



CONFERENCE COUNCIL MEETING

held on Tuesday 24th March 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
	Mrs Janice Millar	Invited Guest

Start time: 10.00am
End Time: 16.00pm

61	Opening Revd Jack Dunion opened the meeting with a reading from Psalm 127, followed by a prayer.	
62	Welcome – Margaret Cowie welcomed Jan Millar to the meeting.	
63	Approve Minutes from previous Conference Council meetings <i>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Conference Council Meeting held on 13th January 2026.</i> The minutes were approved by all present with John Ford proposing and Phillip Brooks seconding.	
64	Spiritual Leaders Update Revd Jack Dunion provided an update and expressed his thanks to the Conference Council for commissioning the Ministry to implement the three strategic aims. He noted that this is a time for significant change; while there may be a difficult road ahead, he remains confident that the Lord is working with everyone involved.	
65	Finance Update Paul Mehew, Company Accountant, provided an update on the current status of the accounts. Payroll and Pensions - The Council reviewed three quotations from external companies to manage the payroll and pensions functions. Following a discussion regarding potential risks and costs, it was decided that the most effective approach was for Paul Mehew to incorporate these	

	duties into his core role. Paul clarified that the requirement would be approximately one full day per month. It was agreed that an internal arrangement is preferable as it ensures the Conference retains direct control over banking, payroll, and pension data rather than outsourcing to a third party. To ensure business continuity and avoid reliance on a single individual, it was further agreed that an announcement would be placed in E-News. This will seek a volunteer from the membership to be trained as a backup to support these functions if required in the absence of the accountant. <i>Action: Paul Mehew will draft something to be included in E-News</i> Society Accounts - Paul Mehew reported that he has contacted all Society Treasurers to request their year-end accounts. As part of this process, he is also identifying which Societies are currently registered with the Charity Commission. The purpose of this exercise is to ensure the Conference has a clear understanding of how each Society manages its annual accounts. This will allow Paul to identify any areas where Societies may not be meeting their filing duties or registration requirements. Where gaps are identified, Paul will provide direct guidance and support to ensure all Societies remain compliant with current regulations. <i>Revd Jack Dunion, Revd Becky Jarratt, Natalie Welch and Paul Mehew all left the meeting</i> Annual Pay Reviews - The Council discussed the annual remuneration review for the upcoming financial year. Following consideration of current economic factors and organisational budget constraints, it was unanimously agreed that all employees shall receive a 4.1% cost-of-living pay increase. It was further resolved that this increase will take effect from 1st April 2026. <i>Revd Jack Dunion, Revd Becky Jarratt, Natalie Welch re-joined the meeting</i>	PM
66	Safeguarding Sue Chesworth reported that there were no significant safeguarding incidents to disclose. She was, however, pleased to inform the Council that at the recent Ministers' Seminar, the Ministers had appointed a dedicated Safeguarding Link to the Council. This role will be held by Revd Lynne Griffiths. <i>John Ford left the meeting due to Zoom technical issues</i>	
67	Committee of Ministers Future of the Church - The Council noted feedback from the Ministers regarding the future legal structure of the Church. The Ministers requested an update on the previous suggestion to transition the Church into a Community Interest Company (CIC). It was noted that the Ministers now recognise that a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) might be a more appropriate structure for the Church than a CIC. They requested clarification on whether this option is currently being pursued and, if not, the specific reasons why. The Conference Council confirmed due to the current workload and other immediate priorities, it was decided that this matter will be formally reviewed at a later date, following the upcoming Annual Conference. Ministers' Seminar 2026 - The theme for this year's Ministers' Seminar programme is 'Unveiling the New Church'. The programme is progressing well and will include two speakers on gender identity so that Ministers can gain a better perspective on this issue. The Young People's Committee have been invited to create a video on the subject to be shown at the event.	

	CoM requested funding from Conference Council for Shannon Fitzgerald, outreach coordinator, to attend as an employee, rather than attend as one of their four invited guests. This was approved by all present. CoM Meetings The Ministers expressed a desire to improve communication channels by inviting wider representation to their next in-person meeting in November at Purley Chase. They have invited One Lay Pastor and a representative from SOLCe. The CoM requested funding to cover the costs (potentially two nights' accommodation) for both a Lay Pastor and a SOLCe representative. After discussion, the Council approved the attendance of these representatives. However, it was resolved that the specific funding and budget allocation for these expenses will be formally reviewed at the Council meeting in May. Link Ministers and Conference Council • Youth and Family Team - Revd Becky Jarratt and Sue Chesworth • Safeguarding - Revd Lynne Griffiths and Sue Chesworth • Training and Development - Revd Becky Jarratt and Sue Chesworth • Finance - Revd Clifford Curry and Company Accountant (Paul Mehew) • Purley Chase Centre- Revd Helen Brown and Purley Chase Committee • HR - Revd Christine Bank and Company Secretary (Natalie Welch) • Churches and CAM - Revd Christine Bank and Margaret Cowie The purpose of these roles is to provide the Ministers with a dedicated point of contact for discussion and collaboration in each relevant area. Safeguarding The Council discussed and formally agreed that all Ministers are required to undergo comprehensive safeguarding training. <i>Action:</i> Natalie Welch (Company Secretary) will liaise with Sue Chesworth (Safeguarding Lead) to identify the most appropriate training courses . Once selected, Natalie will coordinate the booking process to ensure each Minister attends a suitable session at the earliest opportunity.	NW
	<i>Paul Mehew left the meeting</i>	
68	Property Update <i>Chester New Church</i> - An update was provided regarding the ongoing sale of the Chester New Church property. The Council noted that there has been no change in status since the last report, as the matter remains with the Charity Commission. Solicitors are actively chasing the Commission for the necessary response to ensure the sale can proceed to resolution as soon as possible. <i>Manse at Chester</i> - The Council is pleased to report that the sale of the Chester Manse was successfully completed on 6th February 2026. The sale price was £375,000.00 <i>Manse at Kearsley</i> - John Ford is continuing the process of clearing the Kearsley Manse. The Kearsley Society have not yet decided what to do with the Manse, so at present it is not on the market.	
69	Centralised booking and Payment System The Council reviewed a recommendation report prepared by Sue Chesworth regarding the incorporation of a centralised booking and payment system into the new company website	

	currently under development. The proposal addresses the current fragmented and inconsistent management of event bookings and payments across the organisation, including those for the Youth and Family Team, Bradford, and Purley Chase. Key Points: • The current decentralised approach, using various channels like Facebook, WhatsApp, and BACS, creates significant operational, legal, and safeguarding risks due to incomplete attendee records and inconsistent data management. • The new system will mandate that all event bookings and advance payments are made directly through the website, providing a "single source of truth" for all attendance and financial data. • The developers have confirmed a one-off delivery cost of £1,500 + VAT. This represents a reduction from the initial £2,000 estimate, and the Website Project Manager has agreed to waive additional project management fees. • It is estimated that the system will save approximately 40–60 hours of administrative time annually, representing a potential efficiency saving of up to £900 per year at current event levels. <i>Resolved:</i> The Council formally approved the inclusion of the centralised booking and payment system within the new website project. Furthermore, the Council approved the additional one-off expenditure of £1,500 + VAT, payable to the website developers upon completion of the project.	
70	Purley Chase Centre Manager - Recruitment Update A promising applicant who visited the site on 8th January 2026 was formally offered the position following a successful second-stage interview although unfortunately the candidate subsequently declined the offer of employment having accepted another offer elsewhere. Consequently, the recruitment process remains open, and agents continue to source and screen new applicants to ensure a robust selection. To ensure the continued smooth operation of the Centre and allow sufficient time for a thorough recruitment process, the Council approved the appointment of Anne Gaffney to a temporary position. Anne commenced her employment on 28th February 2026 and will remain in the role until 31st August 2026. This temporary appointment is designed to support the team and ensure the Centre continues to run smoothly while the search for a permanent Manager continues. New Marketing and Media Coordinator Following a successful interview process, the Council is pleased to announce that Richard Cawood has accepted the offer of employment as the new Marketing and Media Coordinator. Richard is scheduled to begin his full-time employment on Tuesday, 7th April 2026. Revd Becky Jarratt will support Richard as his Line Manager. The Council looks forward to the expertise he will bring to the Church's digital presence and outreach strategy.	
80	Future of Non-Church Buildings (Brave Spaces Group Report) The Council received a draft discussion paper from the "Brave Spaces Group" concerning the strategic future of the Church's non-church buildings. The report explores what the Church might require from its physical infrastructure over the next 5 to 10 years as the organisation evolves.	

	Strategic Outlook: The group identified several trends that will influence property needs: • A potential shift toward fewer traditional church buildings, with occasional worship occurring in alternative venues or homes. • An increase in online global communities for prayer, Bible study, and learning (e.g., SOLCe and Logopraxis), reducing the necessity for permanent local physical footprints. • A recognised ongoing requirement for venues to host residential events for families, children, young people, and adults, as well as one-day spiritual events. The report provided a three-year average (2022–2024) for key properties to inform future decisions: • Wellspring House: Annual expenditure has averaged £39,133, against an average income of £13,967, resulting in a significant net cost to the Conference. • Purley Chase Centre: Annual expenditure averaged £311,967, with an average income of £192,533. • Residential events and ministerial meetings with overnight stays remain the primary drivers of building use; however, Conference-specific use of these facilities is categorized at approximately 13.7%. The Council noted the contents of the Draft Report and agreed on the following process for progression: 1) Wider dissemination of the draft report and request for further suggestions using an online form. 2) An evening online open meeting to answer any questions about the draft paper. 3) Deadline for further suggestions to the Report. 4) The Final Report to be ready to circulate to those attending the Annual Meeting. 5) Discussion of the Report at the Annual Meeting. Following the discussions, the matter will be up for a discussion at the AGM in July 2026, followed by an indicative vote by the Members, to determine the strategic direction for these properties. The final decision will be taken by the Conference Council. It was agreed that the Council needs to speak with the team at Purley Chase to explain the plan and the future. Margaret Cowie and Barry Friend along with Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, agreed to visit Purley Chase in person to speak with the staff. Chris Chambers will inform the staff at SOLCe. <i>Action:</i> Natalie will organise the meeting.	CC/ NW
81	Three Council Meeting In November 2025, the Conference Council agreed for a joint group comprising representatives from the Conference Council, Committee of Ministers, and SOLCe to identify organisational vulnerabilities and provide recommendations. The group met on 2 February 2026 and 2 March 2026. The following proposals were presented to the Council for discussion and approval: Line Management Training and Support The Council received and reviewed a report proposing a structured support system for personnel management, emphasising that effective management of employees is critical to ensuring all staff work towards the organisation's strategic aims. Line managers are identified as the key drivers of accountability, ensuring that agreed systems and processes are followed by all staff.	

	The proposal suggests regular support meetings to help line managers gain confidence, proficiency, and greater consistency in their roles. The group consists of Jack Dunion, Margaret Cowie, Shannon Fitzgerald, Peter Isherwood, Sue Chesworth, Becky Jarratt, Natalie Welch, and the Manager of Purley Chase (once appointed). The forum will provide facilitated peer support where managers can bring specific questions and problems to reach agreed-upon solutions. Meetings will take place bi-monthly and will be coordinated by the Baobab Centre. Resolved: The Conference Council approved for this which will run for a 1-year period. Clerk to Conference Council The Council reviewed a draft Job Description for a "Clerk to Conference Council," presented by the Brave Space committee. The role included duties such as agenda collation, minute-taking, and maintaining action/decision logs. The Council formally declined the Job Description. It was determined that a separate "Clerk" role would risk undermining the established authority and responsibilities of the Company Secretary. The Council reaffirmed the decision made in November 2025. It was confirmed that the Company Secretary holds the authority to appoint an Administrative Assistant or Secretary to support her in these duties. Any such support person will report directly to the Company Secretary to maintain a clear governance structure and avoid administrative conflict. <i>Resolved:</i> The "Clerk" proposal was declined. The Company Secretary will proceed with appointing administrative support as previously agreed.	
82	Yearbook "Reports from around the Church" The Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, drew the Conference Council's attention to the current format of the "Reports from around the Church" section within the Yearbook. It was noted that this section currently only features contributions from a limited number of committees and societies. Natalie suggested expanding this section to invite submissions from all committees and individual churches. The objective is to provide a broader overview of the active work and initiatives taking place across the entire organisation, thereby fostering better communication and connection between members. The Council unanimously approved the proposal. It was agreed that future editions of the Yearbook will actively encourage and include reports from a wider range of committees and local churches to better reflect the ongoing life and mission of the General Conference.	
83	Young People's Committee Sue Chesworth reported that Jack Ramsay has resigned from the Young Persons Committee and has officially stepped down as Chairperson. The Council records its thanks to Jack for his service. It was formally noted that Libby Jones has been appointed as the new Chairperson of the committee. Additionally, Kayleigh Walker has taken on the role of Committee Secretary.	
84	Youth & Family Team Update Sue Chesworth informed the Council that Revd Lynne Griffiths has now formally joined the Youth & Family Team.	

	The team reported that preparations for the upcoming Easter Rally are complete although it was noted that, to date, there are 7 participants booked for the event.	
85	Annual Conference 2026 Programme The Council discussed the scheduling for the presentation of the "Brave Space" report, regarding the future of non-church buildings, during the 2026 Annual Conference programme. It was agreed that the initial presentation and primary discussion of the report will take place on the Thursday of Conference in July 2026. Following the discussion, a formal members' vote will be conducted. It was decided that this vote will be taken electronically via an online platform to ensure all eligible members can participate efficiently.	
	The meeting closed with a short prayer	
	Conference Council Meeting Dates 2026 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	