



CONFERENCE COUNCIL MEETING

held on Thursday 7th May 2026 at Purley Chase Centre

Trustees Present:	Mrs M Cowie	Chairperson
	Revd B Jarvis	Vice-Chairperson
	Mrs S Chesworth	(on Zoom)
	Mr B Friend	
	Mr T Millar	
	Mr J Ford	Co opted
	Miss J Walton	Co opted
Also in attendance:	Ms N Welch	Company Secretary
	Mr P Mehew	Company Accountant
	Revd J Dunion	Spiritual Leader
	Revd L Griffiths	Minister
	Mr C Chambers	President, New Church College

Start time: 13.30pm

End Time: 18.30pm

86	Opening Revd Jack Dunion opened the meeting with a reading from Ezekiel 47, followed by a prayer.	
87	Welcome – Margaret Cowie welcomed everyone to the meeting. Sue Chesworth was joining in on Zoom and Revd Lynne Griffiths, attending for the first time, was warmly welcomed. Apologies – Phillip Brooks and Revd R Jarratt gave their apologies.	
88	Approve Minutes from previous Conference Council meetings <i>Confirmation of the Minutes of the Conference Council Meeting held on 24th March 2026.</i> A correction was required for minute 80, 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. following the changes, the minutes were approved by all present with John Ford proposing and Barry Friend seconding.	
89	Spiritual Leaders Update Revd Jack Dunion provided a comprehensive update to the Council regarding current ministerial operations and strategic progress. It was reported that the Ministers are continuing their focused development work on the implementation and roll-out of the three strategic aims. Jack explained that during the current absence of the Revd R Jarratt, crucial administrative and operational support is being provided by Revd Lynne Griffiths and Emma Daniels to maintain continuity. Other ministers have also been picking up on some related tasks.	

	He spoke of a highly encouraging trend in external engagement, with an increasing number of individuals reaching out from outside the Church. This increased connection is occurring particularly through initiatives like "Meet the Minister" with other connections coming from other organisations such as General Church, the Swedenborg Society (SS) and the Swedenborg Social Media Network (SSMN).	
90	Finance Update Paul Mehew, Company Accountant, provided an update on the current status of the accounts. Investments –Paul Mehew, informed the Council that the organisation's current Santander accounts are generating minimal interest, with the business reserve account at 2.49% and four additional accounts remaining at 0%. Following a discussion the Council formally agreed that Paul Mehew will evaluate more options and submit a formal investment proposal for Council review at the September meeting. Society Accounts - To ensure full adherence to regulatory standards, it was agreed that the Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, and the Company Accountant, Paul Mehew, will jointly produce a standardised template and a comprehensive guidance package for all societies. This resource will assist local Societies with their accounting practices, support them through the self-registration process, and ensure they are fully compliant when completing their annual returns. Budget Review - The Council noted that a comprehensive review of internal budgets had not been undertaken for several years. It was agreed that a full evaluation is now required to ensure that all current budget allocations remain adequate, realistic, and reflective of the operational needs of individual budget holders. To facilitate this process, the Council gave approval for Natalie Welch, Company Secretary, to organise a meeting. All current budget holders will be invited to attend. The findings and structural proposals resulting from this budget holders' meeting will be presented to the Council for review and final approval at the upcoming July meeting. Payroll and Pensions Volunteer – Following a recent advertisement placed in E-News seeking a volunteer to provide essential backup support for payroll and pensions in the accountant's absence, it was reported that no expressions of interest have been received to date. The Council agreed that the announcement will be re-published in the upcoming edition of E-News to continue the search for a suitable candidate.	PM NW/PM NW NW
91	Three Councils Meeting Update Levels of Planning Framework: The Council received a report from the Three Councils meeting, presented by Trustee Trevor Millar, designed to improve organisational efficiency by clearly dividing responsibilities across three distinct management tiers. • Strategic Planning (Long-Term): Managed by the Trustees to focus on long-term vision, national policies, and devolving budgets to committees to maintain strategic focus. • Tactical Planning (Short-Term): Executed at the local church or committee level to bridge the gap between strategic vision and daily operations through monitoring resources and local budgets. • Operational Planning (Day-to-Day): Executed by paid staff and volunteers to manage week-to-week tasks and resource deployment safely within agreed budgets. The Council formally approved the core directive that all future decision-making consistently be devolved to the lowest reasonable level, provided it aligns with the General Conference's goals and objectives. Purpose and Functions of Committees/Societies The Council held a detailed discussion regarding a structural mapping exercise currently being led by Gayle-Anne Drury. This initiative aims to audit and review all active church groups and committees	

	across the organisation. The primary goal is to map these groups directly against the organisation's three strategic aims, identify any operational overlaps or gaps, and ensure that the wider structural network is aligned with the three aims. To gather the necessary data for this review, the Council approved the distribution of a questionnaire to the main contact persons of all relevant groups. The Council noted that the questionnaire will be distributed to all groups. Non-Church buildings Following a detailed discussion initiated by the “Brave Spaces Group” regarding the future of the Organisation's non-church buildings, the Council approved a comprehensive consultation plan ahead of the upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM). It was agreed that the draft report on non-church buildings will be distributed to all 317 Conference members for review. The estimated cost for this widespread print and postage dissemination is projected to be between £2,100 and £2,200. An indicative vote will be held at the Conference AGM in July 2026, and based on the feedback gathered during the consultation period, Conference Council will review the final data and take a conclusive decision. Revd Jack Dunion and Emma Daniels will work with Chris Chambers, tasked with finalising the draft report for immediate dissemination. The final distribution will include a link/access to an online feedback form. Chris Chambers will organise a meeting where people will be encouraged to share their views on the report. This will streamline the collection process and allow member responses to be efficiently compiled into the final report	JD/ED
92	Company Secretary Update Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, presented a comprehensive, new, Induction and Governance package developed for new Trustees. This framework was created to address historical gaps in the Organisation's induction processes and to ensure all newly appointed Trustees are fully equipped to meet their legal and strategic responsibilities. Following a review of the documentation, the Council noted that the package establishes clear accountability and compliance protocols across several critical areas, including: • Code of Conduct: A formalised framework setting out the ethical and professional standards expected of all Council Trustees. • Declaration Forms & Conflict of Interest Procedures: Documented processes and formal declaration paperwork to ensure full financial and operational transparency. • Safeguarding Responsibilities: Explicit guidelines outlining the specific legal and strategic safeguarding obligations held by Trustees, reinforcing that the entire leadership body carries statutory responsibility for safeguarding. Following the discussion, the Trustees' Induction and Governance Package was formally approved for immediate implementation. The Company Secretary will oversee the roll-out of the package to all newly appointed Trustees. Secretarial Support The Company Secretary provided an update regarding her administrative and secretarial support. Following the previous appointment of an online virtual assistant, it became obvious after trialling this arrangement for a few weeks that remote support was not working effectively and failed to meet the operational demands of the role. Based on the outcomes of the trial, it was determined that an in-person assistant would be significantly more beneficial to properly support the specific daily needs and workload of the Company Secretary.	

	Consequently, it was decided to advertise for the role online, with the recruitment focus aimed at finding a local candidate capable of providing dedicated, face-to-face administrative assistance to the Company Secretary .	NW
93	Health & Safety The Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, informed the Council that the annual health and safety audit for the Purley Chase Centre has been formally scheduled. The audit will be conducted by Croner Consultancy on 4th June 2026. The site visit and assessment will be attended by Wilf Woodhouse (Health & Safety Manager), Barry Friend (Trustee), and Natalie Welch (Company Secretary). It is intended that Anne Gaffney, the covering manager, will also attend the audit, alongside the new manager if one has been appointed by then. The Council formally acknowledged and recognised the dedicated work, commitment, and extensive expertise that Wilf Woodhouse has brought to the organisation as Health & Safety Manager. The Council expressed its sincere gratitude for his invaluable contributions, noting his outstanding voluntary service over many years which they fully appreciate. Health & Safety Policy –The Council reviewed the latest updates made to the organisation's safety documentation. It was reported that the amendments to the Health & Safety Manual previously agreed upon by the Council have now been fully implemented. A comprehensive new section covering COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) regulations has been integrated into the manual to strengthen safety protocols. Barry Friend and Natalie Welch are scheduled to hold a meeting with Wilf Woodhouse during the Croner audit visit on 4th June 2026 to thoroughly discuss and finalise the operational roll-out of this new policy. It was agreed for a small group to be formed, consisting of Barry Friend, Natalie Welch, Joanne Walton, and Revd Lynne Griffiths, to discuss the health and safety expectations and how they can be implemented and work for societies. <i>Action:</i> Natalie will organise a meeting to take place after Conference	NW
94	Annual Review of Policies Natalie Welch explained that all policies had undergone their annual review, and the following were approved by the Conference Council: • Appropriate Data Protection Procedure • Asbestos Policy • Bullying and Harassment Policy • CCTV Policy • Code of Conduct • Data Protection Policy • Data Privacy Notice • Investment Policy • Legionella Policy • Booking Events at Purley Chase Centre • Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblowing) Policy • Risk Management Policy New Policies The following new policies have been approved and implemented: • The Young Person's Guide (Code of Conduct) • Communicating with Young People • TOIL Policy. To ensure comprehensive accessibility and compliance across the organisation, the Council agreed to a dual-method distribution strategy:	

	- All approved policies, alongside the core Safeguarding Manual and the Health & Safety Policy, will be compiled into a centralised reference folder on SharePoint once the system is up and running. Additionally, a physical copy of this folder will be distributed to every Church and Society to ensure hard copies are readily available on-site. These physical folders will be distributed directly via the representatives attending the Annual Conference. - All policies will be uploaded to the Bright HR platform. This will ensure that all employees can easily access, read, and formally accept the documentation digitally. <i>Action:</i> Natalie Welch to coordinate the physical folder distribution to Churches/Societies and oversee the digital upload and tracking on Bright HR system.	NW
95	Annual Conference 2026 Spiritual Direction – Revd Jack Dunion informed the Council that Karin Baynes, a qualified Spiritual Director, had offered to provide individual spiritual direction appointments during the annual Conference in July. Jack noted that he had discussed this arrangement with Karin and suggested to her that he would bring the proposal to this Council meeting to obtain formal approval. The Council discussed and formally approved this initiative, and details and appointment information will be circulated to all Conference attendees. It was agreed that in tandem with this initiative, information will also be distributed to attendees highlighting that general pastoral support will be readily available from all Ministers throughout the event. Conference Bookings- The Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, provided an update on the registration numbers received so far for the Annual Conference. The official deadline for submitting booking forms was 1st May 2026. As of early May, 47 bookings have been formally received. The Council noted that this represents a decline compared to the same period last year, which saw 58 bookings recorded (including children). To address the shortfall, Natalie is actively contacting regular attendees who have not yet submitted their forms. Through this outreach, a number of individuals have already confirmed that they are unfortunately unable to attend this year's event. Children's Activities at Conference -The Council reviewed an update from the Conference Planning Team regarding the organisation of activities for children and young people (under 18) attending the Annual Conference. The Youth and Family Team, who fund this, have had to source a different provider as the company who provided last year's activities was unavailable for 2026. The Outward Bound Trust has been identified as available to deliver the activities for attendees under the age of 18. Emma Daniels has provisionally held the conference dates with the Trust. The total cost for the two-day programme with The Outward Bound Trust is quoted at £2,000 (representing a cost structure of £100 per head per , over two days, based on projected attendance numbers). Discussions are still ongoing to finalise the funding and cost allocations.	NW
96	Property Update Chester New Church - 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. Manse at Kearsley - 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.	

97	Safeguarding The Council discussed the management of future safeguarding investigations. Recent training recommendations highlighted that small organisations frequently face significant challenges in maintaining the strict level of impartiality required for internal investigations, primarily due to close-knit personal and professional relationships within internal teams. To mitigate these risks, the Council formally agreed to explore outsourcing safeguarding investigations to independent, external providers. This mechanism will protect the integrity of the process and ensure absolute objectivity. <i>Action:</i> Natalie Welch to contact Christian Safeguarding Services to seek expert advice. Safeguarding Manual - Sue Chesworth presented the updated Safeguarding Manual to the Council for formal review and approval. The manual has undergone a thorough review, with specific updates implemented to incorporate essential policies and guidelines concerning communicating with young people. The Council formally approved the changes to the Safeguarding Manual. It was agreed that the revised document is now ready for circulation across the organisation alongside the broader policy distribution strategy. <i>Barry Friend left the meeting</i>	NW NW
98	Renewal of Insurance Policy An update was provided to the Council regarding the annual insurance renewal for the organisation's properties. The comprehensive insurance policies for all properties were successfully renewed in April 2026. The Council noted that there was a slight decrease in overall premium costs this year, which is due to holding fewer properties than in the previous year. The Council formally reviewed and approved the renewal costs, authorising the associated invoices to be processed for payment	
99	Committee of Ministers Same-Sex Marriage Consultation Update - The Council received a progress report regarding the ongoing Same-Sex Marriage Consultation process. Official consultation letters and poll cards were formally dispatched on Wednesday 8th April 2026. These voting materials are currently being distributed directly to congregations across all local churches. The strict deadline for the return of all completed poll cards has been set for 29th May 2026. A dedicated consultation webpage has been established on the GCNC website. To ensure the membership remains thoroughly informed, new educational resources and multimedia content are being uploaded to the page on a weekly basis. A formal update article has been published in <i>E-News</i> to ensure widespread awareness, with further progress updates scheduled to be broadcast as the voting deadline approaches.	
100	Annual AGM Articles and Rule Changes - The Council reviewed the final schedule of constitutional changes to be presented for formal adoption at the upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) during Conference. The specific amendments to the Articles and Rules scheduled for presentation have already been formally	

reviewed and approved by the Conference Council following their previous submission by the Constitution Revision Group (CRG).

The Council noted that the official deadline for submissions has passed and no further motions or additional amendments were submitted by the wider membership. Consequently, the agenda for this segment of the Annual AGM is finalised as approved.

Proposed Change to Article 28

Existing Article 28

The Council shall consist of a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and six members to be known as Elected Members, subject to the provisions of clause 4 of the Memorandum. The General Conference in General Meeting shall appoint the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairperson and the Elected Members in accordance with Article 31 below.

Proposed change Article 28

The Council shall consist of **up to eight members but shall be no less than six members**, known as Elected Members, subject to the provisions of clause 4 of the Memorandum. **The Elected Members 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** in accordance with Article 31 below.

Proposed Rule Changes

Rule A1(b)

Existing Rule

Any young person aged 14-17 years may apply in writing to become a Youth Member of Conference entitled to speak but not to vote at the Annual General Meeting. Applications should be sent to the Company Secretary in such form as the Council may decide and should be accompanied by a signed Pledge of Commitment. On attaining the age of eighteen, the Youth Membership will lapse.

Proposed Rule

Any young person aged **fourteen to seventeen** years may apply in writing to become a Youth Member of Conference entitled to speak but not to vote at the Annual General Meeting. Applications should be sent to the Company Secretary in such form as the Council may decide and should be accompanied by a signed **copy of the following** Pledge of Commitment: **‘As a Youth Member I will endeavour to support and serve the General Conference, to develop my knowledge of the heavenly teachings of the New Church, and to honour the Lord Jesus Christ in all my thoughts, words, and actions.’** On attaining the age of eighteen, the Youth Membership will lapse.

Rule B9

Existing Rule

All those registered for a Proxy Vote will receive a “Voting Instructions” form from the Company Secretary along with the Annual Reports and Accounts not less than three weeks before the Annual Meeting. This form should be completed by the Voting Member and signed. Copies of the form should then be sent to the person acting as Proxy and to the Company Secretary to arrive at least forty-eight hours prior to the commencement of the Meeting.

Proposed Rule

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101	HR Purley Chase Centre Manager – The Company Secretary, Natalie Welch, provided a progress report regarding the recruitment process for the position of Purley Chase Centre Manager, explaining that two potential candidates applied for the vacancy. One applicant was put forward via the appointed recruitment agency, and the second was sourced internally through targeted advertising on the organisation's website. First-stage interviews were formally conducted via Zoom on Wednesday 29th April 2026. The interview panel comprised, Sue Chesworth (Safe Recruitment), Joanne Walton (Trustee), and Natalie Welch (Human Resources). Both applicants were invited to attend a second, in-person interview on Friday 8th May 2026 at the Purley Chase Centre. Designed as an informal opportunity for candidates to view the facility and meet the team, the panel consisted of Natalie Welch, Barry Friend, and Joanne Walton. The day would be coordinated so the candidates could tour the premises, meet the onsite operational team, ask any further questions and have the opportunity to interact with the Trustees who were present at Purley Chase Centre following the Council meeting. Chris Woodhouse - It was formally noted that Chris Woodhouse, Chairperson of the Purley Chase Management Team, had resigned from his position effective on 3rd May 2026. The Council formally acknowledged and recorded its sincere thanks to Chris for his many years of valuable contribution as a volunteer. Particular gratitude was expressed for his dedication in standing in to assist the centre during the recent absence of a permanent manager. The Council extends its very best wishes to Chris for the future. Purley Chase Management Team - Following the resignation of the Chairperson, the Council discussed the long-term governance of the centre. Moving forward, the restructured Purley Management Team will consist of a Minister, a Trustee, the Company Accountant, and the incoming Manager of the Purley Chase Centre and the Assistant Manager once appointed. To allow sufficient time for this structure to be fully established and put into place, the Council decided to postpone the Purley Management Team meeting originally scheduled for May 2026. Online Zoom Worship - Following a review, it was formally agreed that the position of Online Worship Coordinator remains critical to the delivery of the online Zoom worship services and must be re-advertised immediately to secure dedicated leadership for the role. <i>Action:</i> Natalie Welch to readvertise the Online Worship Coordinator role both internally across the organisation's networks and externally on public recruitment platforms.	NW
102	Yorkshire and Northeast Area It was reported that at the recent Yorkshire and Northeast Area Council meeting held on 6th May 2026, members made the regretful decision to formally close the Area Council.	
103	Young People's Committee Sue Chesworth provided an update on the recent activities and initiatives of the Young People's Committee: • Alton Towers Trip: It was reported that the committee recently organised a trip to Alton Towers, which was highly successful and well-received by the young people. • The committee has designed a custom hoodie. Moving forward, committee members will wear hoodies during official outings to assist with promotion and visibility. • Consultation on Same-Sex Marriage: It was noted that the committee has been formally contacted to provide their views and feedback on same-sex marriage.	

104	Swedenborg Society The Council received and noted an email from Stephen McNeilly (Executive Director of the Swedenborg Society) regarding potential collaborative archive and library developments. He highlighted a highly successful period for Swedenborg House, which welcomed approximately 42,000 visitors in the previous year and continues to experience strong footfall, public engagement, and book sales. Following a recent internal review of their library, archive, and collections, including historical materials received from General Conference churches, the Swedenborg Society identified significant potential for broader public engagement and development. The Swedenborg Society extended an invitation to the General Conference to meet and explore overlapping interests in archiving and preserving Swedenborgian history. The Council acknowledged the proposal and agreed that developing this common interest is worth pursuing. It was decided that an initial acknowledgement be sent to the Swedenborg Society, with a view to arranging a preliminary discussion to explore potential ideas further. <i>Action:</i> Revd Jack Dunion to send an initial acknowledgement to Stephen McNeilly, confirming the Council's interest in exploring collaborative archive and library opportunities.	JD
	The meeting closed with a short prayer	
	Conference Council Meeting Dates 2026 July 28th, 10am – Hayes Board Room at the Hayes Conference Centre September 8th, 10am Zoom November 30th, 10am Zoom	