



CONFERENCE COUNCIL MEETING

held on Tuesday 13th January 2026 Via Zoom Video Conference Call

Trustees Present:	Mrs M Cowie	Chairperson
	Revd B Jarvis	Vice-Chairperson
	Mrs S Chesworth	
	Mr B Friend	
	Mr T Millar	
	Mr P Brooks	Co opted
	Mr J Ford	Co opted
	Miss J Walton	Co opted

Also in attendance:	Ms N Welch	Company Secretary
	Revd J Dunion	Spiritual Leader
	Revd B Jarratt	Deputy Spiritual Leader
	Mr C Chambers	President, New Church College
	Mr Richard Cawood	Marketing Consultant

Start time: 10.00am

End Time: 16.00pm

46	Opening Revd Jack Dunion opened the meeting with a reading from Matthew 12:18-21, followed by a prayer.	
47	Apologies – Apologies for absence were received from the Company Accountant, Paul Mehew	
48	Approve minutes Minutes from previous Conference Council meetings <i>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Conference Council Meeting held on 25th November 2025.</i> Amendments were made to include updates regarding support for Bradford New Church and the use of inclusive language in the Rules, as provided in the Committee of Ministers' report issued prior to the meeting. With these changes incorporated the minutes were approved by all present, with John Ford proposing and Sue Chesworth seconding. <i>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Conference Council Meeting held on 2nd December 2025.</i> The minutes were approved by all present with John Ford proposing and Trevor Millar seconding.	
49	Matters Arising <i>Brave Spaces</i> – A meeting has been organised for the first Brave Spaces session of the Three Councils to take place on 2nd February 2026. The following individuals have been invited to attend: Margaret Cowie (Chair), Trevor Millar (Trustee), Revd Jack Dunion (Spiritual Leader), Revd Becky Jarratt (Deputy Spiritual Leader), Robin Wooldridge (Leader of Education) and Chris Chambers (President New Church College).	

	<i>Marketing Consultant Richard Cawood joined the meeting to give a 10-minute presentation</i>	
50	Committee of Ministers <i>Digital Marketing, Social Media and Website-</i> Richard Cawood presented a report on the first phase of the Church’s digital development. He explained that the initial focus has been on establishing credibility by ensuring a consistent, professional, and welcoming presence on Facebook. Key points included: • <i>Content Delivery:</i> Over 25 pieces of content have been produced, resulting in church materials being viewed by over 1,000 people without any advertising spend. • <i>Website Development:</i> A new website is currently under construction to provide clearer access to resources, news, and a secure members' area. Richard highlighted that the formal name, “General Conference of the New Church,” can be perceived as institutional. He suggested that a working name, such as “New Church Community UK,” would better reflect a living faith community and improve online discoverability. The Conference Council expressed their thanks to Richard for his presentation. <i>Richard Cawood left the meeting.</i> The Council discussed the proposal. It was agreed that a joint meeting would be organised for the Committee of Ministers (CoM) and Conference Council to discuss a branding name for use on social media and the website. It was explicitly noted that this would be for marketing purposes only and would not affect or require changes to any legal documents. <i>Ministry Fund – Request for Additional Funding</i> The Committee of Ministers provided an update on the bespoke Capacitar facilitator training course, which is scheduled to commence in February 2026 with nine participants. It was noted that the training provider reduced the per-participant fee in recognition of the church providing the venue at Wellspring House. The Committee reported that the costs for this training, combined with other ministerial expenses (including Spiritual Direction and further study), are expected to exceed the annual fund allocation. The Council discussed the request for additional funding to cover the training and anticipated sundry expenses for the remainder of the year. <i>Resolved:</i> The Council approved an additional allocation of £3,000 to the Ministry Fund. <i>Psychometric Testing</i> The Committee of Ministers sought clarification regarding the psychometric testing included within the Standing Orders for Ordination Students (approved March 2025). It was confirmed that because these tests are commissioned by the church for the benefit and protection of the organisation, the resulting reports must be reviewed by the Spiritual Leader and Leader of Education to ensure informed oversight. While the report belongs to the organisation, it may be shared with the prospective student for their information.	RMJ

51	Tributes <i>Colin Skinner</i> - The Council paid a heartfelt tribute to Colin Skinner, Payroll and Pensions Manager, dear friend and colleague, who passed into the spiritual world on Tuesday 6th January 2026. The Council acknowledged with deep gratitude his many years of dedicated service to the General Conference of the New Church. Members shared reflections on his steadfast commitment, his wisdom in governance, and the kindness he showed to all who worked alongside him. The Council noted that his loss will be felt deeply across the community, and his legacy of faith and service remains a vital part of the Church's history. A formal tribute to Colin was included in the E-News distributed on Friday 9th January 2026. <i>John Cunningham</i> -The Council also paid tribute to John Cunningham, a long-standing and faithful member of the Church. His significant contribution to the life of the community over many years was noted with sincere appreciation. <i>Action:</i> It was agreed that a formal tribute to John Cunningham will be included in the next edition of the E-News.	BRJ
52	Spiritual Leaders Update Revd Jack Dunion provided an update regarding the ministerial support being offered to Bradford New Church. It was noted that Revd Lynne Griffiths is scheduled to visit Bradford New Church on 13th January 2026 to assess the community's needs and determine how she can provide further support. This visit follows the ongoing coordination of support from the Committee of Ministers to ensure the church's requirements are met.	
53	Safeguarding Sue Chesworth reported that she is currently managing a small number of low-level safeguarding matters. She confirmed that these are being handled in accordance with the church's safeguarding policy and that appropriate steps are being taken to resolve them.	
54	Property Update <i>Chester New Church</i> - An update was provided regarding the sale of the Chester New Church property. It was noted that the matter remains in progress. The current delay lies with the Charity Commission. However, the solicitors are actively chasing the Commission for a response to ensure the matter is resolved as soon as possible. <i>Manse at Chester</i> - The sale of the Chester Manse is still currently in progress. The matter is awaiting the completion of local searches and final enquiries by the buyer's solicitors. <i>Manse at Kearsley</i> - John Ford reported that a significant flood damage occurred at the property on Wednesday 7th January. The water ingress caused substantial damage to a bedroom, resulting in the collapse of the ceiling. John Ford is currently obtaining quotations for the necessary repairs, which must be completed to ensure the property is in a saleable condition.	
55	Constitution Revision Group (CRG) Revd Bruce Jarvis explained that the CRG met on Friday 9th January 2026 and had various things that needed to be approved by the Council.	

	<i>Membership Application forms</i> – The members of the CRG have slightly amended the application forms to improve clarity. The three updated forms are: • Application for Membership of Conference: For individuals who are not members of a Society or Group. • Application for Membership of the General Conference: For individuals who are already members of a Society or Group of the New Church. • Application for Youth Membership: For individuals between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. All membership forms are available on the General Conference of the New Church website or available from the Company Secretary. It was noted that the current forms are not welcoming to those new to the organisation as those joining via the internet. This is something to be considered at a later date <i>Ask, Seek and Find (Version 6)</i> - The document has been updated and is now available on the General Conference of the New Church website. <i>Standing Order 2: Voting Eligibility.</i> The CRG has updated Standing Order 2 to provide greater clarity on eligibility requirements. <i>Article 28: Council composition and legal compliance.</i> Revd Bruce Jarvis reported on the legal necessity of amending Article 28. Charity law requires a minimum of three Trustees; however, the current Articles of Association require six, plus a Chair and Vice-Chair. Without these specific roles filled, the General Conference cannot legally operate. Following legal advice sought by the CRG, it was suggested that the Articles be adjusted to allow the Conference to operate legally with fewer Trustees. The proposed amendment involves changing the current wording to: <i>"The Council shall consist of up to 8 members but shall be no less than 6 members, known as Elected Members, and shall include a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson. The appointment of the Elected Members to the Council shall be made by members of the General Conference at a general meeting."</i> Resolved: The wording was unanimously agreed by all present with John Ford proposing and Sue Chesworth seconding. This motion will be brought before the members at the July 2026 Annual Meeting.	
56	Purley Chase Centre Manager - Recruitment Update Natalie Welch (Company Secretary) updated the Council on the recruitment process for the Centre Manager position. It was noted that while the period leading up to Christmas was seasonally quiet, momentum has increased significantly since the start of the year. Just prior to the festive break, a promising applicant was identified. Due to time constraints, a successful initial online interview was conducted. Subsequently, the applicant visited Purley Chase Centre on 8th January for a second-stage meeting, which included a tour of the facilities and a detailed review of the financial accounts.	

	Following the success of this visit, the Council agreed to proceed with a formal offer of employment to the applicant. A further update on the outcome of this offer will be provided in due course. In the interim, recruitment agents continue their search to source and screen additional applicants to ensure a robust selection process and contingency plan.	
57	Annual Checklist Natalie Welch (Company Secretary) updated the Council on the development of a new Annual Compliance Checklist for 2026. This initiative is designed to provide all churches and societies with a clear, standardized framework for submitting their annual returns. The checklist will consolidate requirements for membership statistics, financial accounts, safeguarding confirmations, and the annual yearbook reports into a single communication to be issued every January. Natalie confirmed she is working in close collaboration with Wilf Woodhouse to synchronize the collection of Health and Safety documentation. This ensures that churches know exactly which safety records (e.g., risk assessments and fire safety logs) must be provided to Wilf and by what date. The checklist will explicitly state "what, when, and to whom" information must be returned, reducing administrative confusion at the local level. The Council expressed their full support for the implementation of this checklist and the move toward more integrated reporting.	
58	Conference Council – Recruitment of Trustees – Urgent Update The Council reviewed a draft of an urgent notice regarding the recruitment of Trustees, addressing the critical governance concerns raised in E-News 237. The Council reviewed the projected vacancy levels for the 2026 Annual Meeting. It was noted that charity law requires a minimum of three elected Trustees for the General Conference to meet its legal and statutory obligations. The notice outlines the severe consequences of failing to reach a quorum, including the risk of charity closure, the sale of assets (including Purley Chase Centre), and the redundancy of ministers and lay employees. To ensure full transparency and encourage nominations, the Council approved the draft and resolved that this communication should be sent directly to the entire membership. <i>Resolution:</i> It was agreed that the notice be distributed via email to all Members of Conference, with hard copies provided to those without email access. Distribution will also include the usual channels, Secretaries, Honorary Life Members (HLMs), and all employees. The application forms for members to become Trustees will be available on the Conference website.	NW
59	Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Process. Chris Chambers presented a draft proposal for a modernised Line Management and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Process. The Council reviewed the structure, which aims to provide consistent support and professional growth for all Conference employees. Key features of the proposed framework include:	

	• The Yearly Cycle: An adaptable annual cycle (Calendar, Financial, or Academic) to suit the specific needs of each employee's role. • Formal Reviews: A two-stage process consisting of an Annual Review (reflecting on past performance and setting strategic objectives) and a Mid-Point Review (monitoring progress and adjusting priorities). • Strategic Alignment: A requirement that all personal objectives align with the Conference Vision and its three strategic aims. • Pay and Progression: The Mid-Point Review will serve as the formal opportunity to discuss salary increments in line with the Conference Pay Policy. Implementation Plan for 2026: The Council noted the timeline for rollout, which includes: • February 2026: A mandatory briefing for all Line Managers to ensure consistent application of the new process. • Spring 2026: A mandatory briefing for all employees to communicate expectations and provide a forum for questions before the new cycle begins. <i>Resolution:</i> The Council unanimously approved the Line Management and CPD Process as presented with Phillip Brooks proposing and Trevor Millar seconding. The CPD Sub-Group was tasked with organising the mandatory briefing sessions and overseeing the initial rollout.	
60	The meeting closed with a short prayer	
	Conference Council Meeting Dates 2026 March 24th, 10am – 15.00pm – Zoom May 7th – 8th, 1.30pm at Purley Chase Centre July 28th, 10am – Hayes Board Room at the Hayes Conference Centre September 8th, 10am Zoom November 30th, 10am Zoom	