



# The Parish Church of St George, Jesmond

## Parochial Church Council

Chair: The Reverend Debbie Loughran

Lay Chair: Professor Janet Wilson

Secretary: Dr Nigel Russell-Sewell

## Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 19 November 2024

at 7.30 pm in the Choir Vestry, St George's Church

Present: Hilary Cullingford, Lana Liu, Debbie Loughran, Ian Ness, Enid Pearson, Kay Plumley, Mike Ranson (Treasurer), Nigel Russell-Sewell, Brent Swinburne, Margaret Vane, Sue Vernon (Safeguarding Officer), Janet Wilson.

Apologies: Mike de la Hunt, Joan Grenfell, Alison Mattinson, Izzy McDonald-Booth.

1. The Chair opened the meeting with a scripture reading and prayer.
2. All were welcomed to the meeting.
3. Apologies were noted.
- 4. Declaration of Interests**
  - 4.1 No conflicts of interest were declared.
- 5. Minutes of the last Meeting**
  - 5.1 The minutes of the PCC Meeting held on 9 September were approved. Proposed: Enid Pearson; Seconded: Ian Ness.
- 6. Matters arising and action log**
  - 6.1 24-04:12.3 Churchwardens have liaised about the vicarage gardens and the family will look after them.

- 6.2 24-07:9.4 Kay Plumley reported: the diocese have received the money from the Church of England to appoint a Net-Zero Lead, supported by matched funding from the Diocese. A 'Quick Wins' grant to pilot pew heating had been put in abeyance due to change in Diocesan Secretary, but an application for £10,000 is expected to be submitted in due course.
- 6.3 24-09:10.1 The Treasurer had attempted to add the Vicar to the Lloyds Bank account, to no avail at present. This is being pursued. Noted that the Treasurer, Vicar and two Churchwardens would normally act as signatories.
- 6.4 24-09:11.1 Ian Ness is exploring lighting options with Ian Spencer, who is discussing this with the Fabric Committee. A report is awaited.
- 6.5 24-09:13.5 The Chair reported: she is working with a number of people on events, rotas, *etc*, and hopes to have a workable calendar by the new year.

**7. Dogs on the Green**

- 7.1 The Chair reported she had had a number of conversations with people exercising their dogs on the Green, and with families picnicking and other visitors. There had been no indication that dogs exercising was detrimental to their experiences. It may be appropriate to have signage to discourage dogs on the flower beds. Noted that the bins are emptied regularly.
- 7.2 Suggested: a notice "we welcome well behaved dogs; please clear up after them". Agreed by all with one abstention: the current notices should come down for a trial period of six months (to be reviewed in May). The Tuesday Group will be asked to remove the signage on walls and the board.

**ACTION: Brent Swinburne**

**ACTION: Secretary**

**8. Churchwardens, Deputy Wardens, and Gift Audit**

- 8.1 The Chair and Lay Chair had discussed the need for identifying and growing talents within the church community so that there may be an increased engagement in roles such as Churchwarden, Deputy Churchwarden, Servers, Welcomers, amongst others. The Chair suggested a Gift Audit to see where people might wish to offer their gifts as a way to start conversations with people to discern if their talents could contribute to the life of St George's. This could be done alongside a stewardship campaign. Suggested this be done in the new year and lead into the APCM.

**ACTION: Chair**

- 8.2 Noted: similar exercises in the past have been carried out under the banner: "Time and Talents". There may be appropriate paperwork that could be useful.

- 8.3 This exercise is also an opportunity for everyone to update their email addresses and register on the Electoral Roll, which renews in 2025. A 'back to church' Sunday may also provide an opportunity for the community to engage with this. This could be an opportunity to update the email list too and encourage engagement with the Electoral Roll, which renews in 2025. As part of this could also include a 'back to church' Sunday.
- 8.4 Kay Plumley has passed on details of events for volunteering opportunities to the Students Union at Newcastle University. The Chair will attend the Freshers Fayre next year. Noted: the local Liberal Democrat councillor is seeking to have a community event to bring students and members of the community together and there may be an opportunity for St George's to engage with this.
- 8.5 Following an incident on Sunday, the Chair observed the importance of the Ministry of Welcome, and that practice needed to be improved and enhanced.

**ACTION: Churchwardens**

**9. Standing item: Safeguarding**

- 9.1 The Safeguarding Officer reported that references were being sought for the Bell Captain. The Safeguarding Officer and Chair are meeting regularly.
- 9.2 Noted: there has been a hiatus in Church House during the appointment of a new Diocesan Safeguarding Officer. The appointee is about to take up their post. Also noted, the Bishop of Newcastle treats safeguarding with the utmost seriousness.

**10. Standing item: Finance**

**10. (a) Parish Share**

- 10.1 Kay Plumley reported: the Diocese finances are down £1.5M since pre-Covid. A deficit of £250,000 expected this year. The biggest expenditure is clergy, noting this does not include any expenditure towards the Bishop of Newcastle who is not paid for by the Diocese. The Diocese is having to sell property and expend reserves to maintain its financial commitments. The reserves policy is to keep one year's expenditure on hand. There is to be a reduction in clergy over the next three years, from 71 to 60, to achieve a break-even position, subject to increases in offers towards Parish Share. Diocesan Synod was asked to approve a budget for 2025 that expects to return a deficit of £900,000. This will impact a number of deaneries.
- 10.2 The Treasurer responded: it is important that St George's pay a share that is fair, based on known parameters. At present, the parameters are not clear. We pay £90,000 but don't know if this is fair or not. All the money from planned giving goes towards paying our Parish Share and this doesn't feel right.

- 10.3 The Chair reported on a conversation with the Chair of the Board of Finance. Covid had caused the Diocese to abandon the old formula, which aimed at receiving 95% of Parish Share to be able to do what was needed. However, receipts were only 80% of what had been promised; creating significant financial challenges. The Diocese moved to a form of 'offer', with the logic that if parishes offer they will pay 100%. This in turn enables the Diocese to budget with confidence. The cost of ministry, including on-costs, is £100,000 per head. St George's offer £90,000. With an 8% increase this is still below the cost of employing the Vicar. Newcastle Central Deanery has 10 posts, one more than it should. No Parish Share system is ideal. The Chair encouraged the PCC to play its part and pay the £97,200 suggested by the Diocese in full.
- 10.4 The Treasurer noted that we are in a position to meet this in full, so should. However, this is not sustainable in the long term if our income is not increased.
- 10.5 Proposed: the PCC approve paying £97,200 in 2025. Unanimously agreed.
- 10.6 Proposed: increases of 4% are offered for each 2026 and 2027 to enable the Diocese to plan appropriately. This was agreed, subject to annual review. The 2026 offer will be £101,400 and 2027, £105,456. The Treasurer will respond to the Diocesan Director of Finance accordingly.

**ACTION: Treasurer**

#### **10. (b) Occasional Office Fees**

- 10.7 This related to weddings, funerals and baptisms. Fees are set nationally and locally. We have no control over national fees, and must charge these. However, we do have control over the local fees and should ensure we are covering our costs and charging all appropriate fees. For example, we currently don't charge a 'Verger's Fee' for setting up the service and clearing away. Whilst an individual may decline a fee, this should still be charged then donated back to the church. There are a number of small amounts that can, and should, be charged for Occasional Offices that add up to a significant contribution. We don't apply the charges we should (eg we don't charge the Verger fee for setting up the church, when we should; mileage for travelling to crematorium for the Vicar). There are a number of small amounts of Occasional Office Fees that add up together. Another important consideration is heating: is the amount charged covering this cost? Kay Plumley will provide meter readings to enable an appropriate amount to be set in the fees for this; noting that the fee may be reduced in the summer when the heating is off. The local fees have not increased in a number of years and now is the time to review them for 2025. The Chair will propose the fees and ask PCC to approve by correspondence.

**ACTION: Kay Plumley**

**ACTION: Chair**

## **10. (c) Other Finance Matters**

- 10.8 Kay Plumley reminded PCC of “Give as you live” for online shopping to help raise money for St George’s if nominated as a charity, at no cost to the purchaser. “Easy Fundraising” is another portal. Kay to send QR code to Secretary to circulate.

**ACTION: Kay Plumley**

- 10.9 Question: is VAT being reclaimed as part of the project work, noting that this must be claimed within 12 months of the date of invoice. Response: Derek is claiming. The Lay Chair will check the situation.

**ACTION: Janet Wilson**

- 10.10 The Finance Report was received. Noted: due to work on the boiler this year, we are heading to a year-end deficit of £15,000. This will be covered by transfer from the restricted Cookson Foundation fund. We are not in a position to break even based on current income and expenditure.

- 10.11 Reported: the endowment fund investigations continue. The Treasurer has had discussions with a lawyer (generously working *pro bono*) and this is proving far more complex than originally thought. The original fund was set up as a ‘trust’ apart from the PCC in 1964. It is not clear who set this up, and who Trustees might be. That trust cannot be used for the Garden of Remembrance, which relates to a more recent donation. Further clarification is being sought from the Diocese to assist the lawyers applying to the Charity Commission to release the funds such that they can be used for the Garden of Remembrance. Investigations continue. The Chair thanked the Treasurer for his continued work on this.

**ACTION: Treasurer**

## **11. Standing item: Building and Projects Group**

- 11.1 The Chair attended the last meeting and noted that the group are very engaged in their work. Current issues relate to lighting and heating.

## **12. Standing item: St George’s Community Hub 2025**

- 12.1 The Lay Chair reported: we are at the closing stage for applying for larger grants with just a further £15,000 required from the local community to meet the matched funding threshold to apply for significant large grants. An appeal will take place in Advent.

### **13. Churchwarden updates**

13.1 CCTV security: the Vicar is happy with security at the vicarage. Discussed: the pros and cons of CCTV at the church and hall. Noted: there may be legal implications that will require further exploration if CCTV was to be installed. A general view expressed that at the present time the PCC does not support the installation of CCTV, but may review this in the future.

13.2 Motion-sensitive lighting: there is no lighting down to the boiler room, or to the side of church to access the tower. Building and Projects Group is asked to consider lighting and return costings to PCC.

**ACTION: Enid Pearson**

13.3 Email scams: these are increasing, and concern was raised about vulnerable members of the congregation. Unfortunately, there is nothing we can do to stop phishing emails and vigilance is encouraged by all. Recommended a note be put in the newsletter every couple of months.

**ACTION: Chair**

13.4 Speed bumps: these keep popping up. There are also issues with the pavement around Tower House. Noted: bin lorries have to get to the back of church, and building works will also impact the pavement so this is not going to be easily solved in the immediate future. The speed bump was fixed professionally this year; the Building and Projects Group are asked investigate this and request the contractor attend under guarantee.

**ACTION: Enid Pearson**

13.5 Noted: parking permits are to be introduced locally which may encourage misuse of the church car park. Renting out spaces in the car park was discussed, subject to improvements being made to the rear car park. This will be discussed further at the next meeting.

**ACTION: Secretary**

13.6 Noted: the buzzer to Jonathan's office is to be installed.

13.7 Noted: the boiler has been serviced for £6,000. One of the fans then required replacing (£2,500) and the controls failed at the same time. The only control is currently manual. To replace the controls will cost an additional £4,000, and there is no alternative. An overall additional £6,500 will need to be spent and this work has been commissioned.

13.8 Noted: netting will be installed in the tower to stop pigeons getting in.

**14. Any other business**

14.1 Ian Ness read a statement which was received without comment.

15. The meeting closed at 9.30 pm with The Grace.

**DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

<b>PCC Meeting</b>	<b>Deadline for Agenda items</b>
Wednesday 8 January 2025	Sunday 29 December 2024, midday
Monday 10 March	Sunday 02 March, midday
<i>Annual Meetings, Sunday 11 May (separate notification)</i>	
Tuesday 20 May	Monday 12 May, midday

All meetings will begin at 7.30 pm. Venue will be confirmed in the agenda papers.

**Date to note**

7 December                      Christmas Market

14 December                     Living Nativity