



MINUTES OF YESHURUN SYNAGOGUE AGM 2025 / 5785

Held : 15th June 2025 in the Leff Hall of the Synagogue at 1000.

Present: Adam Tash (Chairman); John Sheer (Warden and Meeting Chair); Netanel Kleinman (Warden); Gavin Grossman (Financial Representative); plus around 45 members of the synagogue.

1. PREVIOUS MEETING'S MINIUTES

John Sheer opened the meeting, asking for any questions from the precirculated minutes. There were no questions.

2. REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Referring to the Hon Offs' annual report, John reflected on the major successes:

- finding the new Rabbinic couple, with thanks to Lenny Lowy and Committee
- negotiating the interregnum before the couple arrived - special thanks to Rabbi Hughes
- running of the weekday services which were "mostly quorate"
- joint services between YAM and the main minyan, about once a month
- delivery of all the festivals for members, with good events

In reflections from the last year, the following points were covered in more detail by the meeting, with interaction from members:

a) High Holyday Services

There had been a number of complaints following Yamim Noraim davenning last year and people had not appreciated how services had been led, with widespread disappointment noted. People wished to have a more tuneful and uplifting experience.

Rabbi Czitron will coordinate davenning across services for 5786 and lead some services. The community will be informed of the Rabbi's exact locations and participation in various services (YAM, main, joint etc) for High Holydays. A full timetable will be planned to ensure clarity and coordination across services.

It was stressed that accurate Nusach (traditional liturgy) is crucial. Support is available for those who need guidance.

b) Content Of Services

Questions were asked about moves to modify some of the service rituals, possibly such as removing certain piyyutim (liturgical poems) on Yomtov, including High Holydays. The Rabbi explained that existing inherited protocols were important but could sometimes be adjusted based on feedback and prior consensus.

The Rabbi emphasised that changes are not made lightly and that minhagim (traditions) matter — particularly in timing, flow, and emotional resonance of the service.

Rabbi Czitron acknowledged different preferences between the main service and YAM regarding newer or traditional prayers.

c) Facilities and Minor Concerns

Suggestions included installing a tallis stand at the entrance to the main davenning area.

d) 80th Anniversary of Yeshurun (5786)

Planning is needed to mark the occasion. A committee — potentially chaired by Mr Grossman — will be set up. Reference was made to delays in celebrating the 70th anniversary as a caution for the planning.

e) Prayers for Israel

Concerns were raised about the increasing length of the section on Shabbos before Musaf regarding multiple prayers for the State of Israel and its Defence Forces. While noting the current situation in Israel, some congregants nevertheless felt that consolidating the prayers, as was done in the past, would streamline the service without reducing meaning.

The Rabbi reinforced the importance of collective prayer for the State and Defence Forces, stating that while the structure of prayers may be revised, the intent remains unchanged.

f) General Discussion on Minhag (Custom) and Decision-Making

A member reflected on the importance of minhag, noting there was a formal schedule of the shul's minhagim and the importance of not changing things on whims. The warden assured that any decisions regarding change of minhagim would only be made after due consideration and he welcomed feedback (after the meeting) from attendees.

g) Integration Between YAM and Main Shul Services

Members asked about further potential integration between the YAM Minyan and main synagogue services.

The leadership team responded that over the past 18 months, the two groups have collaborated more frequently — noting joint davening had occurred many times. Integration efforts included YAM leadership representation on the synagogue Board; Board candidates coming from YAM showing commitment to the entire community; and shared events like the Purim seudah and community quizzes.

The Rabbi however elaborated on misconceptions about what 'integration' would entail, noting that:

- A full merger of services isn't imminent, due to differing styles of davenning and schedules.
- YAM prefers modern setups (e.g. round tables, open spaces) versus the traditional structure of the main shul, preferred by many older members.
- However, communal meals, joint events, and post-service gatherings (like Kiddushim) demonstrate growing unity.

It had been suggested to have a joint service the previous Shabbos, noting the situation in Israel but YAM had refused.

A proposal was made to form a joint working group with volunteers from both YAM and the main shul. This group could meet periodically to map out short- and long-term integration opportunities and build a strategic vision.

It was noted that all congregants could daven in either space, affirming that all attendees are welcomed and made to feel part of either minyan.

Integration with the main shul is an ongoing topic. The leadership team explained that opinions within YAM vary : some strongly support closer ties and unified events, while others value YAM's identity and diverse approaches and worry integration could alienate members.

It was acknowledged that not everyone will be satisfied with the pace or direction of integration, and balance is essential.

The leadership team confirmed that YAM participants are full members of the broader synagogue community but that the different minyanim represent the different styles and preferences, while functioning still under one communal umbrella.

It was noted that most shuls run minyanim of different styles, reflecting a diversity of preferences across the members. A final reflection noted that having two or multiple minyanim isn't unusual; most communities now function that way - if YAM were simply viewed as an alternative minyan rather than a separate entity, some tensions might naturally dissolve.

h) YAM Committee Structure and AGM Purpose

A question was raised about the necessity for YAM to hold its own AGM, especially given the broader community collaboration, also noting that YAM operates with a separate dedicated committee to manage its events and communications.

The leadership team explained that the YAM 'AGM' was primarily a forum to elect a new committee for this purpose, review activities, and consider updates to internal statutes. And while not formally independent, YAM maintains close and positive cooperation with the main synagogue board.

i) Hospitality and Guest Experience

A practical concern was raised about ensuring guests, including such as MPs, are properly welcomed and not left unattended. It was suggested the Board nominate members as greeters and that guests be greeted proactively.

j) Seating and Shul Design : Tensions

There was a renewed call to consider updating the main synagogue seating, arguing that removing pews and adopting a more adaptable, modern layout could bridge generational preferences and facilitate greater integration.

However it was noted that while younger members tend to support such changes, older members often prefer traditional set ups and while the issue has been raised repeatedly, there is as yet no consensus on the way forward.

The question of whether to remove pews also remains divisive—many members are either firmly for or against this. Financial cost, emotional attachment to tradition, and potential membership impact are all factors.

It was however clarified that removing pews is not a driver or barrier to YAM integration and that YAM's decisions are independent of this debate.

Some members complained that a recent joint service saw significant imbalance in seating allocation, with particularly underutilised seating set aside for women. This created dissatisfaction among some main shul attendees who had felt displaced without just cause. Amelioration suggestions included using the upstairs gallery for overflow to avoid unnecessary reallocation and resentment.

Acknowledgement was given to efforts made to test various downstairs seating setups for joint services, noting that YAM women often prefer downstairs seating, and that families with young children need accommodation that avoids disruption, while maintaining participation.

These changes require trial, patience, and adaptability to strike the right balance.

Some longstanding members expressed frustration over permanent seats appearing to be reassigned during joint services, despite past arrangements and financial commitments. The leadership team acknowledged these issues had featured in prior discussions and would continue to be reviewed sensitively.

3. FINANCIAL REPORT

a) Positive Financial Results

The Financial Representative presented the report for the year, explaining that the budgeting process has become more precise and transparent, with monthly tracking of income and expenditure.

The community had a strong financial year, mainly due to reduced staffing costs. Surplus funds had allowed for building improvements (e.g. foyer refurbishment) and enhanced programming (e.g. weekly kiddush).

Recognition was given to the Financial Representative, who was stepping down from the post after three years, for his stewardship and financial clarity.

Other points raised, and in discussion, were

b) School's Occupancy and Future Considerations

Rental income from the on-site school remains vital, though noting that the lease expires in two years. Options for the site post-lease were being discussed, including creating a community school—but this would require significant planning, expertise, and resources. Members were encouraged to contribute ideas for post-lease use.

Concerns were raised about the lack of a dilapidation clause in the school's lease and the long-term costs of maintaining the site.

The Leff Hall flooring is in poor condition due especially to wear from the school. It was previously deemed pointless to replace it, due to ongoing damage, but with the school now

confirmed for two more years, there was strong consensus that the floor now needs urgent attention.

The school has agreed to repair some damage and repaint certain areas. Costs for floor restoration may be shared but timing for the floor repairs needed to be during school holidays.

c) Post-2027 : Nursery Proposal

While Yeshurun running its own full-scale school was considered too ambitious, a nursery was suggested as a realistic and beneficial option. It was noted that while some community members already attend the nursery at site of the Edgware and Hendon Reform Synagogue, others are unable to secure places there.

Constraints such as hours, and accessibility for young families were noted as challenges for any new nursery.

It was suggested a modest nursery could become profitable with as few as 12 children and might offer more financial sustainability than leasing the Yeshurun site to an external school. A community-run nursery could also ensure greater care for the building and serve long-term needs of members more effectively. The need for more school places generally within the community was emphasised, particularly as families struggle to secure spots in existing local schools.

It was agreed there was a need generally for broader discussions on this and was something the new Board could put its mind to.

d) National Insurance

Clarifications were given on discrepancies in National Insurance calculations, linked to payroll technicalities.

e) Kitchen Cleanliness and Use

The upstairs kitchen was flagged as unhygienic, possibly due to improper use by caterers or school staff. Although cleaned weekly and recently refurbished (including with a new dishwasher), it was noted the kitchen suffers from clutter, grease buildup, and misuse as a storage area.

A new board member would be tasked to oversee hall hire and kitchen cleanliness going forward and a system for deeper, more regular cleaning was being considered.

f) Maintenance Concerns and Neglect

Members expressed disappointment at visible neglect in the shul such as dust buildup and a lack of overall tidiness. Concerns were raised about the uninviting environment and the poor appearance of certain areas, such as outdated or broken lighting.

Volunteers were praised for initiating improvements and cleanup efforts, but there was a call for a more structured, long-term solution.

The leadership team noted a recurring issue is coordination between the school's cleaner – this was being addressed.

Ongoing frustration was voiced about surplus tables and chairs left out during the week, making the space feel cluttered and unwelcoming.

The leadership team noted that although a storage trolley exists for these and that the outside store is functional, logistics and ease may be influencing staff habits. There was agreement that better use of storage and restoring visual order should be explored by the incoming Board.

g) Use of Beis Hamidrash and Lease Commitments

Members expressed concern over the continued school use of the Beis Hamidrash describing it as disheartening and incompatible with its traditional role.

A prior AGM commitment was cited, obliging the board to have formally reviewed the school's lease and reclaim the space when the agreement ends.

Some disagreement emerged over whether past agreements had been properly minuted, but the consensus was that a formal conversation must take place before any lease renewal to reclaim the Beis Hamidrash for davenning.

4. CLOSING REMARKS

Gratitude was extended to the and Rabbi and Rebbetzin, the Board, officers and volunteers for their service and positive impact on the community.

Particular appreciation was shown for small behind-the-scenes efforts, such as food preparation for Kiddushim etc and organisation of various events and programmes..

The meeting concluded after some 80 minutes.