**Church Governance in Penshurst, Fordcombe and The Chiddingstones:**

**Background:**

In 2021 our three parishes merged to form the Joint Benefice of Penshurst, Fordcombe and The Chiddingstone Churches. In April 2022 the governance of The Chiddingstone and Penshurst Churches was merged into a single Joint Council (JC) and Fordcombe Churches merged their governance into this bigger group in January 2023. These decisions were the result of a long consultation process and consented to via a public vote in each parish.

The legal benefice name is rather too long for publications and so it was agreed by the JC that the four churches would in documents and on social media be referred to by the short name of **The High Weald Churches**. This name was chosen to honour the historic landscape that lays beneath us and in geological terms unites us.

**The Joint Council** carries out about nearly all of the work previously carried out by local PCCs.

**The former PCCs** now only exist in a residual capacity and need only meet once a year to approve the accounts for the restricted funds they manage and elect a PSO (Parish Safeguarding Officer).

Our **professional administrator** completes a lot of the day-to-day work once carried out by four sets of separate parish volunteers. Their role includes communications, bookings, purchasing, payments, rotas etc and it has been quite a feat to merge four different systems into one over these first two years. Some systems are still being formed and amended but huge efforts have gone into making our benefice run efficiently and in line with best practice.

The workload of **Church Wardens** has been reduced from its historic levels, Whilst wardens remain responsible for many day-to-day operations, the church fabric and supporting their clergy, much of their work is now shared across the wider JC. As our centralised systems evolve, we should see the time burden on individuals reduced. Each parish is entitled to two wardens to represent them.

**At present the Joint Council is comprised of:**

**Clergy**: Rev’d Lisa (Rector and Chair of the JC) and Rev’d Linday (Associate Priest)

**Church Wardens** from each parish act as local representatives. These are Karen Franklin in Penshurst, Paul Allen in The Chiddingstones, and Angela Ventin in Fordcombe.

**Working across the parishes** are Matthew Stevens as Operations Manager and deputy Chair of the JC; Bob Golds as The Buildings Rep and Karen Franklin as the Mission and Worship lead. Angela Ventin also represents the benefice at Deanery Synod.

**We have two current board vacancies:**

**Benefice Treasurer.** The job is one of oversight rather than day to day bookwork. There is a team of volunteers and our parish administrator carrying out all the routine tasks with aid of QuickBooks software. The post holder would have oversight for the collating and submitting church reports to the diocese, end of year accounts and supporting our fundraising work. Full training can be given.

**Benefice Safeguarding Lead**. This person is needed to oversee the team of local Parish Safeguarding Officers. This person can be co-opted onto the full Joint Council or remain as the previous postholder did, outside the governance structure but reporting to meetings as needed. Full training will be given.

**Some other vacancies are about to fall vacant:**

**Benefice Buildings Rep**: This job is to support the wardens in ensuring that the buildings are safely maintained, and works are planned and managed effectively. This is a perfect job for a retired surveyor, architect or engineer but can be done by anyone with an interest in historic buildings and or churchyards.

**Chiddingstone Church Warden:** With more of the parish administrative load centrally managed there is less need for multiple wardens. It may be helpful to have two wardens or a warden and deputy. The postholders will be expected to act as warden in both Chid churches but it can be that wardens agree informally to focus on one church setting on a day-to-day basis.

**New roles:**

The Joint Council would like to create two new places on the board. One to represent **Ministry to Older People** and the other to **represent Ministry to Families and Schools.** There is a lot of good local work already in place for both age groups; so the jobs are not so much about starting new initiatives but ensuring that the church’s plans incorporate the needs of different age groups and support the excellent work already taking place in each community. If you are interested in any of these roles, please speak to an existing member of the JC for further information.

**How to help your local churches to thrive:**

**Pray.** Our churches are here to serve God and grow His Kingdom. All we do should be underpinned by prayer. Please pray for all who offer time and energy to their work. Please pray that we can work in harmony and under the clear influence of God’s Holy Spirit. Please pray also for the provision of the financial and practical resources needed for us to thrive.

**Let us know your views:** If you would like to offer support or feedback about any aspect of church life; please be in touch with the JC members who represent you. Communication by e mail or letter is helpful so that ideas are properly recorded and attributable to individuals. Of course, informal chats over tea and cake can be arranged!

**Be part of the decision-making bodies:**

**The Joint Council:** Why not stand for a place on the JC board? Your voice is important. If you feel that you have a particular skill set that we might benefit from we have flexibility to create co-opted roles if required. If you have some expertise to share, we would be most interested to hear from you.

**Local committees and interest groups:** You could join or form a group to support our mission and ministry. There are many specialist local working groups and committees for music, cleaning, flowers, churchyard, reading, intercessions, crafts, prayers, and home groups. Some groups work across the whole benefice whilst others focus on a single parish. These groups always welcome new members.

**Read the local village magazines**. These record what is happening in the parishes and are a helpful source of information.

**Subscribe to the weekly E mail:** An email with the latest information is sent out on a Friday or Saturday.

**Engage with the benefice website**. This newly launched site shares important local information more widely. Going forward this will be the most up to date source of information. <https://www.highwealdchurches.org.uk/>

**Attend the Annual Parish meeting and vote if you are eligible,**

# The Annual Parochial Church meeting for The Joint Council will be at **Chiddingstone Village Hall at 1130 on 14th April**.

**Explaining the Annual Parish Meetings in Our Benefice**

*A summary of Church representation Rules 2022*

The annual meeting is in fact four meetings. Before the main Joint Council event, there will be short parish meetings at which there will be elections for local wardens, safeguarding officers and for receiving the accounts for the restricted funds held within each local parish setting. Most of the meeting will focus on the business of the Joint Council. The meeting will include the receiving of accounts and annual reports. This will be an opportunity to celebrate all that is good in

our church communities and to thank people for their hard work and generosity to us. Only people

on the church Electoral Roll (ER) can vote at the meetings.

The ER is updated each year and revised in full every six years. That pleasure awaits us in 2025!

The official ER update for 2024 must be collated and published 15 days before the parish meeting. This year the ER revision window closes on 30th March (Holy Saturday). Any requests

to join the ER received from Easter Day onwards cannot be actioned until after the APCM.

Anyone from the 2023 roll who has become ineligible, moved away or leaves the church can ask

to be removed from the ER before the full revision next year. Those who have died are removed

automatically.

You need to be added to the ER to have voting rights. You can **apply to join the ER** if you meet the following criteria:

* You are baptised
* You are aged over 16
* And can make one of three declarations. That you are:
1. a member of the Church of England or of a Church in communion with it, and

resident in the parish. OR

1. a member of the Church of England or of a Church in communion with it, is not resident in the parish, but has habitually attended public worship in the parish during the preceding six months. OR
2. a member in good standing of a Church which is not in communion with the Church of England but subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, is also a member of the Church of England, and has habitually attended public worship in the parish during the preceding six months.

**If you wish to stand as a Church Warden or JC member** you must be nominated and seconded using the official forms that will be available from Holy Week onwards. Nominations close before the APCM and no nominations may be received once the meeting begins. The person nominated must be:

* Baptised
* On the ER for 6 months or more
* Aged over 21
* Not disqualified from being a trustee
* And not have served six consecutive periods of office
* The person nominated must sign the form to give their consent to being nominated

**Additional Requirements**

**Safeguarding Training:**

A congregation with good safeguarding knowledge makes for a safer church for everyone.

All members of the JC and many other parish officers and volunteers need to undergo formal safeguarding training. The two basic courses can be accessed online each taking about an hour to complete.

There are some more intensive courses linked to roles with wardens being expected to undertake advanced training.

We expect anyone who is standing as warden or for a place on the Joint Council to have completed their basic safeguarding training before the APCM and to have booked the advanced training for as soon as possible afterwards.

To sign up for courses please see: <https://safeguardingtraining.cofeportal.org/>

**Code of Conduct:**

To align ourselves with best practice from the charitable sector; those serving as a Church Warden, on The JC or holding any office or role within our benefice which represents our churches to others; will from the APCM be asked to follow a Code of Conduct. This is to encourage us to:

* communicate in person and online in a courteous and appropriate manner
* have clear expectations of one another in preparing and engaging in meetings,
* work as a unified and collaborative body of Christians

*Full details of the Church Representation rules can be accessed here:*

[*https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-resources/church-representation-rules*](https://www.churchofengland.org/about/leadership-and-governance/legal-resources/church-representation-rules)