker has not yet been filled, but it is hoped that this will happen in the future.

The Area is proud that it has been able to provide two CF presidents in a row! There is now a new Area Chair and other Exec members. It is hoped an Area Secretary will be in post soon.

Eastern Area: Stambourne are celebrating the 100th birthday of one of their members! There are some churches experiencing challenges with buildings and others who are seeing encouraging growth and developing new projects.

The Area is looking forward to hosting the national Assembly, but there are concerns as the admin team have not met for three years, either in person or online, due to lack of

responses.

The GS and CSW have intensified their visits and support in the Area. It is hoped that working on the Assembly together may help to reunite the Area.

South West Midlands: The Area Assembly was a positive event and ideas for working in the community were shared. There is a new Area treasurer. Some churches are facing significant challenges, and there are internal struggles which can make things more difficult. Other challenges involve the lack of volunteers as those who are willing are getting older, and younger people have less time available.

The GS thanked all the Area Reps for their reports and for keeping communication with the churches going. She highlighted the overall challenging themes from the reports as:

- Ageing membership
- Apathy
- Lack of Preachers
- Lots of reports of new members
- Need to highlight congregational tradition
- Work with Asylum seekers and Ukraine communities
- Increase in youth work and youth attendance

She reminded the committee that churches can access the resources hub for ideas for worship, and also the sermon vault if they do not have anyone available to take the service. There is a need to keep encouraging people to get involved, share testimonies and take on responsibilities.

A list of potential grants was shared (Paper L), following the recent fundraising webinar. Please contact the GS if support with grants is needed.

The Chair thanked the reps for their support. She asked the reps to remind churches that both Areas and CF are available to support.

14. Church Support Team reports (Paper J)

Church Support Worker (Paper J1)

The CSW was not present at the meeting, but she was thanked for all of her hard work. The committee were reminded of the upcoming Youth and Childrens Worker's retreat and mission trip to Brazil that have been organized by the CSW.

Website and Social Media Officer (Paper J2)

There were no questions regarding the WSMO report, however he thanked the committee for all the communication they have shared regarding events etc.

RG mentioned that she had attended the 'Try Praying' webinar that had been promoted via social media and had found it very inspiring, and something that she would like to share more widely. The GS confirmed that she had some resources available, and that churches wanting to purchase more Try Praying resources would be eligible to apply for a starter grant.

Safeguarding (Paper J3)

The Safeguarding Officer was not present at the meeting, but there was some discussion around six churches that had received letters regarding unaffiliating due to lack of movement towards achieving their safeguarding certificate.

There are approximately 20 churches still working towards their certificate and some that will come up for renewal this year.

The GS thanked all who had assisted churches in achieving or working towards their safeguarding certificate.

There is still a need for more Safeguarding Checkers in Scotland and the East Midlands Area.

It was confirmed that more safeguarding training is coming up in April. Some raised concerns that the dates for training are not published far enough in advance for people to arrange to attend. These will be published earlier in future.

Learning and Development (Paper J4)

There have been lots on new initiatives within the Learning and Development team. The Committee were introduced to Knitty, the new team mascot! This initiative is designed as a lighthearted and accessible way for the team to let others know about their activities and to promote events.

The new 2024 prospectus has been professionally printed and is now available to share with those who may be interested in our learning opportunities.

The Committee were shown promotional bookmarks which are designed to encourage and inspire people to take part in learning. These will be distributed at the national Assembly and other events.

A new online Being Congregational course is being prepared. This will be launched at the national Assembly. The course is designed to be completed over four weeks, but will be available for people to access individually, or in groups, at times convenient to them. Supporting material will be provided, and a certificate of participation will be produced on receipt of a completed feedback form.

15. Assembly (Paper K)

The national Assembly takes place on 11th May at the University of Essex, which is close to both Colchester and Wivenhoe. The event will also be live streamed, and Area reps are asked to encourage people from their Area to attend. It was suggested that people may wish to join as a church or Area group, even online, so that there is still a feeling of fellowship.

A whole programme of activities has been planned across the weekend, including 60's and 70's music for Saturday night. Additional worship has been introduced for 10.00am, with formal proceedings starting at 10.30am.

Another change is that significant church members who have passed away will be included in remembrance along with ministers who have passed away.

In 2025 the Assembly will be held in Nottingham and will continue to be held in different Areas around the country and nations each year.

16. Youth in Churches

Harry Booton was welcomed to the meeting (online) by the Chair.

HB had represented the CF at the URC Youth Assembly. He presented two

recommendations inspired by the Assembly, to the Committee.

- I. **Youth representative role** – The URC have Youth representatives for each Area or Synod. He learnt a little about how the URC Youth structure works, and proposed that the CF introduce a Youth representative role to encourage and inspire other young people and represent them within the wider CF. His ideas included hosting a monthly online session to bring together young people aged 13-25 within our churches, and to include a youth perspective within the CF. The GS confirmed that the constitution does include young people at Council, who are not currently specifically represented, and therefore there may be an opportunity for a youth representative at Council. She also confirmed that there were funds available if support was needed to establish the role and activities.

Proposal: Harry Booton – For the CF to create a Youth Representative role that would support and encourage young people, host regular online events and represent their views at Council if appropriate, and for the CF to support HB in this role.

Agreed: Unanimous

- II. **Honest Church** – Honest Church is a national initiative set up by the Student Christian Movement. The idea is to prevent any further hurt to individuals that might prevent them from engaging with church. It encourages churches to be honest about their stance on sensitive issues such as LGBTQ+ and women in church leadership. It challenges the ‘everyone welcome’ perspective that is often promoted by churches but is not necessarily true. The point is not to challenge the theology of the church, but to encourage consideration of modern issues in order for every member of the church to know where they stand, and to have an honesty to answers about sensitive issues.

A toolkit is available to support churches with the process. This is helpful in helping churches start difficult conversations. It allows the church to decide different ‘levels’ of tolerance and provides non-threatening language to help the church express their decision. A logo can be used once a church has had discussions and reached conclusions on where they stand. The logo shows people that they can expect an honest answer when asking questions.

Proposal: To present the idea of Honest Church to Council, so that this can be promoted to churches across the Areas and CF as a whole.

Agreed: Unanimous

17.AOB

- I. IJ has written a hymn ‘Anticipating Heaven – The Criminal’s Plea’, which is available on the Resources Hub. Please remember to encourage anyone who has written a hymn to share it with us.
- II. The committee were reminded of the holiday cottage at Pilton Green, which is available to ministers and church members. There are still lots of dates available for this year and Area Reps were asked to encourage people to book to ensure that we can retain this valued benefit.
- III. Keith Smith, Caretaker at the CF offices, is retiring after more than 25 years of

service. An open invitation to the lunch and celebrations for the afternoon of 17th April has been sent out to churches. There is also a memory book, and an online payment button for anyone who wishes to contribute to a retirement gift.

- IV. A sheet with diary dates for April was given to Committee members as there are lots of events taking place during the month.
- V. The Investment Board has advised that there are a number of Areas that are holding funds that should be spent, and which should be made available to churches. The GS read the amounts for each area and advised they speak with their area treasurers.
- VI. The new Joys and Challenges of Being a Deacon booklet is now available and a copy will be sent to each church.
- VII. It was confirmed that RG will remain as CSC Chair for three years, and will make the required presentation at the national Assembly.

The meeting was closed in prayer.

Dates of next meetings:

Saturday 28th September 2024

Saturday 29th March 2025

Saturday 27th September 2025