The United Reformed Church
Mission Council, March 2020

Mission Council was due to meet at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, from 17 to 19 March. During the previous week the seriousness of the Covid-19 emergency became widely apparent. The Moderators of General Assembly, Mr Derek Estill and the Revd Nigel Uden, therefore decided, after consulting the Clerk and the General Secretary, to cancel the meeting.

The General Secretary wrote to members of Mission Council on 13 March to propose that a number of items of pressing or procedural business be decided by the Officers of Assembly. Some comments were received, which the Officers considered. The following decisions were eventually confirmed and were notified to members of Mission Council on 14 April.

20/01 Paper A1: Contingency Plans for General Assembly

It is agreed, on behalf of General Assembly, that

1) **The Officers of Assembly have authority to take such steps as may be needed to implement any changes as set out in Resolution 21 of the 2018 Assembly, and to facilitate any other matters that may be necessary;**
2) **The Revd Clare Downing and Mr Peter Pay shall take up their office as Moderators of Assembly on 13 July 2020;**
3) **The Assembly Arrangements Committee is to pass on its work to the Business Committee on 13 July 2020, the Convenor of that Committee thereby becoming an Officer of Assembly.**

20/02 Paper C2: Financial arrangements for Reform magazine

The paper proposed financial support for Reform for the five-year period 2021-2025. The Officers agreed the figure proposed for 2021, in order that the immediate future would be clear, while allowing longer-term plans to be considered at a future meeting.

20/03 Paper G2: Pensions Executive

1) **On behalf of General Assembly, the Pensions Executive is renamed as the Pensions Committee; it is designated a sub-committee of the Finance Committee; and its membership and Terms of Reference are agreed** (see below)**.**

2) **The Church expresses its thanks to those who have served the Church faithfully on the Pensions Executive in the past, and is grateful for those who will serve on the Pensions Committee in the future, recognising that this is an important and inherently complex responsibility**

20/04 Papers J1 and J2: Nominations

The nominations listed in these papers are noted and approved.

20/05 Paper M1: The Assistant Clerk of General Assembly

Formalising and clarifying matters decided at the previous two meetings of Mission Council, and on behalf of General Assembly, it is agreed that the Assistant Clerk:

a) shall be a member of Mission Council and of General Assembly;

b) is authorised to attend any committee or church body that the Clerk attends, and may deputise for the Clerk as a member of those either occasionally or on an on-going basis, noting the caveat on membership of the URC Trust [i.e. that the constitution of the Trust does not presently identify the Assistant Clerk as a voting member]**, subject to the agreement of the Clerk and the General Secretary.**

c) shall be a full member ex officio of both the Law and Polity Advisory Group and the Business Committee.

d) may assist with the running of any Appeal, Reference, Constitutional Review, or any aspect of the Disciplinary Process involving the Clerk, or may deputise for the Clerk with the agreement of the Clerk and the General Secretary.

20/06 Papers R1 and R2: Safeguarding

Terms of Reference and membership are agreed for the Safeguarding Advisory Group and Terms of Reference for the Synods' Safeguarding Practice Group (detail below).

20/07 Papers T1 to T4: Ministerial Discipline and Incapacity

Comments were invited on these papers to the Secretary of MIND by 29 March. None were received. On this basis, the matter will be submitted to General Assembly in the names of the Clerk and General Secretary, with procedural support from members of Mission Council, who nonetheless remain free to contribute to substantial discussion at Assembly.

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP FOR THE PENSIONS COMMITTEE (from Paper G2, 20/03)

Terms of Reference

a) To provide expertise and guidance to the URC in relation to all matters relating to the provision of pensions for ministers, CRCW's and staff. In particular, to:
   i) advise the Finance Committee on the monetary requirement, needs and obligations of both the schemes and in relation to the benefits and financial status of the various charitable funds connected to ministers
   ii) when requested, support the consideration of any changes to the level or nature of pension provision by the URC for General Assembly or Mission Council
   iii) inform the URC of the nature and impact of legal and regulatory changes affecting its pension arrangements

b) To act on the URC's behalf in dealings with the trustees of its pension schemes and with the professional advisers of the pension schemes. It may where necessary also respond to contact with the Pensions Regulator on behalf of The URC

c) To take decisions on behalf of the URC within the guidelines for delegation agreed with General Assembly or Mission Council

d) To liaise with the Investment Committee to ensure that the URC's view of suitable investment strategy is communicated to the trustees of the pension schemes

e) To monitor the services provided by external pension providers and the internal pensions administration of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund

f) To secure advice and support from external advisers as is necessary to provide clear guidance to the URC.

Membership

a) Ex-officio members:
   i) the Treasurer, or Deputy Treasurer, of the URC
   ii) the Convenor of the Investment Committee
   iii) the Convenor of the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee
   iv) the Deputy General Secretary Administration and Resources.

b) A Convenor of the Pensions Committee and two further members appointed by the General Assembly for four-year terms, renewable once

c) Up to three additional members co-opted by the Committee

d) Staff in attendance:
   i) The Chief Finance Officer
   ii) The Pensions Manager, who acts as secretary
   iii) The Secretary for Ministries, who may attend for matters relating to the Ministers' Pension Fund.

Links between Committees

The Pensions Committee convenor sits ex-officio on the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee, the Investment Committee and may be invited to join the board of the URC Ministers Pensions Trust. This complements the ex-officio members of the Pensions Committee in facilitating good inter-committee communication. When matters need referral for information or decision to Mission Council or General Assembly, these will be presented by the Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer under the auspices of the Finance Committee.

Delegated authority

a) The Ministers Pension Fund Rules place certain responsibilities upon the URC. The following are delegated to the Pensions Committee; all others will be referred by the Committee to Mission Council or General Assembly for decision:
   i) Acceptability of suitable occupation (for ill-health rule purposes)
   ii) Admission of a late joiner
   iii) Service credit for ill health pension purposes when engaged in ecumenical work
   iv) Participating bodies: Consent for new participating body (where we have decided to admit no more), contributions and expenses chargeable to participating bodies and various other actions
   v) Consent to the trustees providing an augmentation of benefit (in agreement with the Treasurer)
   vi) Consent to the trustees making a benefit payment in excess of HM Revenue and Customs limits
   vii) Receive the trustee's recommendation re any deficit/surplus (this effectively includes agreement to contribution rate changes and deficit contributions) – but the resulting actions would be managed in liaison with the Treasurer.

b) There are similar responsibilities in relation to the lay staff pension scheme. The Pensions Committee will seek to manage these matters but will refer any significant financial matters to the Treasurer and liaise with the Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources) where members' benefits are concerned.

c) Some responsibilities fall to the employer as a result of legislation and the actions of the Pension Regulator. These may include liaison with the Regulator and the trustees over the strength of the 'employer covenant', the investment strategy and the level of risk undertaken, the agreement of contribution levels and a plan for any recovery payments. The Pensions Committee will seek to manage these matters on behalf of the URC, whilst recognising that all matters of significant financial consequence should be managed in liaison with the Treasurer.

Desirable skills for General Assembly appointees

a) All members should have a good knowledge of pensions, though not necessarily as practitioners

b) The Convenor needs a comprehensive understanding of pensions, a willingness to keep up to date, and a willingness to contribute a considerable amount of time to the role outside meetings. He/she does not necessarily need to be an actuary, but a strong financial orientation and Board level experience are necessary

c) If appointed as a member of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust board, the Convenor will also, in a personal capacity, offer experience and support to the Chair of the Trustee Board.

Method of working

1) The Committee will normally meet twice each year

2) Further meetings, perhaps of a subset of members, may be held to address any current and pressing matters

3) Where possible, progress will be made between meetings by electronic means and agreement to matters of decision may also be made in this way. ------END------

TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP FOR THE SAFEGUARDING ADVISORY GROUP (from Paper R1, 20/06)

1. Background

The Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG thereafter) is the main body of the Church to maintain a whole-church approach to safeguarding and protection for children, young people and adults at risk throughout the URC as well as to oversee the development, implementation, review and monitoring of the Safeguarding Strategic Plan (2020-2025).

2. Membership of the SAG

The SAG will be chaired by the appropriate Deputy General Secretary (or the General Secretary in the absence of the DGS) and administered by the URC's safeguarding adviser, who will act as secretary for the SAG and will be the central point of contact for all SAG matters.

The membership will include the Head of Children's and Youth Work, the Secretary for Ministries, and up to five further members with relevant skills and experience, including safeguarding children and adults at risk, safeguarding law, police, and employment issues. These five shall include up to three nominated members and up to two whom the Group may co-opt. All of these members may vote, and count towards a quorum.

Nominated members will be appointed to terms of three years and will normally serve no more than two terms. Nominations for membership are to be brought by Nominations Committee to General Assembly (or to Mission Council acting on its behalf).

Co-opted members will be appointed for a term of service relevant to their contribution to the work of the SAG.

The Secretary may invite others with specialist knowledge or to contribute to meetings as occasional visitors if required.

3. Meetings

The members of the SAG will meet at least three times per year, normally at URC Church House.

A meeting quorum will be one half of the current members of the SAG.

Meeting agendas and minutes will be provided by the Secretary of the SAG, and these will include supporting papers or documents for review in a timely manner.

4. Responsibilities of the SAG

The SAG oversees the development of policy and the implementation of Good Practice across the United Reformed Church in safeguarding and protecting children, young people, and adults from harm, abuse or neglect, making recommendations to Mission Council and General Assembly as appropriate.

The SAG ensures that Good Practice documents are updated, published, and circulated as appropriate.

The SAG develops systems for monitoring local church and synod compliance with Good Practice and devises strategies for addressing identified weaknesses.

The SAG fosters collaboration with ecumenical partners across the full range of safeguarding issues, including engagement in the development of public policy.

The SAG advises on the development and delivery of safeguarding training, and the support of synod/regional safeguarding officers and coordinators.

The SAG oversees services which the United Reformed Church receives from external or other relevant agencies and contractors to support its safeguarding policies and practices.

The Safeguarding Advisory Group reports to Mission Council and General Assembly when appropriate.

5. Amendment, modification or variation

These Terms of Reference may be amended, normally after recommendation by SAG, and always subject to the approval of Mission Council or General Assembly.

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Membership of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, at March 2020

Convenor
The Revd Richard Church, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Secretary
Mr Ioannis Athanasiou, URC Safeguarding Adviser

Members
The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries
Dr Sam Richards, Head of Children's and Youth Work
The Revd Zaidie Orr
Mr Paul Smillie

Co-opted members
The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King, Education and Learning Officer

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TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SYNODS' SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE GROUP (from Paper R2, 20/07)

This group is a sub-group of the Safeguarding Advisory Group and comprises all synod safeguarding designated persons and professionals of the United Reformed Church, including synod safeguarding officers and synod safeguarding advisers. The group reports to the secretary of SAG and denominational safeguarding adviser of the Church.

Purpose

- To act as a confidential reference body for safeguarding practice with children, young people and adults at risk throughout the denomination.
- To ensure that safeguarding procedures are reviewed and implemented consistently in practice.
- To provide an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange between and across the synods.
- To contribute to the development of good practice guidance and training resources.
- To offer training and professional development opportunities for synod safeguarding designated persons.

Membership

The Safeguarding Advisory Group shall determine the group's membership (seeking, if it wishes, advice from the group about this). Membership will include ex officio all synod safeguarding leads of the URC and the denominational safeguarding adviser, who will chair the meetings. Members should have suitable skills and experience in safeguarding matters, relating to children and adults. A meeting quorum will be representation from at least 7 synods regardless of the number of attendees in each meeting. For reasons of confidentiality, the group should be restricted to those who lead and oversee safeguarding policy and practice in all URC Synods on a paid or voluntary role. There will always be remote access and reasonable adjustments for participants as well as a minute taker external to the group who should not be a member of the SSP group.

Meetings

The group will normally meet at least three times per year, although it may determine to meet more frequently. Meetings will be planned, supported by an agenda and recorded.

Confidentiality

Because of the nature of its remit, it is essential that the discussions of the Safeguarding Practice Group shall be treated as confidential. Individuals and churches may be named in the course of the group's discussions. The minutes of the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group will be kept securely. If they need to be released beyond the group, they will be reviewed and redacted as needed by the chair. All members of the group will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement on an annual basis and any other attendees will be asked to sign one at the meeting.

Conflict of Interest

At each meeting members will be asked to declare any conflicts of interest.

Remit

- Promote consistency and quality of safeguarding practice across URC Synods
- Contribute to the development and implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures across the Synods

- Support the provision of training and professional development to synod safeguarding leads
- Maintain an overview of cases and safeguarding incidents
- Work with URC's safeguarding adviser to monitor issues
- Review the role of the group biannually.

Approval

These Terms of Reference were approved by the Safeguarding Advisory Group (5 February 2020).

Review

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed biannually by the Safeguarding Advisory Group, after taking advice, if it wishes, from the group.

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