Congregation Report on the Parochial Church Council Meeting
Monday 15 December 2025

Annual Budget and Plan for 2026

One of the most important tasks for the PCC as the governing body of SJP is to approve the annual budget for the following year so the PCC meeting on 15 December was the annual moment to do this for the coming year. Within the year, SJP tries to break even and meet its reserves policy. Currently the reserves policy is under review by the independently chaired Finance and Audit (Risk) Committee, at the request of the PCC. They are looking at the relative merits of a set amount as now (a number of months of running costs of the church) or moving, as some other charities are doing, to a risk-based approach. That is, setting the reserves level at an amount that would be needed if St James's had to close down its operation? The PCC continued to express concern about staff workload and financial capacity. It was noted that in the Archdeacon's Visitation and also from a recent project with GDPR consultants that comments were made that SJP staff treat their work as a vocation as much as employment. This is in one way commendable, but it's also then the responsibility of the PCC as trustees to guard against work-overload of staff who are very committed to the work of St James's. After due deliberation the 2026 Budget and Business Plan was agreed and shows a projected year end surplus of £5,000.

Organisation Design

What occupied most of the meeting, apart from standing items such as Safeguarding and Policy Reviews, was a proposal for looking at the organisation design, given that 2026 is an important year for SJP. As a Church of England church, St James's must adhere to the Church Representation Rules which dictate a certain governance model: the PCC is the governing body which is chaired by the incumbent (our Rector) and there must always be a greater number of lay persons than clergy serving on it. These rules also mandate the terms of office and manner of election of the PCC members. Since the Charities Act 2006 Parochial Church Councils in England are separate charities and must register if income exceeds £100,000. Therefore St James's is subject not only to the Church Representation Rules but also the requirements of the Charity Commission and our PCC members are also trustees with the appropriate fiduciary duties. It means, for example, that only those who are not excluded from being trustees can be PCC members.

The PCC noted that we are a medium sized church and, unlike many smaller ones, employ staff (as well as relying heavily on fantastic volunteers) to undertake the work and mission of the church. One of the issues that will be addressed in 2026 going into the Wren Project (hopefully) is that of governance. Currently, our Rector acts in effect as the Chief Executive with, the PCC acknowledges, too many direct reports. While this is standard governance for the Church of England, this is not good practice for a charity. Large churches and cathedrals have senior executive roles to lead the paid staff. Small churches continue to rely on the incumbent. St James's is medium-sized and so faces particular challenges because of its size. The PCC spent most of the meeting debating a number of options and will hold a consultation in 2026 on a revised organisation design.

Staff news

It was reported at the meeting that our Chief Operating Officer Nick Thasarathar after surgery and three months recuperation will be back with us early in the New Year on a phased return over the coming months. The PCC expressed its delight at this news, and also made a heartfelt vote of thanks to Jo Munns who has been our excellent interim Chief Operating Officer, covering while Nick has been away.

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The PCC acknowledged that 2025 had been very challenging financially and structurally. It was prepared, given in-year expenses that were unbudgeted, for a deficit in 2025, acknowledged that the staff were working extremely hard to minimise this by both cost saving and income generation, acknowledged St James's reliance on the end of the year each year in terms of income, December and Christmas especially, and looked forward to 2026 with a small budgeted surplus.

I should like to wish you and your loved ones and all in our congregation and wider community every happiness for a peaceful and relaxing Christmas at this magical time and all best wishes for a hopeful and fulfilling New Year.

Keith Best
PCC Secretary