

Assembly Executive

9-11 February 2024

The Hayes Conference Centre,
Swanwick



The
**United
Reformed
Church**



16 January 2024

Dear Friends and colleagues,

**Welcome to the Assembly Executive
Friday 9 to Sunday 11 February 2024
The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Alferton, Derbyshire DE55 1AU**

1. Introduction

This is the second mailing for next month's Assembly Executive. It includes the following:

- Agenda for our meeting
- Updated list of attendees
- Practical Information sheet
- Travel information
- Map of the venue

The first mailing included a covering letter and a list of attendees. If you are missing any of these papers, please contact Izumi Nishizono, izumi.nishizono@urc.org.uk.

It still seems likely that engineering works will affect rail travel in and around Derbyshire on Sunday 11 February, so please check carefully before buying tickets.

If you are planning on driving to the venue, please help reduce our collective environmental impact by checking the list of people attending to see whether car sharing might be possible.

2. Assembly Executive Papers

The papers for Assembly Executive are now available here: www.urc.org.uk/assembly-executive. There may be some last-minute additions, so please regularly check this page.

Please note that paper Z1, which will be considered in a brief closed session in session 7, will only be available in hard copy and distributed at the venue.

3. En Bloc

At General Assembly and Assembly Executive meetings, we take certain business en bloc. These are items where the Moderator thinks that decisions might be reached responsibly without further discussion. You will see that the agenda includes a slot when these items will be voted on.

I suggest you read the en bloc papers first. This will give you time to contact the author of a paper if you have questions. Authors' names and e-mail addresses are noted on the cover sheets. If you think any of these papers need discussion at Assembly Executive, particularly if you disagree with a proposed resolution, you may ask that a piece of business be removed from en bloc. You must put that request to the Clerk,

michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk by 12:00 on Wednesday 7 February. If six people ask to remove an item, it will be withdrawn from en bloc and added to our agenda.

If a serious difficulty, error, or changed circumstance is noticed in a paper currently scheduled for en bloc, the proposer may ask for it to be withdrawn from en bloc, or the Moderator may rule that the difficulty, error, or changed circumstance requires the paper to be withdrawn from en bloc. Such requests should be made to the Clerk as soon as possible.

I need to remind you too that we really rely on every Assembly Executive member to read the papers and take note of information to relay back to their synods. In using the En Bloc method of decision-making there is no wish to bury information or to avoid discussions which Assembly Executive ought to have. We must all ensure the appropriate flow of information from Assembly Executive to the synods.

Here are the papers the Moderator currently expects to take in en bloc:

- A4 – General Secretariat Transitions
- A5 – Business Committee: minutes secretary
- F2 – Worship, Faith and Order Committee: amending terms of office
- G1 – Pensions Update
- J1 – Nominations Committee
- R2 – CDAG: Ministerial resignations
- S1 – Safeguarding Committee: criminal record checks
- X1 – Mersey and North Western Synods: synod changes

I look forward to seeing you in Swanwick next month.

Yours sincerely,



The Revd Adrian Bulley



Assembly Executive

Friday 9 to Sunday 11 February 2024

Agenda

Friday 9 February

12:00 to 13:00 Registration in reception
13:00 to 14:00 Lunch

Session one

14:00 to 15:30 Welcome and opening worship
15:30 to 16:30 Tea/coffee break. Check-in/access rooms

Session two

16:30 to 18:15 Minutes and matters arising.
Update from Finance on budget progress
H1 – Ministries: URC Competency Process
H2 – Ministries: Special Category Ministry
18:30 to 19:30 Dinner

Session three

19:45 to 20:30 B1 – C&YWC: A formal ministry for children's/youth/family work
Presentation immediately followed by group discussions
20:30 Evening prayer

Saturday 10 February

8:00 to 9:00 Breakfast

Session four

9:15 to 11:00 Worship
R1 – CDAG: Investigation teams
R3 – CDAG: New Appendix C Assembly mandated matters
11:00 to 11:30 Tea/coffee break

Session five

11:30 to 13:00 A1 – Business Committee: Establishing the Resources Committee
A2 – Business Committee: Modern Slavery Statement
A3 – Business Committee: Reconciliation and Mediation Service
I1 – Mission: Report
F1 – Worship, Faith and Order: Update
13:00 to 14:00 Lunch

Session six

14:00 Free time
16:00 Tea/coffee break

Session seven

16:30 to 18:00 En Bloc:
A4 – General Secretariat Transitions
A5 – Business Committee: Minutes secretary
F2 – Worship, Faith and Order Committee: amending terms of office
G1 – Pensions Update
J1 – Nominations Committee
R2 – CDAG: Ministerial resignations
S1 – Safeguarding Committee: criminal record checks
X1 – Mersey and North Western Synods: Synod changes
Items taken out of En Bloc
Not later than 17:30 - brief closed session to consider Z1
18:30 to 19:30 Dinner

Session eight

19:45 to 20:30 The Church's commitment to Net Zero
Presentation and group discussions
20:30 Evening prayer

Sunday 11 February

8:00 to 9:00 Breakfast
Vacate rooms and return key cards by 9:30

Session nine

9:30 to 11:00 Morning prayer
B1: C&YWC: A formal ministry for children's/youth/family work
discussion and decision-making
Remaindered business
11:00 to 11:30 Tea/coffee break
11:30 to 12:30 Worship with Holy Communion
12:30 to 13:30 Lunch and departures
13:30 to 15:00 Meeting of Committee Convenors and Secretaries

Future Assembly Executive dates:

Tuesday 26 November 2024 (19:00 – 21:00 budget meeting online)
Monday 3 to Wednesday 5 February 2025 (The Hayes, Swanwick)

Paper A1

Establishing the Resources Committee

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Victoria James, Chief Operating Officer victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Approve the proposed changes to the committee membership and to the committee structure. Approve the Terms of Reference.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Agrees the revised membership of the Resources committee. Such membership to be Convenor, Treasurer, Deputy Treasurer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Finance Officer plus 6 further members covering Finance (2), HR (1), Properties (1), Comms (1) and compliance/health and safety/ GDPR (1).2. Agrees to the Remuneration Committee continuing as a sub-committee of the Resources Committee.3. Adopts the Terms of Reference for the Resources Committee and the Remuneration Committee.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Agree the Terms of Reference for the Resources Committee (and its Remuneration subcommittee) to enable Nominations Committee to bring nominations for this new committee to serve from the close of General Assembly 2024.
Main points	<p>For the Resources Committee to be appointed to and for its nominated members to be approved by General Assembly at its meeting in July 2024, Assembly Executive is asked to agree the revised membership proposal along with the terms of reference for the Resources Committee and the Remuneration Committee.</p> <p>As the Resources Committee is a committee of the Church which also reports to, and acts on the delegated authority of, the URC Trust (in relation to matters relating to employment and central properties), these decisions will enable further work to be undertaken with the URC Trust before summer 2024. This will include finalising the delegated authority framework between the</p>

	URC Trust and the Resources Committee. This in turn will enable the committee to begin its work after General Assembly 2024 as envisaged by the original Resolutions.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2023 – Paper N2, Resolutions 59,60 and 61.
Consultation has taken place with...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff members whose work will be shaped by this new committee • Convenors and Secretaries of the relevant committees (Finance, Human Resources Advisory Group, Communications Committee, Remuneration Committee) • Members of CHMG based on role and specialism • URC Trust • Nominations Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	Cost of meetings will be reduced as fewer people will be travelling and the number of meetings will be reduced.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased effectiveness within the governance relationships • Improved risk management and awareness of liabilities in these key areas • Increased clarity to the authority delegated by General Assembly and the Trust • The work of the Administration and Resources team will become more coordinated.

1. Introduction

1.1 GA 2023 under Resolutions 59, 60 and 61 has required the creation of a new Resources Committee as part of the Church Life Review. This will bring together the following five current groups and committees:

- Finance Committee
- Church House Management Group (CHMG)
- Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG)
- Remuneration Committee
- Communications Committee.

1.2 This change is welcomed by those working in these areas and will support improved collaboration and coordination as well as streamlining workflow. The committee time will be streamlined also. In essence, the change envisaged by the GA Resolutions takes the work of 5 committees (which involved 14 meetings a year, taking between 43-52.5 hours per annum, and covering ten broad areas of work) to create one committee.

- 1.3 For this new committee to function effectively, it will need to be working at a strategic level with operational matters clearly and effectively delegated. It is also important to note that the Resources Committee is a committee of the Church reporting to General Assembly, but it also will be acting on the delegated authority of the URC Trust in relation to employment and property matters. The Terms of Reference seek to capture this relationship.

2. Work and consultation since General Assembly 2023

- 2.1 Since the resolutions were passed in the summer, the Admin and Resources team have worked together to produce the draft Terms of Reference and a proposed meeting cycle to ensure the appropriate flow of decision making. Both these elements have been out for further consultation with the Convenors and Secretaries of the Finance Committee, HRAG, Remuneration, and Communications and it has been discussed with CHMG. In addition, Nominations Committee has been involved in the process so that they are ready to proceed in the relatively short timeframe between Assembly Executive and the deadline for papers for General Assembly 24.

3. Proposed changes to the original resolutions

- 3.1 Following the detailed work of the Admin and Resources team and the consultation process, the following changes to the original resolutions are proposed:

a. Keeping Remuneration Committee as a subcommittee of the Resources Committee

It would be helpful to keep this small committee (albeit with slightly changed terms of reference) for the following reasons:

- a. Keeping a small committee for this purpose preserves confidentiality around sensitive personal salary information and performance matters where these relate to bonuses.
- b. It keeps some distinction between these staff remuneration conversations and those managing the finances and the implications of the budget position.
- c. It is easier to enable external input into this small group rather than the whole and this external representation is hugely valuable for comparisons and benchmarking purposes.

b. Proposed membership of the main committee

General Assembly originally agreed that the membership of the new committee will include the Convenor, Treasurer (if not the Convenor), COO (as Executive Secretary), Chief Finance Officer plus five other members covering Finance, HR, Property and Communications. This leaves only one member to cover IT, Compliance (including Health and Safety), Records and Archives.

The following factors are relevant to the membership of the committee:

- The Deputy Treasurer needs to be included.
- Having only one person with finance expertise beyond the ex officio members leaves us a little exposed in that area, which is of concern in the current context when there is much to work through in terms of finance in the coming years. We could also have a situation where the other members who bring skills in

relation to HR, Property and Communications are less confident in matters of a technical finance nature which puts increased reliance on the finance specialist beyond the ex officio members. A further outworking could be that if that member sends apologies for a meeting, then the finance input will be coming primarily from those who have been responsible for preparing the budgets and other papers. To ensure proper accountability it is proposed that we increase the number of finance specialist members.

- Given the Trust's responsibilities and duties in terms of finance, property and employment, there needs to be sufficient Trust representation on the new committee.

3.2 The proposed membership is as follows:

- Convenor
- Treasurer (if not the convenor)
- Deputy Treasurer
- COO
- CFO
- Six further members covering Finance (2), HR (1), Properties (1), Comms (1) and compliance/health and safety/GDPR (1).

4. Terms of Reference

4.1 The Terms of Reference for the Resources Committee and the Remuneration Committee are based on the changes outlined in Section 3. The Terms of Reference for the Resources Committee are provided in Appendix 1 and the Terms of Reference for the Remuneration Committee are provided in Appendix 2. Both are before Assembly Executive for final approval.

4.2 If Assembly Executive changes the approach from that outlined in Section 3, then the Terms of Reference will need to be amended accordingly.

5. Meeting cycle

5.1 Given the significant change that this new committee will bring, an outline meeting cycle has been prepared to support the committee in its early stages. This will help ensure that no key business is missed as well as supporting operational efficiency in administering the committee. Assembly is asked to simply note this cycle.

6. Next steps

6.1 If Assembly Executive agrees to the proposed changes outlined in Section 3 and approves the terms of reference, then the next steps will be:

- a. Role descriptions to be prepared for the committee positions.
- b. The committee membership to be appointed using safer recruitment principles.
- c. Nominations Committee to bring the nominations for the membership of the Resources Committee and Remuneration Committee to General Assembly in July 24.
- d. The new committee to form and begin its work immediately after General Assembly.

Appendix 1

Resources Committee Terms of Reference

Committee	Resources Committee
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly
Secretary	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Ex Officio Members	Treasurer Deputy Treasurer Chief Finance Officer (CFO)
General Assembly Appointed Members	Six members with collective experience of finance, properties, HR, compliance, and communications. Ideally representing those skills areas as follows: Finance (2), HR (1), Properties (1), Communications (1) and compliance/health and safety/GDPR (1). At least one such member to be a director of the URC Trust
Length of Term	Initial term of four years which may be extended by up to two years
In Attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	Head of Communications (and other team members as required) Compliance Officer Archive and Records Manager Facilities Manager Human Resources Officer IT Manager
Minute Secretary	PA to COO and CFO
Meeting Frequency	Six times per annum (c 21 hours)
Subgroups/Sub committees	Pensions Committee, Remuneration Committee and Legacy Fund Panel
Quoracy	Four members to always include the Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer
Accountability & Reporting Duties	General Assembly (Communications and Finance) and United Reformed Church Trust (properties, compliance, employment and finance). The Committee will provide an update report to each meeting of the URC Trust. Responsibility for the implementation of policies and decisions of the Resources Committee rests with those employees appointed by Church House to do so, and ultimately, the COO.
Terms of Reference Review	At least every four years, in consultation with the Trust. In addition, a full review in consultation with the Trust and the operational team will take place 18 months after its first meeting to ensure its effectiveness.

Responsibilities

The Resources Committee (the Committee) has key responsibilities across a number of interlinked and interdependent operational areas.

Finance

The Committee has oversight responsibility for the funds administered for the benefit of the United Reformed Church, its long-term financial planning, and the preparation and control of its budget under the authority of General Assembly and the Trustees of the URC Trust.

The committee will ensure that proper procedures are in place for the maintenance of accounting records, controlling, and monitoring the budgetary process and the preparation of financial statements in compliance with applicable UK law and accounting standards. To this end, the Committee should expect to liaise with the appointed auditors at least once per annum.

The Committee may take such decisions about the finances of the Church as are necessary within the policies set by General Assembly.

The Committee will also have detailed budget oversight for the following broad areas:

- Administration and Resources including Church House
- Central Properties (see below)
- Communications.

Communications

To promote effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the URC the committee will:

- Develop and monitor the communication strategy ensuring structures, staffing and appropriate communications channels are in place to give voice to good news, facilitate regional/national communications, support the communications of Church House departments and General Assembly and resources local churches.
- Develop and monitor the strategy in relation to the Bookshop as a denominational resource and communication tool.
- Develop and monitor policies and procedures which relate to the work of the Communications team.
- Ensure that the work of the Communications team appropriate supports and resources local churches.

Central properties

The Committee has delegated authority from the URC Trust to oversee the 'management' of all existing central properties, which include Church House (86 Tavistock Place, the tenanted flat (86A Tavistock Place) and all properties owned or rented to house Synod Moderators and General Assembly appointed ministers. 'Management' means acting in accordance with current policies to oversee:

- Maintenance and all capital expenditure in relation to all properties
- The sale and acquisition of manse accommodation
- Overall compliance of the central properties to all policies and legal responsibilities.

Church House Operations and Human Resources

The Committee has delegated authority from the URC Trust to ensure the development

and monitoring of a suite of policies covering all operational and compliance areas, including but not limited to Health and Safety, Data Protection, Archiving, IT and Business Continuity.

The Committee has delegated authority from the URC Trust in relation to all operational HR matters, including the agreement of HR Policies and Procedures, as they relate to employees. In exercising this authority, the Committee shall:

- Develop and monitor the terms and conditions and employment policies/procedures for employed staff to support the culture as well as ensure legal compliance.
- Monitor, review and approve the ongoing staffing strategy including size and makeup of the team, grading/regrading of posts, expertise, career development and succession planning
- Approve any new job descriptions and resulting appointments referring matters related to salary banding to the Remuneration Committee
- Review any proposed major changes to existing job descriptions for employed staff and referring any associated salary change to Remuneration Committee
- Agree a course of action with HR staff regarding any dismissal other than a those at the end of a fixed term contract or non-confirmation of employment at the end of a probationary period. This would include any decisions on severance arrangements or settlement agreements
- Determine, within the budget preparations, the annual cost of living rise for lay salaries and stipends based on the recommendation from the Remuneration Committee and the MoM Committee.

The Committee shall be responsible for any other related matters which affect the welfare of staff or operational matters in Church House, which may arise from time to time, and for which a formal policy or procedure is required.

Risk management

The Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities, at least once per year but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Conducting business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it.

Decisions can be taken via email with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the COO and noted at the next meeting with updates on progress as needed.

Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects and instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work. The Committee has the power to seek external professional advice if they deem it necessary with reference to the Chief Operating Officer for unbudgeted professional fees.

The COO shall be responsible for ensuring communication to Church House staff and other relevant parties, of all decisions.

The Committee has discretion to seek input from the wider staff team as deemed necessary.

Appendix 2

Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference

Sub-committee	Remuneration Committee
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly
Secretary	Chief Operating Officer (COO)
Ex Officio Members	Treasurer
General Assembly Appointed Members	HR specialist on Resources Committee
Length of Term	Initial term of four years which may be extended by up to two years
External/Independent members	Methodist Head HR for contextual view and benchmarking
In Attendance	Human Resources Officer Staff representative (at specific times)
Minute Secretary	Human Resources Officer
Meeting Frequency	Two per annum
Quoracy	Three members to always include the Treasurer and Chief Operating Officer
Accountability and Reporting Duties	Accountable to Resources Committee and report on the overall financial impact of decisions as against the budget allocated by the Resources Committee
Terms of Reference Review	At least every four years, in consultation with Resources Committee. In addition, a full will take place 18 months the first meeting of the Resources Committee

Responsibilities

The Remuneration Committee is responsible for considering matters in relation to lay staff remuneration including bonuses and long service awards within the budget provided by the Resources Committee. The Remuneration Committee will:

- Consider any annual cost of living rise based on recent inflation rates, expected changes, external benchmarking and the outturn of formula for stipends received from MoM
- Decide upon proposals from line managers in respect of bonus payments to be made to individual members of staff in recognition of exceptional performance, within the budget allocated by the Resources Committee
- Recommend salary banding for new posts for final approval of the Resources Committee
- Review existing salaries in the light of any proposed major changes to existing job descriptions for employed staff and providing a high-level summary to the Resources Committee for budget management purposes.

Risk management

The Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities, at least once per year but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Conducting business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it.

Decisions can be taken via email with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the COO and noted at the next meeting with updates on progress as needed.

If external professional advice is deemed necessary by this Committee, it would need to seek authority from the Resources Committee.

The COO shall be responsible for ensuring appropriate information flow into the Resources Committee and out to staff (collectively or individual) as necessary.

The Committee shall seek input from the wider staff team at key points in the year on matters relating to the annual cost of living rise. Views may be sought at other times at the discretion of the Committee.

Appendix 3

Resources and Remuneration Committees – meeting cycle

Items with papers are to fall into the following categories:

- Information (I) – ie submitted for information and questions taken but not detailed discussion or decision
- Decision (D) – paper on which decisions are needed
- Conversation (C) – papers seeking a steer for further work.

Resources Committee

Month of Meeting	February (10am-3pm) Online	May (10am-1pm) online
HR and Remuneration Helen in attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New posts/revised JD (D) • Increases in contractual hours (D) • Receive Remuneration Committee summary (I) 	
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legacy Fund Update (I) • Building Fund Update (I) • Pensions Committee Update (I) • Management Accounts 31 December (I) • Audit Plan (I) • Confirm plan for Annual Treasurers' Day (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pensions Committee Update (I) • Management accounts 31 March (I) • Annual Accounts and Reserves policy (D) • Meet with auditors (C&D) • Budget steer (C&D)
Central Properties Mary in attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales and Acquisitions (I&D) • Maintenance (I&D) • Compliance (I) 	
Communications Andy in attendance		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy Planning (D) • Work updates (I)
Operational Items Mary, Fred, Nic, Shahera in attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CH and Facilities Update (I) • IT Update (I) • Compliance Update (I) • Records and Archives annual update (I) 	
Overarching Matters		

Paper A1

Month of Meeting	June (10am-1pm) online	September (11am-4pm) In person
HR and Remuneration Helen in attendance External rep		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New posts/revised JDs (D) • Increases in contractual hours (D) • Receive Remuneration Committee summary (I)
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest management accounts (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legacy Fund Update (I) • Building Fund Update (I) • Pensions Committee Update (I) • Management Accounts Jul 31 (I) • Budget and forecasts (D)
Central Properties Mary in attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales and Acquisitions (I&D) • Maintenance (I&D) • Compliance (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales and Acquisitions (I&D) • Maintenance (I&D) • Compliance (I)
Communications		
Operational Items Mary, Fred, Nic, Shahera in attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Continuity Plan (C) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CH and Facilities Update (I) • IT Update (I) • Compliance Update (I)
Overarching Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Schedule and Policy reviews (D) 	

Paper A1

Month of Meeting	November (10am -1pm) online	December (10am-1pm) online Needs to meet in first week of December (absolute deadline for providing payroll changes is 12 for processing on 15)
HR and Remuneration Helen in attendance External rep		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual HR Report (C) • Revised JDs post PDRs (D) • Increases to contractual hours (D) • Receive Remuneration Committee summary (I)
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest management accounts (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest management accounts (I)
Central Properties Mary in attendance		
Communications Andy in attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy Planning (D) • Work updates (I) 	
Operational Items Mary, Fred, Nic, Shahera in attendance		
Overarching Matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Register 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Papers for Assembly Exec (D) • Triennial plan for GA matters (C&D)

Standing Items	Every meeting - Opening	Every Meeting - Closing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Devotions • Apologies • Conflicts of Interest • Minutes previous meeting • Matters arising (not otherwise on the agenda) • Summary of matters approved via email and any update (I). • New policies/policy amendments (D) • Spending Approval for items outside routine agenda (D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm future meeting dates • AOB (notified in advance) • Grace

Remuneration Committee

HR officer in attendance External representation	Topics Covered
January if needed (10am-noon) online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual salary reviews (D) • Salaries for new posts/revised JDs (D)
August/September (10am-noon) online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff representative (C) • Cost of living report and recommendation (D) • Individual salary reviews (D) • Salaries for new posts/revised JDs (D)
November (10-noon) online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual salary reviews (D) • Confirm pay awards (D) • Bonus requests (D) • Risk register
Standing items Every meeting - opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome • Devotions • Apologies • Conflicts of interest • Minutes previous meeting • Matters arising (not otherwise on the agenda) • Summary of matters approved via email and any update (I)
Standing items Every meeting - closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm future meeting dates. • AOB (notified in advance) • Grace

Paper A2

Modern Slavery Statement

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Victoria James victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adopt the URC's Modern Slavery Statement.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Adopts the Modern Slavery Statement.2. Asks Synods and local churches to develop policies in response to this Statement and to implement appropriate supporting procedures.3. Notes the commitment from Church House to implement a Modern Slavery Policy and revise other policies in response to this statement while also implementing procedures to underpin the policy and overarching statement.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Adopt a statement on Modern Slavery for the denomination under which local, churches and Synods as well as Church House will develop appropriate policies to meet the expectations of the statement.
Main points	A Modern Slavery Statement has been prepared following a Resolution brought to General Assembly in 2021. This Statement is aimed to be denomination wide, and Assembly Executive is asked to adopt it on that basis. Thereafter, Synods and local churches are encouraged to develop policies which support this statement and deliver its expectations, Church House having made progress in this regard.
Previous relevant documents	Paper X1 General Assembly 2021 – Resolution 50 Order Paper Friday 30 June 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	General Secretariat Equalities Committee Church House Connective Synod Moderators Synod Clerks URC Trust Legal Advisor – Andy Middleton Safeguarding Committee Synod Safeguarding Officers

	Members of West Midlands Synod (Synod from which original resolution was brought).
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Summary of Impact

Financial	There may be some cost implications if we need to procure contracts from different providers. The extent of this impact is currently unknown.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Background

- 1.1 West Midlands Synod brought the original Resolution seeking that a Modern Slavery Statement is prepared, and that Church House implements a policy thereunder. Albeit later than originally intended, the Statement is now before Assembly Executive for Adoption.

2. Proposed statement

- 2.1 After consultation, the proposed statement is set out in Appendix 1. Assembly Executive is asked to adopt this Statement.

3. Next steps

- 3.1 If Assembly Executive adopts this Statement, then Church House will finalise its policy to put the Statement into practice and develop other policies accordingly to ensure the statement is fully implemented. Such policies can be made available to Synods and Churches to help them as they seek to respond to the Statement.

Appendix 1

The United Reformed Church Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement

Introduction

This Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Statement relates to actions and activities during the financial year ending 31 December 20XX.

The United Reformed Church and its associated bodies (“the URC,” “we,” “us,” “our”) takes a zero-tolerance approach to modern slavery and human trafficking in all its forms. We strive to act with integrity and transparency in all business dealings and to put in place effective systems and controls to safeguard against any form of modern slavery taking place in our churches, in our business and in our supply chains. We all have a duty to be alert to risks, however small. Everyone in the URC has an obligation to report their concerns so that management can address them.

There are several types of modern slavery. Human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage and bonded labour, slavery based on descent (where people are born into it), child slavery, early and forced marriage, and domestic servitude are the most prevalent. Slavery comes in numerous forms, but they all involve the coercive exploitation of the most defenceless individuals. Most often, this is due to their exclusion and poverty, and when legal systems break down and fail to adequately protect the vulnerable.

People can be particularly vulnerable to modern slavery when external circumstances push them into taking risky decisions in search of opportunities to provide for their families, or when people find they are simply pushed into jobs in exploitative conditions. Anyone could be pressed into forced labour, but people in vulnerable situations – such as being in debt, or not having access to their passport – are particularly at risk. Crises like the Covid-19 pandemic and climate change can make people even more vulnerable to exploitation.

According to the 2021 Global Estimates, there are 49.6 million individuals in modern slavery on any given day; of these, 27.6 million are involved in forced labour, and 22 million are in forced marriages. ⁱ

ⁱⁱThe Global Slavery Index estimates that 122,000 people in the UK are victims of modern slavery. ⁱⁱⁱOnly 3,998 of these potential victims were referred to the Home Office between April and June 2023 (National Referral Mechanism).

Our organisational structure

The URC is a family of Christians who meet in local churches across England, Scotland, Wales, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man. We are part of the worldwide family of Reformed Churches, a group of more than 70 million Christians. There are three decision making councils in the URC outlined below:

- Church Meeting – for local churches
- 13 Synods – led by a Synod Moderator
- General Assembly – the denominational decision making body.

Through our conciliar structure as a charitable organisation, we seek to fulfil the Church's objectives via extensive relevant programmes.

The URC's denomination-wide governing body is the General Assembly. Normally it meets every year, to discuss and decide the Church's mission and way of life. The General Assembly has a number of committees that oversee the ongoing work of the denomination.

This statement covers the business activities of all URC councils and committees across the wider denomination.

Our policies

We are dedicated to identifying and preventing modern slavery and human trafficking in our supply chains and business dealings. We have essential policies in place to help us put effective processes and controls in place to lessen the likelihood that modern slavery may occur within our business or in our supply chain.

The following policies set down our approach to the identification of modern slavery risks and steps to be taken, to prevent slavery and human trafficking in our operations:

- **Whistleblowing policy:** We encourage the reporting of suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, including instances of modern slavery and human trafficking.
- **Anti-Bribery, and Fraud policy:** Our policies outline our position on bribery, corruption, and fraud as well as how we will prevent, identify, report, and investigate such crimes.
- **Good Practice 6 Safeguarding Guidance:** Sets out the actions the URC takes to promote a safer culture, by protecting those that are at risk of being abused.
- **Gift Policy for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers:** Sometimes, people or families will present or offer personal gifts to ministers. This policy establishes a process for registering such presents, protecting ministers from any accusations of malpractice.
- **HR and Employment Policies:** We have a wide range of HR Policies to ensure that staff are properly appointed, paid fairly and benefit from fair employment practices. We commit to being a Real Living Wage Employer.
- **Procurement Policy:** Church House is developing a policy to establish the factors which must be followed when selecting suppliers to assist in ensuring that a good business partner is selected and includes supplier reputation and compliance with relevant laws and ethical procedures. Synods and local churches are encouraged to develop a similar policy.
- **Modern Slavery Policy:** Church House will implement a policy overseeing the approach and process towards managing and minimising the risk of modern slavery and human trafficking from occurring in our supply chain. This policy can be made available as a template to Synods and local Churches.
- **Additional Policies:** In view of the Modern Slavery Policy's implementation, other policies, such as the Ethical Investment Policy Statement will be reviewed.

With the exception of the HR policies, the policies listed above apply equally to staff (including church workers), ministers, trustees, volunteers, and anyone engaged on a temporary basis. They are monitored by relevant policy owners on a biennial basis.

Training

We recognise that it is everyone's responsibility to safeguard others and we need to ensure that people holding specific roles and responsibilities are specifically equipped to protect vulnerable groups.

To ensure a good understanding of the risks of modern slavery and human trafficking and the mitigations in place, specific training is provided in conjunction with the Clewer Initiative, who have trained our Synod Safeguarding Officers to deliver their package throughout the denomination. Training is available through the Synods and is also offered from the Assembly Safeguarding team. It is available to anyone who wishes to access it. Training dates are circulated via the Safeguarding newsletter.

Due Diligence processes for slavery and human trafficking

To help identify and monitor the risk of modern slavery and human trafficking in our supply chain, we commit to reviewing our existing suppliers in accordance with the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The URC's due diligence process includes building long-standing relationships with suppliers and making clear our expectations of business partners. We commit to include anti-slavery and human trafficking provisions in all our contracts with suppliers. Where we discover we have been engaging in business with a supplier in support of modern slavery and/or human trafficking, all ties will be immediately cut.

Actions and future commitments

To reduce the possibility of modern slavery or human trafficking occurring in our organisation and supply chain, we plan to implement the additional steps listed below:

- Continue to uphold related policies aforementioned, and implement URC Modern Slavery policies, in churches, Synods and Church House, ensuring we undertake training and awareness raising
- Review existing contracts, to improve the visibility of our key supplier relationships and terms
- Ensure that new contracts have relevant modern slavery clauses included in them.

1. ⁱ https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2022/09/12142412/GEMS-2022_Report_EN_ExecutiveSummary_V4.pdf

2. ⁱⁱ <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2023/09/29084706/GSI-Snapshot-United-Kingdom.pdf>

3. ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-april-to-june-2023/modern-slavery-national-referral-mechanism-and-duty-to-notify-statistics-uk-quarter-2-2023-april-to-june#:~:text=Overall%2C%20of%20the%203%2C998%20potential,annually%20since%20the%20NRM%20began.>

Paper A3

Reconciliation and Mediation Service

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive agrees in principle to the proposal to enter a service level agreement with Place for Hope for five years, with a review in year four, as detailed in Assembly Executive February 2024 Paper A3.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Initial report following consultation regarding the possibility of initiating a URC-wide reconciliation and mediation service.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2023: Paper A5 – Mediation and Reconciliation Resource.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators Methodist Connexional Team: Head of Ministries and Learning James Coleman and Lis Mullen (Northerly Synods) Carolyn Merry and Helen Boothroyd (Place for Hope) Fiona Bennett (immediate past Assembly Moderator) Secretary for Education and Learning Finance Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	If approved, a service-level agreement with Place for Hope would cost £75,000 per annum over an initial five year term, with a review in year four.
External (eg ecumenical)	Methodist Connexional Team.

Background

General Assembly 2023 paper A5 had the following to say in support of resolution 2023:10:

“It has become obvious recently that across the Church there are an increasing number of conflicts that arise. In the context of a more litigious society, and in the light of the trauma of the pandemic, the Church is dealing with an ever-increasing number of

complaints rooted in conflicts. These are affecting local churches, Synods and the General Assembly.

The complaints process (Section Q) works on the basis that initially mediation is used, where at all possible, to try to resolve conflicts before moving to formal investigation. However, those operating the policy have to seek individuals willing to take on mediation. We have no standing panel that either Synods or the General Assembly can draw upon, to bring expertise in this area.

The Business Committee believes this is something which could be of service to the whole church, and therefore invites General Assembly to initiate a process of consultation to test this, and if appropriate, to bring costed proposals to Assembly Executive in 2023.

There will be good experience to draw upon from the Northerly Synods who have worked with a 'Listening and Reconciliation' service. There will also be expertise and experience to draw upon from ecumenical partners (the Church of Scotland and Methodist Churches have developed similar services in places) and from expert organisations in the field, such as Place for Hope and Bridge Builders.

We envisage a process of consultation with Synods, as well as partners with expertise in this area, to test the feasibility, and costs, of developing a mediation and reconciliation service to assist the flourishing of the whole United Reformed Church."

Resolution 2023:10 says: "General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to consult widely and bring costed proposals for a URC-wide Mediation and Reconciliation Service to Assembly Executive 2024".

What follows represents the fruits of a period of consultation and reflection.

Northerly Synods' Listening and Reconciliation Service

The five synods in the northern parts of the British Isles (Northern, North Western, Mersey, Yorkshire and Scotland) have for many years been exploring how collaborative action may assist them to support local churches more effectively.

In a 2017 application to the URC Legacy Fund, they wrote: "Providing facilitation and assistance to churches undergoing change is essential. The Synods recognise that the extent of change anticipated is likely to create difficulties for churches, possibly even conflict at times. Periods of feeling unsettled can be a natural expression of the movement of the Spirit as well as a human response, all of which can lead to difficulty for some."

Following careful consideration and appraisal, a partnership was proposed, initially with Place for Hope (see below); latterly they developed their own course to train people in mediation skills.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 and personnel changes intervened before this vision could be fully realised. Some of those involved felt that the Listening and Reconciliation Service lacked appropriate support for those engaging in mediation, and this may well have contributed to it faltering.

There remains a small cohort of people in the northerly synods who have been trained and might still be willing to be used and (with further training) form part of a reconciliation and mediation team for the URC. A further tranche of people expressed interest in being trained, but that was curtailed by Covid-19.

This proposal builds upon the innovative work done by the northerly Synods and takes account of the consideration and appraisal they have carried out.

Methodist Connexional Reconciliation and Mediation Team

The Methodist Connexion launched a pilot project in June 2021 within three of its Learning Network Regions (covering thirteen districts; one third of the whole). Following evaluation in 2023, since 1 October 2023, the project has been expanded across the Connexion.

Further information can be found here: www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/guidance-for-churches/reconciliation-and-mediation-team-pilot-project/.

Like the proposals initially developed by the northerly Synods, the Reconciliation and Mediation Team is delivered in partnership with Place for Hope which, through a service level agreement, offer a team of accredited mediation practitioners and have delivered for the Connexion:

- Project management
- Administrative support
- Initial training (two three day courses and one accreditation day) including travel and accommodation
- Case supervision for those accredited
- On-going professional development and learning
- Access to experienced accredited practitioners to partner with those newly accredited
- All expenses for those offering mediation.

The team is fully funded from the Connexional budget, with no cost to end users (congregations, circuits or districts).

Over the course of the three-year pilot project, eighteen practitioners were trained and accredited by Place for Hope (an approximate 50:50 split between presbyters and lay people). During the same period, 42 cases were rereferred to the team.

With the expansion of the project to include the entire Connexion, it is anticipated that further people will be accredited with the hope that the team will have expanded to include 60 people within the first full five years.

Like The United Reformed Church, the Methodist Connexion often struggles to find accredited practitioners who are truly independent of a particular situation in order to provide objectivity. It is recognised that, were the URC to follow a parallel route in its consideration of a mediation and reconciliation team, there would be benefits to both denominations in having access to accredited practitioners from across the UK.

Place for Hope

Place for Hope (see www.placeforhope.org.uk) is a charity which has its historical roots in the Church of Scotland but which has been an independent charity since 2015

to enable the gift of this work to reach more people. They now work in partnership with the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Methodist Connexion.

Place for Hope has a long history of offering foundation training to people wishing to be equipped as mediators, leading to accreditation through Scottish Mediation. They also offer supervision and continuing professional development for their accredited mediators.

As well as training mediators, the charity is also committed to facilitating culture change in order that conflict is avoided wherever possible. For example, they offer a course, delivered online, called Living Well with Differences.

Place for Hope talk about conflict transformation, rather than conflict resolution.

Proposal

There are many good reasons for entering a service-level agreement with Place for Hope:

1. Staffing

There would be no need for the URC to employ additional staff to administer the team, develop training or deliver training.

2. Cost

There would be no need for the URC to bear any additional costs in terms of buying in reconciliation and mediation from external contractors. The most recent (November 2023) engagement on behalf of the General Assembly with purchasing a mediation/facilitation service to address one situation in a Synod will cost £100 per hour for what is likely to >8 hours.

3. Objectivity

The pool of URC accredited practitioners could be added to the pool of accredited practitioners from the Methodist Church, Church of Scotland and Scottish Episcopal Church to ensure that people can be found for any situation which may arise who have no prior knowledge of individuals, their background, location or circumstances. Likewise, URC accredited practitioners might be available to other denominations for the same reasons.

4. Experience

Place for Hope has a proven track record of providing precisely the service we require.

5. Ecumenical

It would be very good to be able to work with ecumenical partners in offering such a service.

6. Prevention

Ministers might be encouraged to access the Living Well with Difference course as part of Education for Ministry 3. In addition, Synod Training and Development Officers might be trained to cascade the training within their Synods. Both approaches could begin to change the culture that gives rise to conflict.

One weakness with General Assembly resolution 2023:10 is that it could be construed as 'buying in' a service to solve our problems. There could be much more to it than that,

of course. This could be an opportunity to shift the culture throughout the URC to transform how we respond and engage with conflict. It is an opportunity to learn to model a peacemaker way of being which could be prophetic in our local communities and society. It is a very tangible opportunity to develop discipleship, evangelism and mission.

Place for Hope's bespoke proposal for The United Reformed Church can be found in the Annexe to this paper. In essence, it seeks to:

- “train, equip, deploy and support a team of skilled URC mediators
- make available mediation support across the URC within five years
- open learning pathways for ordained and lay people from senior leadership to grassroots to understand and live better with differences, change and conflict”.

The first two of those aims are clearly what was envisaged by the General Assembly resolution (2023:10); the third aim extends that resolution to begin to instil cultural change throughout the denomination.

The cost of providing the service that Place for Hope is offering may be thought to be high at £75,000 per year, initially for five years, with a review in year four, but the benefits as outlined above, may make that cost seem rather more reasonable.

Understandably, those who hold the General Assembly purse strings are extremely wary about the prospect of increasing the current budget deficit further and wonder whether there are other ways of funding the scheme.

The funding options appear to be:

1. Fund from the General Assembly budget.
2. Explore whether any of the Synods might be willing to fund this for an initial period, ultimately – perhaps – funding this work through inter-synod resource sharing.
3. Explore other funding streams
4. Ask churches and Synods who use the service to pay for it.

A steer from Assembly Executive on these (or other) funding options will be welcome.

It should be emphasised that options 4 is by no means cost neutral as far as the General Assembly is concerned. Experience suggests that the General Assembly (like churches and Synods) is likely to be a heavy user of such a scheme and that will be a cost. Not to set up a scheme such as this at all will continue to involve both Synods and the General Assembly in significant expenditure in purchasing such a service piece meal.

Annexe



Place for Hope Proposal to the United Reformed Church Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation Programme

Background

Place for Hope (P4H) accompanies and equips people and faith communities so that all might reach their potential to be peacemakers who navigate conflict, change and differences well. We welcome long-term partnerships with denominations to embed a culture of reconciliation and peace-making. We offer a broad programme of foundation training in conflict transformation together with the training and support of a specialist team of mediators. This model has been tried and tested through a pilot programme in the Methodist Church and is currently being rolled out across the Methodist Connexion.

The United Reformed Church (URC) General Assembly 2023 passed a resolution to consult and bring to General Assembly 2024 costed proposals for a URC-wide Mediation and Reconciliation service. Following meetings of the URC-lead, first with the Methodist Church lead for their P4H partnership, then with P4H, we were invited to submit this proposal.

Place for Hope has delivered various training elements to the Northerly Synods of the URC in earlier years. We very much welcome this opportunity to offer an integrated programme of longer-term training and support across the whole United Reformed Church.

Purpose and Nature of Programme

This proposal responds to the General Assembly resolution 2023 - extending the scope of what was envisaged therein - on the basis of P4H's recent experience of programme delivery to embed a culture of reconciliation for other partners, notably the Methodist Church and the Church of Scotland, and our recent discussions with the URC-lead.

We propose an integrated programme to begin to embed a culture of reconciliation and peace-making across the United Reformed Church in Britain. This programme would:

- train, equip, deploy and support a team of skilled URC mediators;
- make available mediation support across the URC within five years;
- open learning pathways for ordained and lay people from senior leadership to grassroots to understand and live better with differences, change and conflict.

It is our experience that for a culture of reconciliation to begin to embed in a denomination it is necessary to integrate mediation team training and development with broader training programme to raise awareness and understanding across that denomination of the dynamics of conflict, including personal conflict styles, and how to live well with differences. Without this integration, cycles of conflict continue, and mediation is largely a 'firefighting' response to situations of high conflict. Mediation alone cannot bring about culture change.

Key Programme Elements

1. Training of a team of mediation practitioners from the URC using P4H's residential *Faith in Change and Conflict* course.
2. Assessment of mediation practitioners.
3. Accreditation of successful practitioners through Scottish Mediation.
4. Supervision of URC mediators.

5. Mentored paired deployment of URC mediators, alongside a more experienced P4H practitioner, to both URC and other cases. Online mediation is used by P4H where suitable and acceptable to the parties in the case, but in-person mediation is always made available where preferred by the client or more suitable for the nature of the case, e.g. large-scale facilitated conversation with a congregation.
6. Phased provision of facilitated conversation, mediation and coaching support in situations of conflict, change and transition across the URC in Britain.
7. Ongoing continuous professional development (CPD) for all URC mediators (in line with annual accreditation requirements).
8. Delivery of a range of P4H's foundation courses for ordained and lay people across the URC, either through direct delivery of an agreed number of open online training courses or through a Train the Trainer programme (in-person or online) or an agreed combination of the two. Courses to select from include:
 - Living Well with Differences
 - Growing through Change and Conflict
 - Responding to Bullying and Harassment
 - Journeying through Change and Transition
 - Leading through Change and Transition
 - Scripture, Spirituality and ConflictWe recommend that the programme of courses offered be developed with P4H's training team on the basis of an analysis of need.
9. Bespoke training provision for specific ministries, groups, and events which may be agreed between the partners.

Programme Implementation

Duration

We recommend an initial 5-year programme to allow sufficient time for both foundation training and mediation support to be made available across the whole United Reformed Church in Britain. We envisage that this programme would run from September 2024 to August 2029. It would be possible to offer a shorter 3-year pilot programme across selected synods if preferred. However, the delivery model has already been piloted in the Methodist Church and then moved forward to roll-out, so we recommend moving straight into a full 5-year URC programme.

Phasing

To ensure quality and deliver a professional-standard mediation service there would need to be a phased roll-out of the reconciliation and mediation team, as in the Methodist Connexion. This is necessary to train and bring onstream mediators gradually and in a manageable way to minimise risk, maximise stakeholder engagement and ensure the service is fit for purpose. Similarly, a phased programme of foundation training would be agreed based on learning pathways.

Plan

We would provide a detailed programme plan for approval by an agreed joint programme management body within the first four months of the partnership. The phasing over the 5-year life of the programme would be clearly set out in the programme plan and expectation management prioritised.

Ecumenical deployment infrastructure

The ecumenical aspect of our model of mediation support infrastructure is of benefit to denominational partners through positive cross-fertilisation and enhancement of ecumenical partnership. URC mediators would join the P4H volunteer practitioner team, deployed in pairs on an ecumenical range of cases and often partnered with a practitioner from a different denomination. This brings to cases both in-depth denominational knowledge and an outside perspective, while offering mediators a wider range of casework experience. All URC practitioners would be deployed on a variety of URC cases during the programme period, with probable deployment to other cases too. Supervision, CPD and deployment infrastructure would all be provided by P4H throughout this 5-year programme.

Programme Management

P4H would be responsible for the operational management of the programme in close collaboration with a named partnership lead for the URC. We recommend the appointment of a combined Steering Committee for strategic vision and oversight of the partnership programme comprised of appropriate representatives of both partners and chaired by the URC partnership lead. P4H would prepare and present regular update reports to the Steering Committee.

Programme Outcomes

Where there is unresolved conflict, churches often look inwards; where they are empowered to live well with differences and work together positively through change and conflict, churches look outwards and are more effective missionally.

Programme outcomes would include:

- a. Strengthened support for those in ministry – lay and ordained – to navigate change, differences, and conflict well.
- b. Embedding of a spirit of conflict transformation and the ministry of reconciliation into the relationships, culture and systems of the URC.
- c. Synods and local churches released from internal conflict to focus on fulfilling their mission and ministry.

Finance and Costings

Place for Hope is able to offer the proposed programme at an annual cost to the United Reformed Church of £75,000 per year.

An indicative breakdown of the projected averaged annual costs of running the programme is shown here:

Staffing	£53,000	5-6 total P4H staff days per week: for programme management, training co-ordination and delivery, practitioner support, client care, personnel management, operations and finance management, administration, evaluation, communications.
Direct delivery	£20,000	For training, mediator assessment, mediator support and deployment - including on venues, travel, accommodation, subsistence, materials.
Full cost recovery	£2,000	Towards administration, communications, governance, finance costs of the charity.
Annual total	£75,000	

The balance of these costs would vary from year-to-year across the life of the programme and depending on the nature of certain elements, for example the model of foundation training delivery agreed. The annual funding would be used primarily for the building of capacity in the early years of the programme, with a higher proportion of the funding spent on delivery of support in later years. The annual expenditure may vary between years, but a restricted fund would be used by Place for Hope to manage any such variation.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

P4H would gather evidence throughout the programme to enable in-depth analysis. We would monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme using a robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) Framework, including success criteria, monitoring of outputs, and evaluative outcomes identified by result areas through key performance indicators, both qualitative and quantitative.

P4H would agree a regular reporting schedule with the URC partnership lead. We recommend a mid-term review of strategic direction by the partners. We would present a detailed review report in the first part of 2029 to enable URC decision-making on next steps.

P4H employs a capacity development approach to enable us to roll-out our vocational training and support across an increasingly wide range of partner organisations over time. Our long-term aim is to enable those denominations which work with us on creating a culture of reconciliation and peace-making through foundation training and mediation team training and deployment, to eventually be able to take all the infrastructure support functions of a mediation team (supervision, deployment, CPD, annual accreditation) in-house. This is not possible in the life of a single 5-year programme. Given the parallel journeys we are undertaking with several denominations which already work together on a range of issues, we envisage a possibility that in the long-term the development of internal infrastructure capacity might be able to be undertaken ecumenically, e.g. Methodist and URC together. We would hope to be invited to propose a further programme for the next stages of capacity development towards the end of this programme period, assuming the positive feedback and review outcomes envisaged.

November 2023

Paper A4

General Secretariat transitions

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive extends the term of the Revd Philip Brooks to serve as Deputy General Secretary (Mission) until the end of August 2025.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To inform Assembly Executive of expected transitions within the General Secretariat and to reappoint the Revd Philip Brooks to serve as Deputy General Secretary (Mission) until his retirement in 2025.
Main points	The Revd Adrian Bulley will retire as Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship in August 2024. The Revd Philip Brooks will retire as Deputy General Secretary for Mission in 2025.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	The General Secretariat.

Summary of impact

Financial	No overall change to the current situation.
External (eg ecumenical)	

The General Secretariat is made up of four members: The General Secretary, The Chief Operating Officer, the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship and the Deputy General Secretary for Mission.

In 2022 The Revd Philip Brooks was appointed to serve as Deputy General Secretary for Mission for two years. This was to avoid making a permanent appointment at a moment the General Assembly Committee structure was under review. Philip was initially appointed as Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith on seven year term, due to conclude in 2024.

Philip has indicated that he would wish to retire in 2025. As has frequently happened before with Ministers serving the General Assembly, when a short extension to their

period of service will take them to their planned retirement date, Assembly or Assembly Executive is asked to extend their term of service to that date without a formal review process. This resolution seeks to extend Philip's service to his planned retirement date.

The Revd Adrian Bulley has indicated he will retire in August 2024. One year before Philip will retire.

It is now clear, following consultation through the Church Life Review and the decisions of the General Assembly in 2023 that we will continue with a three-department structure. The Mission Department serving the Mission Committee, the Resources Department serving the Resources Committee, and the Discipleship Department serving the Ministries, Education and Learning, Children's and Youth Work and Safeguarding Committees.

Given the financial situation we face with a considerable deficit budget, it is conceivable we may face the necessity for a reduction in levels of staffing within the Offices of the General Assembly. This may need to affect the General Secretariat as it will other areas of our activity. The Business Committee is not minded 2024 is the point to seek to reduce its size, given the intensity of Church Life Review activity. The process has begun to seek to appoint a new Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship on a similar basis as currently, with the considerable proviso in the Job Description that it is highly likely the role will evolve and take a different shape over time, as structures continue to evolve along with our staffing and ministry structures within Church House. This would lead the way open, if it becomes appropriate, to reconfigure the General Secretariat as Philip moves into retirement in 2025, giving appropriate time to consider this matter carefully.

Paper B1

Towards a formal ministry for children's, youth and/or family work

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Robinson, Convenor paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Sam Richards, HCYW sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive agrees to seek funding for the establishment of a formal ministry for children's, youth and/or family work from <i>either</i>: a) by empowering CYWC to ask sources within and beyond the URC for funding or b) within the M&M budget.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Developing proposals for a formal ministry for children's, youth and /or family work, and seeking direction for securing the funding for this.
Main points	A new commissioned ministry is proposed, to complement existing ministry deployable to serve the denomination. Confirmation of this direction of travel is sort along with clarity about how it should be funded.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2023 Paper B1 – Recognition of Children's, Youth and Family Ministry.
Consultation has taken place with...	Worship, Faith and Order Committee, Synod Moderators, CYDO+ team, Discipleship Team Leaders, General Secretariat.

Summary of impact

Financial	Funding is required for the training and ongoing support of those being called to a new formal ministry to serve the URC.
External (eg ecumenical)	Other denominations, particularly the Church of England, are exploring how to recognise and increase the number of those serving in this type of ministry. The Baptist Union of Great Britain recognise specialists including children, youth and families within the calling of Minister (having previous had Youth Specialist Ministers as a recognised joint calling as Baptist minister and qualified youth and community worker).

General Assembly 2023 passed the following resolutions:

- 1) General Assembly recognises the work of many people in local churches amongst children, young people and families as ministry and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.**

CYWC believes this should encourage churches to recognise and support all the army of volunteers engaged in children's, youth and family ministry. The C&Y and CYDO+ team offer a range of training, resources and wider support to supplement and promote this. A sample service of commissioning, which may be used in conjunction with the Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC as appropriate, can be found here: www.urch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Service-of-dedication-for-workers-children-and-young-people-and-the-church-family.pdf

- 2) General Assembly acknowledges the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Leaders in local churches and invites Synods to work with the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Ministries Committee to develop appropriate schemes to offer accreditation and recognition of these roles.**

CYWC believe this should enable local church employed workers and lead volunteers to be recognised beyond their local church, and more formally supported by and able to contribute to Synod children's, youth and family ministry. Yorkshire Synod have led the way in developing a scheme, and Synods are keen to ensure coherence and consistency with support from CYWC and the CYDO+ team in moving forwards. CYWC wishes to strongly encourage the employers of such workers to provide appropriate pastoral support and supervision, and hope such a scheme of Synod recognition with help enable this.

- 3) General Assembly is minded that there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.**

This resolution is the most radical. To bring proposals to General Assembly 2024 requires us to have many and varied conversations about the theological, practical, and financial aspects of the envisaged posts. The CYWC would like to take the opportunity to share findings from recent conversations, give details of conversations still to take place, and request further guidance with regards to their proposed direction of travel, so that work is focussed appropriately. That's the focus of the rest of this paper.

1. Theological considerations

This is the area in which we have developed our thinking and the proposals the most. At General Assembly 2023 we were instructed to engage in conversation with the Worship, Faith and Order Committee to ensure any proposals for new ministry posts lay within the theological understanding and polity of the denomination.

It may be helpful to summarise something of the varied recognised ministry posts within the denomination.

Ordained ministry

Stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministers of Word and Sacraments

Ministers are office holders, not employees. Their posts are Synod approved pastorates or other roles. They are under the Terms of Settlement which sets out terms and conditions for service and for stipendiary the Plan for Partnership which sets out remuneration, housing etc.

Ministers may be appointed to Special Category Ministry posts (eg chaplain). Ordination is for life (unless removed from the Roll of Ministers).

Elders

At ordination, an Elder becomes an Elder of the denomination, not just the congregation. Elders, like ministers of Word and Sacraments, are ordained for life.

There are 'marks of ministry' for the Elders Meeting to embody collectively.

Commissioned ministry

Stipendiary and non-stipendiary Church Related Community Workers

CRCWs are office holders, not employees. Their posts are URC accredited CRCW Projects. They are under the Terms of Settlement which sets out terms and conditions for service and for stipendiary the Plan for Partnership which sets out remuneration, housing etc.

Commissioning is for life (unless removed from the Roll of Ministers).

Accredited or Recognised ministry

Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher

Locally recognized worship leader or lay preacher

Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneer

Formally recognised ministry requires a process of mutual discernment of calling. The individual, with appropriate support from others, discerns a call to a particular area of ministry; the URC (through the local church/Synod or denomination processes depending on the type of ministry and level of recognition) discerns a need for a particular ministry and calls people to serve through acknowledgment of call, training, support and deployment to need.

To establish a new formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister, CYWC have explored the following options (we have presumed a denomination-wide level of recognition and deployment to differentiate this from Synod recognition):

Option A

Opt for this to be a recognised specialism within an existing form of ministry – eg ministry of Word and Sacraments.

Option B

Create a new category of ministry that is parallel to an existing form of ministry – eg CRCW.

Option C

Propose a re-ordering of existing forms of ministry that incorporates Children's, Youth and/or Family Ministry – eg an umbrella 'commissioned ministry' that includes community work, lay chaplaincy and/or lay pioneering as well.

Discussion and prayer around these three options have led us to the following conclusions at this stage.

Option A has been discarded. Worship, Faith and Order Committee have advised that a separate category of minister of Word and Sacraments for these posts would be outside the URC's theological understanding of such ministry. The only way the new proposed post could be shaped by our understanding of the ministry of Word and Sacrament would be to recognise specialist posts (like we do for pioneering or chaplaincy roles for instance). Whilst some ministers of Word and Sacrament may be able to fulfil these posts, in general, we do not believe that a minister of Word and Sacraments holding a Children's, Youth or Family Minister specialist post would do justice to the specialist knowledge, skills and attitudes this would require, nor do we believe this would be welcomed by the URC when many pastorates are in vacancy.

Option C has much to recommend it. However given the review of Special Category Ministry awaiting response, the very early stages of Lay Pioneer Ministry development, the forthcoming review of CRCW ministry, and other potential developments following the work emerging from the Church Life Review, this would involve a long delay before it could be properly explored. CYWC therefore wish to remain open to this as a future possibility, but in the meantime develop a 'stand alone' recognised form of ministry to serve the denomination.

Option B is the proposed choice at this time:

A commissioned ministry, with stipendiary and non-stipendiary options, to follow a parallel path to CRCW ministry in terms of assessment of call, training through RCLs using Common Awards and placements, deployment to approved specialist posts as post holders – to be incorporated within the Terms of Settlement and for stipendiary the Plan for Partnership.

This would enable Synods, in dialogue with local churches, to create, approve and declare vacant posts to which they could call recognised children's, youth and/or family ministers. The processes for this will require further conversation with Ministries Committee and would draw on learning from SCM and CRCW post creation and appointment processes.

If option B were introduced, CYWC understands that, in exceptional circumstances, local authorisation to administer the sacraments may be conferred by the Synod on a post holder if this is deemed necessary and appropriate for the context and ministry being undertaken in a particular post. However this is not an attempt at 'ministry of Word and Sacraments' by the back door and creates clear water between the proposed new ministry and this in general.

We believe option B could also enable Certificates of Eligibility and Limited Service to be offered in the same way as they are for ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs, although the exact detail of this will require further conversation with Ministries Committee.

Option B supports a specific call to children's, youth and family ministry and identifies this as a ministry the church needs. It enables the URC to proceed relatively quickly, potentially with the first student ministers in training in Autumn 2025 and completing EM1 in 2029.

Questions the CYWC would like to hear Assembly Executive's view upon:

- Do you believe creating a new commissioned ministry, as per option B, is the correct direction of travel for the proposals coming to General Assembly in 2024?
- How do you see this ministry being exercised fruitfully in local contexts?

2. Practical considerations

2.1 Training and education

Option B would require CYWC to work closely with Education and Learning to develop proposals for training people for this ministry. This is a current priority, and it may be that a verbal update can be given at Assembly Executive of conversations taking place between the drafting of this report and the meeting of the executive. The following early reflections give a flavour of what may be possible.

Appropriate modules in youth work and children's and family work already exist within Common Awards. Delivery of training could, for instance, use the Cambridge Theological Federation block week pathway currently accessed by Westminster College for training ministers of Word and Sacrament, already used by Ridley Hall to deliver lay ministry training in youth, children's and family and sports ministry. Training through URC RCLs should ensure appropriate URC ministerial formation alongside those training for other ministries within the church.

The Church of England are actively exploring an Apprenticeship model for training lay ministers which would attract Government funding, but require trainees to be employed during their training. This may be an alternative model if it comes to fruition with Durham University Common Awards programme.

The marks of ministry and levels of competence which will define this Ministry need careful development in consultation with practitioners, the CYDO+ team, Synods, E&L and Ministries.

2.2 Title of the ministry

We are aware that at the moment we have called those within this ministry 'URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister'. Over the next period of time, the title of the ministry will need to be clarified reflecting both the work and ministry, as well as theological considerations. It should be possible, within the call to the ministry, to specialise to some extent within training through selection of modules and courses at EM1, 2 and 3 (as ministers of Word and Sacraments may do so), and posts may carry more specific titles to reflect the particular ministry required in that context (as SCM posts do for ministers of Word and Sacraments).

2.3 Introducing new posts

We are aware that there will be people fulfilling children and youth worker posts within the URC currently who may be interested in discerning whether they are called to this new post. Options will need to be explored as to how those with prior learning and

experience may fulfil these new posts, whilst also ensuring that pathways for those exploring this kind of ministry for the first time are also encouraged.

In due course, it may also be appropriate to develop a pathway to support those wishing to transition from Synod Recognised Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister to the denominational formal ministry.

These last two practical considerations will be explored amongst the CYDO+ team and other practitioners in this ministry.

Questions the CYWC would like to hear Assembly Executive's view upon:

- What should this ministry be called?
- What long term support would be necessary and appropriate for these ministers?

3. Financial considerations

We are aware that introducing a new recognised ministry will cost. The fear of an overburdening the denomination with this cost lay behind some of the points raised at General Assembly 2023.

The financial implications of the education and training elements of introducing the posts will be part of the conversation to take place with Education and Learning as details of the training programs becomes apparent. We may need to consider limits on the numbers of those responding to the call to such ministry – both a minimum required to make the training viable, and a maximum that is affordable.

Education aside, there are obviously long-term financial implications if the URC pursues this new form of recognised ministry. It would seem fair to support these new ministers in the same way that current ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs are supported. However, to do so through the current M&M budget could put huge strain on that budget, ultimately to the detriment of other ministries and areas of work, which would be inappropriate.

It currently costs approximately £70K over three to four years to train a minister, and £41K per year from M&M funds to support a minister. (Other costs, such as appropriate housing, expenses etc, would be met by Synods and local churches.)

If we were to train a cohort of three people per year from 2025 that would cost approximately £53K per year at current costs.

If we were to have three people per year commissioned from 2027 that would add £123K to the M&M budget each year at current costs until this became neutralised by those leaving ministry (through retirement etc) in approximately 20 years.

An alternative approach would be to secure new ring-fenced funding for this new ministry. The potential sources for such funding are Synods, local churches and grant funding (both existing URC funds and wider sources). In this way, investment for growth could be in part focussed on children and young people, fulfilling some of the desires of the Church Life Review and the recent Assembly Executive discussion about future budgeting. An example might be to seek match funding for a substantial grant from a URC source such as the New College fund to enable the first 10 to 15 years of this new ministry to be funded.

What is clear, of course, is that serious time and resources needs to be given to the process of nurturing vocation to this and other ministries. If we are to be bold in our financial investment in any area of Church life, it is the CYWC's view that doing so to support ministry amongst children and young people, could lead to the growth in the church that would provide future stability.

Questions the CYWC would like to hear Assembly Executive's view upon:

- How high a priority is this for future funding and resourcing?
- Would you favour including this within M&M (as we do other ministries) or establishing a separate fund to finance this development?

Paper F1

Update on current work

Worship, Faith and Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope rpp20@cam.ac.uk Philip Brooks philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee.
Main points	This paper outlines the areas of work the Committee has undertaken as well as its future work.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	The work of the Committee has an impact on ecumenical relationships, as this is the body which is called on by ecumenical partners to discuss how to improve areas of co-operation and mutual understanding.

The remit of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee is:

- to address issues of worship, faith and order on behalf of the URC
- to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues
- to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of worship, faith and order
- to listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate
- to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to worship, faith and order to act as a sounding board for the Minister for Digital Worship
- to receive reports from the United Reformed Church Spirituality Group.

An eventful year has passed since our previous report to Assembly Executive as the then Faith and Order (F&O) Committee. Since that time, we have met twice (3 March 2023 online and 9-10 June 2023 in residential) as the F&O Committee and once (20 October 2023 online) as the new Worship, Faith and Order Committee.

At our F&O meetings, we:

1. Discussed an 'environmental policy' and stressed that the reduction of in-person meetings to one per year had addressed part of the issue, though we would need to return to the subject and agree a policy once the URC's new Committee Structure was clearer.
2. Completed work on a Fresh Expressions paper which helped inform debates elsewhere in the church about when a FX becomes a 'church'.
3. Continued a discussion about membership and 'isolated membership', having heard the response that this was not quite meeting the need that had been identified. Part of our discussion has revolved around how someone might belong to the URC in ways other than belonging to a local church. This remains work in progress as we have yet to reach a point of resolution.
4. Prepared and discussed a paper on the theological implications of the Vocation and Call paper which emanated from the Education and Learning, Ministries, and Children's and Youth Work committees. A version of the paper (discussed though not endorsed by the F&O Committee) can be found on the URC Learning Hub.
5. Drew to an end the work of the Worship Reference Group as a body separate from but reporting to F&O thanking those involved, especially the Revd Samuel Silungwe for chairing the group. It was agreed that the work of the group should be included on the Committee's agenda and a resolution to effect this was adopted at General Assembly in 2023.
6. Looked at and responded to the material presented by yoURChurch in order to be recognised as a church in the URC. F&O Committee raised some issues but was of a mind to seek the will of General Assembly with a view to maintaining links with yoURChurch, in part through continuing members of F&O who attend yoURChurch, as its polity and its activity develops. Over time, as membership of the Committee changes, any ongoing discussion might need a more formal relationship with yoURChurch.
7. Began a discussion about how the schedule of promises might be made available in non-gendered language, following a question raised during the parallel sessions at General Assembly 2022. A small group has been established, convened by the Revd Dr Susan Durber with the Revd Andy Braunston as secretary, with a remit to draw on ecumenical experience in considering what might work liturgically.
8. Have maintained contact with the work of the Ministries Committee through the regular attendance of the Secretary of Ministries, the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith. She has submitted occasional papers for our consideration, including one discussing a 'Theology of Safeguarding'.

9. Have looked again at the 'priesthood of all believers', considering an initial paper which led F&O to resolve to do further work and think about how our deliberations might be more widely disseminated.
10. In light of discussion informed by one of our members, Ms Diana Paulding, we supported the arrangements made for a 20s-40s event which proved to be a success. It has particularly helped our discussion about membership.
11. Reflected, in discussion with the Childrens and Youth Work Committee's resolution, adopted by General Assembly in 2023, to work out how Children's and Youth Work Ministry might be formally recognised in the URC, highlighting what might be the F&O issues involved.

At our last F&O Committee meeting we thanked the Revd Samuel Silungwe for his time of service on, and contribution to the work of, the Committee and bade him a fond farewell.

Following resolution 56, passed at General Assembly in 2023, the F&O Committee became the Worship, Faith and Order Committee with the remit which appears on the cover sheet. We have met once (online) and next meet on 23-24 February 2024, after the meeting of the Assembly Executive.

Deliberations at our first meeting as the new WFO in October 2023 brought to light that appointees to the Committee were asked to serve for six years. This was felt to be out of step with other Committees and also to be a length that could put off some people from serving on the Committee. As a result, the Committee will ask Assembly Executive, via a separate report, to agree that the initial term of service for appointees should be four years. Such an appointment can be renewed for a further four-year term.

In our February meeting, we will be continuing our work as follows:

1. We expect the group working on a version of the schedule of promises in non-gendered language to report on progress.
2. We will discuss our historical and current understanding of 'membership' with the intention of discussing with the General Secretary, at a future meeting, how contemporary lifestyle might impact on that understanding.
3. A further discussion will take place on 'priesthood of all believers', making reference to a number of resources, and whether or not there is any mileage in the Committee seeking to disseminate its findings.
4. We will discuss whether work with the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee might fruitfully occur in further discussion of the document *God's Love Unites Us*.
5. The matter of 'discernment' has come to our attention as one we might fruitfully consider and on which some further work might be desirable.
6. We will consider more fully our plans regarding a Net Zero target for the Committee and its activities.

7. We will keep yoURChurch on our agenda to see if any further work needs to be done by the Committee.
8. We will receive a report from the Spirituality Group in line with our new remit. We currently plan an annual reporting mechanism with a representative of the Spirituality Group in attendance at one of our meetings annually (probably an online meeting).
9. We will consider an approach from the Theology of Worship Group and how best to relate their work to that of the Committee.

As per our remit, members of the Committee would be pleased to receive comments and feedback from members of Assembly Executive. We would be pleased also to receive questions regarding the URC's worship, faith and order for deliberation during, or between, our meetings.

Paper F2

Amending Terms of Office for members of the WFO Committee

Worship, Faith, and Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Andy Braunston, Co Secretary andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Acceptance of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive, acting in the name of General Assembly, resolves that the term of service on the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee should be for four years with the possibility of one further four-year term of service.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Bring terms of office of elected members of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee in line with other Assembly Committees eg four not six, year renewable terms.
Main points	People find a six year commitment, which might be renewed, rather daunting and limits the range of people who might be interested in serving on the Worship, Faith and Order Committee.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	The Business Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Paper G1

Pensions update

Pensions Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Vaughan Griffiths deputy.treas@urc.org.uk
Action required	None – for information only.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report on progress of new working arrangements for the Pensions Committee of the URC.
Main points	Following the move to DC (defined contribution) pension arrangements the Pensions Committee has been reconstituted with Revd Dr Janet Tollington as Chair. The Pensions Committee reports to the Finance Committee in the first instance. Terms of reference are being revised.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	None.

Summary of impact

Financial	There is no direct financial impact.
External (eg ecumenical)	Improved governance arrangements for the URC No ecumenical impact.

The Pensions Committee acts as the representative of the Church in dealing with pension providers who are now:

- Ministers' Pension Trust (MPT) – now closed to accrual
- TPT who run the Staff Salary Scheme – now closed to accrual
- AON Master Trust – the provider of the new defined contribution scheme.

The Pensions Committee also has responsibility for the oversight of the arrangements for death in service and ill health retirement benefits.

The Pensions Committee will meet quarterly. AON will be asked to attend every meeting and the MPT and TPT will be asked to attend alternate meetings.

Meetings with AON will review:

- Service levels provided to members
- Use of the AON Portal by members
- Investment performance
- Communication with members
- Any particular issues arising in the operation of the AON Master Trust.

Meetings with MPT and TPT will deal with the business as with AON (above) but only as far as it relates to schemes closed to accrual.

The Pensions Committee will report to each Finance Committee meeting and a report of its work will be provided to General Assembly.

Paper H1

URC Competency Process: When there are concerns about a minister's performance of their duties

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive adopts the URC Competency Process in place of the URC Capability Process.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This process replaces the 2020 version of the URC Capability Process.
Main points	The process begins from a place of call, discernment and a disciplined life to assist ministers who fall short of the expected standards of ministry and are not at this stage in their ministry competent rather than incapable or incapacitated. The aim is not disciplinary but to improve performance of their duties. The hearing stage shall be heard by members of the Assessment Board because of their expertise in assessing for ministry.
Previous relevant documents	2008 Capability Process and Procedure 2020 URC Capability Process RCL Amber Light Process.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators CDAG Assistant Clerk to General Assembly.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

In 2020 General Assembly agreed the URC Capability process (Paper F2). Responses from those who have had to implement this process indicated that it was akin to a disciplinary process and not helpful in the long term. In response to their request, Ministries Committee believes the new process is more pastoral in approach to assist a

minister, who falls short of the expected standards of ministry, in the better performance of their duties.

1. Introduction

1.1 Calling and discernment

A hallmark of the Reformed tradition is the covenant between ministers and those with whom they minister – a covenant based on discernment in the various Councils of the Church. The local church, through its Elders' and Church Meeting, discerns if candidates for ministry should be commended to the Synod. Synods discern if a sense of Call should be tested by the Assessment Board on behalf of General Assembly. Before ordination or commissioning a minister must receive a Call from the relevant Councils of the Church. In the Reformed tradition an inner sense of Call must always be confirmed by external discernment – in the URC the external discernment is located in our Councils.

Ministers work in a variety of roles for the Church – most in local pastorates or church in-community projects, some in special category posts, some for the wider Synod (often alongside local roles), and some in General Assembly posts. Regardless of role, the Church has reasonable expectations of satisfactory ministerial performance and maintenance of professional standards. In 2019 the URC adopted Marks of Ministry for ministers of Word and Sacraments and in 2007 it adopted Core Competencies for Church Related Community Workers which both outline the expected professional standards. Whilst these are detailed documents, it is accepted that no minister is expected to exhibit exceptional gifting in every area. The United Reformed Church has, however, discerned the framework of gifts and graces described in these documents to be that which forms the basis of discernment in both training and assessment.

Discernment, initial and ongoing, is undertaken in prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit. The Church trusts ministers to prayerfully and consistently be open to God's further directing whilst ministers are invited to trust that the Church will continue to participate in the ongoing discernment of the external dimensions of a calling.

1.2 Performance and discernment

The Church will undertake the ministry of discernment around performance and standards in two stages – the first under the oversight of the Synod (or by the General Assembly for ministers in Assembly roles); the second under the oversight of the General Assembly's Assessment Board. The primary aim of this process is to provide a pastoral framework to maintain, and where necessary restore, satisfactory performance and professional standards. This process applies to both ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (thereafter known as ministers).

2. Living a disciplined life

1.3 Promises

At ordination or commissioning, ministers make promises to lead a holy life. In 2010 General Assembly (Appendices 3a and 3b, *General Assembly Book of Reports 2010*, pp215-218 and updated at *Mission Council Book of Reports 2020*, pp45-54) agreed guidelines that help to give substance to those promises. These standards comprise personal integrity and health, relationships with

ministerial colleagues, elders, members and others, and relationships with the Church's Councils.

There are other aspects of the disciplined life, such as the giving of service in the quality and the time spent engaging with ministry and responding to the call to serve the Councils of the wider church.

1.4 An ongoing disciplined ministry

To be a minister means entering the disciplined life; a discipline beginning in Education for Ministry 1 (EM1) extends throughout the minister's service in Education for Ministry 2 (EM2) and Education for Ministry 3 (EM3) and beyond into retirement. The disciplined life is manifested in a number of ways, not least in attitudes of respect for self and others as well as openness to challenge and willingness to change as we respond to God's call throughout our lives.

3. Continuing support and discernment within ministry

3.1 The Basis of Union and Structure

The doctrinal and institutional framework within which all ministers agree to serve is set out in the *Basis of Union* and *Structure* of the URC.

Ministers, being Church office holders, relate to the Church through its four principal councils: General Assembly, Synod, Elders' Meeting and the Church Meeting.

The General Assembly decides stipend levels and terms of service through the Plan for Partnership. Its policies inform ministerial practice and expectations – for example the requirement to have pastoral supervision, safeguarding and safer sacred space training, and the guidance on the hours ministers should devote to their duties over a four week period.

The Synod gives support and oversight to ministers serving within its geographical boundaries and defines the role of any who serve in a Synod rather than, or alongside, a local post.

Elders' Meetings share in the ministry of oversight of local churches and community projects and are, often, the Council most closely related to ministers' duties. The Elders' Meeting is the Council that, most often, discerns the particular gifts and graces needed for a particular ministry to flourish.

At each induction or commissioning of a minister, the Church Meeting promises support and encouragement of that ministry and, in the spirit of generosity, contributes towards the mission and ministry of the whole church so the whole church may benefit.

The mutual support and accountability between the various Councils of the Church creates a culture of interdependency. All the Councils support ministers' journeys of development with the Marks of Ministry and Core Competencies providing a useful discernment tool.

3.2 Support in the early years of ministry

During EM2, ministers have a pastoral adviser and access to ongoing learning through the Church's Resource Centres for Learning as well as their Synod's

Training and Development Officer (or equivalent). EM2 Ministers are encouraged to have pastoral supervision as another resource. The role of Synod and adviser are to encourage, support and, as appropriate, to challenge the minister's words, actions, application, behaviours, and attitudes in these key early years in ministry. Ministers can access an EM2 learning grant as well as grants for further study and continuing education.

3.3 Support in EM3 ministry

Ministers in EM3 are required to have pastoral supervision and can access support through their Synod's Training and Development Officer. They can access funds for ongoing study and are encouraged to become more self aware and aware of their relationships and interactions within their area of ministry as this helps an understanding develop of their ministerial effectiveness.

4. Principles behind the operation of the policy

4.1 Not a quick fix

The Competency Process is not a quick fix remedy to address issues of underperformance; it is in place to be used as a tool for working collaboratively with local churches, minister, Synod, and Assembly, where possible, to an agreed process to achieve the best outcome for all concerned.

If managed correctly, underperformance issues may take between three and 12 months to resolve. This is not to put an unnecessary burden on the minister, or those with whom the minister works, but to demonstrate that the United Reformed Church is committed to addressing competency issues within a system that promotes consistency, impartiality, equality and fairness.

4.2 Sensitive and confidential

At all times throughout the process those charged with overseeing ministry are reminded to respond sensitively respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the minister in question.

4.3 Open to amendment

This procedure does not form part of ministerial Terms of Settlement and it may be amended at any time by General Assembly or Assembly Executive acting on behalf of General Assembly.

4.4 Fully informed

When ministers enter into this process they shall be given a copy of this policy and a full description, in writing, of the concerns that have been identified.

5. Competency

5.1 Role descriptions

The United Reformed Church recognises the various roles a Call to ministry encompasses the sacramental, prophetic, community development, and leadership roles set within the context of pastoral relationships and responsibilities.

It, therefore, accepts that when addressing issues of underperformance the Marks of Ministry and Core Competencies shall be the guides – along with any relevant Assembly policies – for understanding the expected standards.

They shall be considered as a tool to evaluate the overall performance level of the minister concerned.

It will be for the Councils overseeing the particular post, together with the minister, and with the guidance of the Synod Moderator (in local and Synod based roles), to identify and agree the particular expectations and standards it requires of its ministers. A role description should be discussed and agreed prior to induction or commissioning; and be consequent to the objectives, mission, and role description for the post. These should be included in any signed terms of settlement.

6. Performance below an expected minimum standard

Underperformance arises where it is believed, by those exercising the ministry of oversight of a particular post, that the minister is not meeting the role descriptions and/or the individual performance standards and expectations of the post.

7. Health-related underperformance

If underperformance is due to an identifiable and relatively short-term health-related matter, the Synod Moderator or Ministry Support may ask the Secretary for Ministries for an Occupational Health Assessment.

Those bodies charged with the ministry of oversight of a particular post will give consideration as to whether poor performance may be related to a disability as defined under the Equality Act 2010, and, if so, whether there are reasonable adjustments that could be made – including changing their duties or providing additional equipment or training. Consideration may also be given, by the same bodies, in making adjustments to this process in appropriate cases.

If the minister wishes to discuss this or inform the Church of any medical condition they consider relevant, they should contact their Elders Meeting, Synod Moderator or Ministry Support/steering group.

8. Special monitoring

8.1 Initiating special monitoring

- 8.1.1 A concern about a minister may be raised in a number of ways, but it would most likely be brought by the Council most closely supervising the role to the next Council (eg an Elders' meeting, to the attention of the Synod Moderator, or a Synod Committee, or Assembly Ministry Support, to the General Secretary).
- 8.1.2 In the first instance, performance issues should normally be dealt with by discussion with the minister to understand the cause of the shortcomings and to find a way to bring performance to the required standard. This process is not intended to be used as a disciplinary process.
- 8.1.3 The procedure must not be used in response to complaints that are found by those Councils exercising the ministry of oversight to be frivolous or unsubstantiated.
- 8.1.4 If the Council with the responsibility of oversight of a post have concerns with a minister's level of performance over a period of at least three months, this shall initially be dealt with by way of discussion about a possible programme

of help, support and particular steps that can be taken towards alleviating the concerns. The targets set will be realistic and timed (normally three-six months). The minister will be asked to agree the content and timing of the Special Monitoring programme. Clear record keeping during this time must be kept.

8.1.5 The agreed plan should:

- i) clarify the required standards
- ii) identify the main areas of concern
- iii) establish the likely causes of poor performance and identify any training needs; and/or
- iv) set targets for improvement on the main areas of concern which should not number more than four and a timescale for review (recommended monitoring every three weeks during period and review after three months).

8.1.6 Where appropriate, a note of any such initial discussions may be placed on the minister's file and may be used for the purposes of any future competency hearings.

8.1.7 If the minister serves a group or joint pastorate, the Synod Moderator (or their representative) shall consult with the other churches involved in the pastorate in order to ascertain whether the concerns apply only to one church or are shared by others in the pastorate. If the concerns relate to one church within the pastorate, agreement needs to be reached that in the initial meeting the views of all the churches will be represented.

8.1.8 In an LEP, where concerns are raised about a minister of another denomination, the Synod Moderator will consult with their counterpart from the other denomination about the particular performance issues and agree the process to be used to resolve said issues. Where appropriate structures of another denomination raise concerns about a minister of the URC serving in an LEP, this process shall apply with necessary modifications, and a representative of the concerned denomination shall be invited to attend meetings as necessary.

8.1.9 Where no agreement can be reached with the minister about Special Monitoring, the Council exercising the ministry of oversight may either insist upon such a programme, or determine that the failure to mutually agree such a programme raises the level of the concern such that it is appropriate to initiate the Competency Hearing.

8.2 Possible outcomes of special monitoring

8.2.1 If the Council exercising the ministry of oversight is satisfied that the minister has, by the agreed review date, made good progress during Special Monitoring, it will cease the Special Monitoring. A record of the Special Monitoring and a short report of their progress will be placed on the minister's file. A copy will be given to the minister who may register any disagreement about its content. Ministry continues on a normal basis.

8.2.2 If the Council exercising the ministry of oversight believes significant progress has been made but not yet to the required standards it may

extend the period of Special Monitoring, once, for a period of three months and then review.

- 8.2.3 If the Council exercising the ministry of oversight believes that significant progress has not been made within the agreed timetable, or if the minister does not work to the timetable and goals with an appropriate attitude, it shall refer the matter to a Competence Hearing.

8.3 **Exceptional situations**

- 8.3.1 If the Council exercising the ministry of oversight considers the competency concerns are so serious that it feels that Special Monitoring is not appropriate it may immediately refer the matter to a Competency Hearing.
- 8.3.2 A representative of the Council exercising oversight, normally the Synod Moderator, shall meet with the minister to discuss the concerns and the reasons they are considered exceptional. The representative will inform the minister that a Competency Hearing Panel will be convened. This verbal indication will be confirmed in writing and a copy of this policy will be given to the minister.

9. **Competency Hearing Panel**

9.1 **The operation of the Competency Hearing Panel**

- 9.1.1 The panel will be instigated if:
- i. the minister does not, within a reasonable timescale, make sufficient progress in Special Monitoring
 - ii. the minister does not respond appropriately to the Special Monitoring programme; or
 - iii. the concerns are so serious that the Stage 1 Panel should be convened with immediate effect.
- 9.1.2 A representative of the Council exercising oversight, normally the Synod Moderator, shall meet with the minister to discuss why matters are being referred to a Competency Hearing. This verbal indication will be confirmed in writing and a copy of this policy will be given to the minister.
- 9.1.3 The representative of the Council exercising the ministry of oversight matter shall refer the matter to the Convener of the Assessment Board who will inform the Secretary for Ministries who shall act as Secretary for the Competency Panel.

9.2 **Attendance at the Competency Hearing Panel**

- 9.2.1 Only the Assessment Board members of the Panel will make the decision (in bold).
- a) **The Convener of the Assessment Board** (or the Assessment Board member nominated by the Convener) who will convene and chair the Panel;
 - b) **Two further members of the Assessment Board**;
 - c) The minister's Synod Moderator or Ministry Support if in an Assembly Appointed role;
 - d) A representative from the minister's Synod or place of ministry if in an Assembly Appointed role;

- e) The Legal Adviser will act in an advisory capacity;
- f) The Secretary for Ministries (or a nominated representative) who will act as the note taker.

- 9.2.2 The minister may present their own response to the case or have a representative or friend do this. In any event the minister may bring a friend, colleague, or representative with them to the hearing. A representative may be a legal professional or union representative.
- 9.2.3 The Convenor of the Assessment Board (or Assessment Board member nominated by the Convenor) having received the referral shall write to the minister explaining the process.
- 9.2.4 The Secretary of Ministries shall, in liaison with the Convenor, assemble the personnel for the Panel and will ascertain the earliest date for the meeting and an appropriate venue and make the necessary practical arrangements.

9.3 The Competency Hearing Panel Process

- 9.3.1 The minister will be invited to join the Panel and the Convenor shall ensure that the Panel understands the issues involved, the seriousness of the concerns, the process to be followed and the possible outcomes.
- 9.3.2 The Convenor shall stress the need for appropriate confidentiality and encourage openness.
- 9.3.3 The Panel shall share in prayer together.
- 9.3.4 The Convenor shall ensure the good order of contributions to the Competency Hearing, and further ensure everyone has the appropriate amount of time to make their contributions.
- 9.3.5 At an appropriate stage, the Convenor will ask the Synod Moderator and the Synod representative/representative of the place of ministry if in an Assembly role, to withdraw from the Panel to give the minister the opportunity to raise any relevant issues with the Panel members who shall make the decision.
- 9.3.6 The Convenor shall, at all times, consider whether expertise from outside the Panel might be necessary.
- 9.3.7 The minister shall then withdraw and the Synod Moderator and the Synod representative/representative of the place of ministry if in an Assembly role will rejoin the Panel to have an opportunity for further discussion, without the minister present.
- 9.3.8 The Synod Moderator, and Synod representative/ministry place representative shall leave the Panel and the decision-making members of the Panel will come to a decision on the outcome, and agree the wording of the letter to the minister, Moderator/representative of place of ministry.

9.3.9 The decision will be given in writing by email and by post within ten working days of the hearing.

9.4 Possible outcomes

Throughout 9.4, “the Panel” refers to the Assessment Board members of the Panel.

9.4.1 Not Proved. The Panel may find concerns not proved and the matter is closed.

9.4.2 Further Review. The Panel may discern a continuing call to ministry and decide the referral was too early, discerning that some improvement has happened and, reserving the matter to itself, gives a further period for review and improvement. No more than two further hearings should convene within the review period unless the Panel resolve to extend the review period as noted in 9.4.2.4 below. An improvement plan should be drawn up setting out:

- a) the areas in which the minister has not met the required performance standards;
- b) targets for improvement and a timescale for such improvement of not more than five months;
- c) any measures, such as additional training, mentoring, or supervision, which will be taken with a view to improving performance;
- d) a period for review which shall be not more than 6 months from the date of the decision;
- e) the consequences of failing to improve within the review period, or of further unsatisfactory performance (outlined in 9.4.3 below)

9.4.2.1 The warning and improvement plan will normally remain active for twelve months from the end of the review period. After the active period the warning will remain permanently on the minister’s file.

9.4.2.2 The Competency Panel will receive regular reviews of the minister’s performance during the review period from the Synod/Ministry Support/Steering Group and will write to update the minister and the Council charged with oversight of the post with any comments.

9.4.2.3 No further action will be taken if the Panel is satisfied with the minister’s improving performance.

9.4.2.4 The review period may be extended once for a period not exceeding three months if the Panel feels that there has been a substantial, but insufficient, improvement.

9.4.3 Curtailment and Move to Inactive Status

The Panel may resolve to curtail the pastoral tie or appointment and place the minister into Active Status 7 (whereby they are authorised to perform the functions of ministry on a limited basis as specified in an agreement between the General Assembly and the minister and with the approval of the Accreditations sub-committee.) In the case of a stipendiary minister the

Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee may be involved to ease the transition out of paid ministerial work.

The United Reformed Church believes in the reality of change and notes that a period of limited ministry may give time for reflection, learning, and growth which may help a minister's performance to improve. The limited ministry noted above might provide evidence of improvement. Following such an improvement, applications to the Accreditations sub-committee to transfer to another form of active ministry will be considered on their merits.

10. Pastoral care

The Synod Moderator will ensure that independent pastoral care is in place for the minister.

11. Appeals

11.1. Grounds of appeal

If the minister or the Council offering oversight of the ministry wishes to appeal the decision of the Competency Hearing Panel they should write to the Clerk of General Assembly, within 28 days, setting out their grounds of appeal. Permitted grounds of appeal are:

- a) an abuse of process leading to an impaired decision
- b) New information coming to light that could not reasonably have been considered at the Competency Hearing
- c) An acceptance of the findings of fact but an appeal against the outcome.

11.2. The composition of the Appeal Commission

The Clerk of Assembly will invite the Officers of General Assembly to ask two members of the Disciplinary Appeal Commission to hear the case along with a member of the Assessment Board who has not previously been involved in the matter.

11.3. The Appeal Hearing

The Appeal Hearing shall follow the General Assembly Appeals process.

11.4. Appeal outcomes

The Appeal Commission may, giving reasons:

- a) dismiss the appeal from the Minister and uphold the original decision
- b) dismiss the appeal from the Council with oversight and uphold the original decision
- c) uphold an appeal from the Minister
- d) uphold an appeal from the Council with oversight and curtail the pastoral call or appointment and move the minister to Active Status 7 or inactive status
- e) in the case of an appeal from the Minister, allow one further three month period for improvement and reconvene no more than four months later and receive reports from the Council with oversight of the post and the minister, deciding then either to curtail the pastoral call or appointment and move the minister to Inactive Status VII or decide that sufficient improvement has been made and take no further action.

Paper H2

Special Category Ministry

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive gives thanks for the Special Category Ministry Scheme and affirms the change in its emphasis. Assembly Executive affirms that <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) the SCM programme in its current form is phased outb) 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) be created to intentionally grow new Christian communitiesc) such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Church Life Review called for a review of the SCM scheme. The outcome of the Review resulted in the need for change in direction with focus on pioneering to form new Christian communities.
Main points	Pioneering is a big part of the God's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places. It is an opportunity for the URC to partner with God and others towards a more just and inclusive society. After a review of the Special Category Ministry Scheme (SCM) initiated by the Church Life Review, Ministries has concluded that the scheme needs a new direction. It recommends that the SCM programme in its current form ends; no new projects shall be accredited and current ones will come to end when their term expires; there will be a relaunch of the programme with 13 new posts (one per Synod); these posts will be Pioneering Posts which may encompass the status of mission project; the posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.
Previous relevant documents	SCM Application paperwork.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators Secretary for Education and Learning.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Background

- 1.1 Special Category Ministry (SCM) was first introduced in the 1970s to be posts outside any deployment quotas; they are in addition to ordained ministry being exercised by the vast majority of ministers in local pastorates. The 'special category' posts originally represented an attempt by the church to recognise its missionary task on the 'frontiers' of industry or education and in the face of social injustice. They are 'special' only for the purposes of deployment. It is important that this post is seen as part of the Synod's mission strategy, and any application for a post needed to indicate how this is so.
- 1.2 Special Category Ministry posts are broadly of three kinds:
- a) new or priority areas of outreach where pioneering work is required and where it would not be appropriate to expect the Synod to provide a minister from the existing deployment quota
 - b) chaplaincies: ministers in 'workplace' ministry or in educational institutions, often universities
 - c) innovative ministry in unique situations specific to a locality or Synod.
- 1.3 In 2016 General Assembly agreed that 8% of available full-time stipendiary ministers should be set aside for Special Category Ministries. This number was never realised and, given the low number of stipendiary posts in 2023, this percentage is no longer viable.
- 1.4 In November 2022 the Church Life Review (CLR) brought a proposal brought to Assembly that the Special Category Ministry Scheme should be reviewed. The CLR gave two reasons:
- a) that there is a sense that perhaps the scheme, (rather than the post-holders within the scheme), has not fully achieved what was imagined in terms of innovation and
 - b) that there is perhaps an unrealistic expectation placed on an individual ministry in an SCM post if the aim is to emerge a new Christian community. (GA 2023 Paper N2 para 42).
- 1.5 Ministries Committee, with wider terms of reference than the points raised by the Church Life Review, instigated a review of Special Category Ministry which took place from GA 2022 until February 2023.
- 1.6 We would like to thank the Revds Lythan Nevard, Tim Clarke and Helen Warmington for their work with the review.

2. The review

- 2.1 Whilst there is much to commend a ministry which stands outside the bounds of traditional pastorate ministry, the review highlighted various concerns of the scheme in particular:
- a) the model of SCM ministry as ministry of presence

- b) the difficulty in evaluation of posts
- c) the length of two five year terms of service may not be long enough to establish the ministry
- d) the failure of succession planning by Synods resulted in a lack of sustainability of posts/projects.

2.2 Over the course of the scheme, the majority of the projects accredited have been about the ministry of presence which, of course, in itself is a useful tool for mission. However, the model of lone worker as a ministry of presence in almost all cases resulted in a failure of succession planning because it was too difficult to envisage how the ministry might continue. The ministry became too person dependent.

2.3 Whilst some SCM posts came to a natural end, in most cases, the failure of Synod to engage in succession planning meant the posts were not viable even after ten years.

2.4 Further, in most cases, it has been difficult to do any evaluation from which to draw learning points. Reporting has been lacking despite formal proformas and clear timetabling for those reports to be received.

2.5 Therefore, Ministries Committee has concluded that, our limited resources might best be targeted elsewhere. At this point in our denomination's life, newly accredited posts should be about creating new Christian communities rather than the ministry of presence.

2.6 Ministries therefore recommends to Assembly Executive that

- a) The SCM programme in its current form ends
- b) No new projects shall be accredited and current ones will come to end when their term expires using the normal review process
- c) There will be a relaunch of the programme with 13 new posts (one per Synod)
- d) These posts will be Pioneering Posts which may encompass the status of mission project
- e) The posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension with a possible extension of five years.

3. Why pioneer posts?

3.1 A pioneer place is a renewing form of being church that connects with our changing culture and is foremost aimed at people who do not know the gospel and are not/no longer involved with an existing church. As a denomination we recognise that it is not the church of God that has a mission in the world but the God of mission which has a church in the world. Pioneering is a big part of the God's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places. It is an opportunity for the URC to partner with God and others towards a more just and inclusive society.

3.2 Pioneers are people called by God. This is a vocation. Pioneers have a gift for seeing, for imagination, dreaming, inspired not just by what could be but also by a sense of holy discontent, at the way the church is fulfilling its mission and purpose. In particular, this call and gift is exercised among those not currently engaged in the church.

- 3.3 Pioneers are leaders capable of gathering people round a vision for a new missional adventure and facilitating the ministry of that team to bring something new to birth. This is where most SCM projects have not succeeded.
- 3.4 Pioneers recognise that their primary call is to see new communities of disciples emerge in new contexts. They are not mission enablers with a general remit for mission in a place, their call is more focused. Their gift is to start with context and allow that to shape church.
- 3.5 Pioneers are creative and prophetic innovators with a gift for faithfully reimagining church within the neighbourhood and communities to which they are sent.
- 3.6 We understand the primary role of the Pioneer is to be released from the expectations of traditional pastorate ministry to connect with people outside of Church and thus create new ways of doing Church together in the neighbourhood and communities in which they are based. The ultimate aim of those communities would be to become new Fresh Expressions of Church. The intention should always be to become church - not a stepping stone to traditional church but encourage church to emerge in whatever form.

4. Mission Projects as a model of pioneering

- 4.1 In 2020 the Law and Polity Advisory Group deemed that, in essence a Mission Project is some form of Christian work or witness which stands alone, rather than as part of the work of a particular local church. A Mission Project might be:
- a) a wholly new piece of work ie a missional community
 - b) a new way of operating from the premises of a now closed local church, perhaps where the ecclesial body had ceased, but community work was still going on;
 - c) a transitional arrangement for an emerging piece of work that might become a local church in due course.
- 4.2 We believe URC Mission Projects fall into the category of pioneering. Current mission projects eg Peter's House as a missional community in the Yorkshire Synod and 'No. 84' in Redcar in the Northern Synod are good examples of how a mission project might be considered a pioneer post.
- 4.3 Each centre of mission will undoubtedly look different because they are shaped entirely by the opportunities and needs of their area; activities, initiatives, and partnerships will vary massively depending on the context. However, like other pioneering projects, mission projects build relationships in order to grow creative, accessible church communities, initiatives, and partnerships. We believe that to make a real difference we need to be part of communities, not just working in them.

5. Lay or ordained

- 5.1 Ministries Committee considered whether the posts should be for lay and ordained.
- 5.2 Although current SCM posts can be opened up to lay people after a period of six months if no one suitable is found, we concluded that, at present, new pioneering posts should be for ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related

Community Workers and Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers of the United Reformed Church.

5.3 However, it should be recognised that there may be difficulties concerning the appointing of lay pioneers as lay pioneering is non-stipended. Therefore, housing and other benefits afforded to ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers would not apply.

5.4 As with current SCMs, a request can be made for a post to be opened up to ministers from other churches (ie a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, the Council for World Mission or the World Communion of Reformed Churches) on a Certificate for Limited Service if a post has not been filled by a URC minister after six months. We suggest the timescale moves to 12 months to enable more opportunities for ministers (and lay pioneers) from the URC to consider the particular calling. However, the granting of a Certificate cannot be guaranteed when considering ministry numbers.

5.5 **Training Stipendiary Ministers as Pioneers**

5.6 In suggesting these proposals, we realise that Education and Learning Committee will need to consider suitable provision of training for pioneering. We understand that this request may become part of the review of training provision currently being conducted by the Education and Learning Committee.

5.7 An initial conversation with the Secretary for Education and Learning confirms that it may be better to use the outside provider we currently use for lay pioneer training for consistency of provision. However, we are content to await the outcome of the training review.

5.8 We are not suggesting a new order of ministry but that students in training for the ministry of Word and Sacraments who may feel a call to pioneering should study pioneering modules as part of their degree or diploma.

5.9 For those already in ministry who are successful in their application for such pioneer posts, we suggest they undertake the CMS Certificate in Pioneering Mission or other recognised course deemed appropriate by Education and Learning Committee alongside their pioneering ministry for which provision will be made in the Terms of Settlement.

6. **Thanks to SCM postholders past and present**

6.1 In recommending change, Ministries Committee is not making any judgement of posts past and present but simply acknowledges that the time is ripe to begin something new.

6.2 Ministries Committee acknowledges the General Assembly 2016 resolution that agreed that up to 8% of the available stipendiary posts for ministers of Word and Sacraments should be allocated as SCM posts, believes that moving from the 8% allocation to one Pioneer Minister per Synod will ease the pressure on Synod deployment target figures, increasing them slightly.

6.3 Ministries Committee appreciates that, should Assembly Executive agree to change the emphasis to pioneering, we shall be in a transitional period and the

above is not as tidy as we would like. Ministries Committee recognises that further work will need to be done on criteria for such posts and mission projects as well as the timing of the phasing out of the old scheme and introduction of the new scheme.

- 6.4 However, mindful that resolution 51 charges the denomination to consider the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship, Ministries Committee feels that this is urgent business as any decision will give clarity to those who are in post at present.
- 6.5 Ministries Committee would like to thank all those who have served faithfully in SCM ministry posts over the years.

Paper I1

Report to Assembly Executive 2023

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor, Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This report provides an update on the work of the Mission Committee and Mission Team since General Assembly 2023.
Main points	The report covers the areas for which Mission Committee is responsible, namely: Church and Society, Ecumenical Relations, Interfaith Relations, Greenbelt, Commitment for Life, Global and Intercultural Ministries, Legacies of Slavery, Racial Justice, Fresh Expressions, Mission and Evangelism, Rural Mission, Net Zero Task Group.
Previous relevant documents	Papers I2, I3, I4, General Assembly 2023 Book of Reports Resolution 31, 51a and 71, Record of Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Within the context of the ongoing work of Mission Team and Mission Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	All the work in this report is contained within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	The report outlines several areas of UK and global ecumenical interaction.

1. Commitment for Life

- 1.1 Commitment for Life's thirty-year presence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IoPt), in partnership with Christian Aid, demonstrates the URC's effective and practical long-term commitment to the region. This presence and support are particularly needed at times of intense disruption and does a great deal more than making calls for change or signing petitions. That said, the URC has given strong assent to Christian Aid's calls for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, the unconditional release of all hostages and adherence to international law.
- 1.2 Commitment for Life is currently working with Northern College to offer lay-preacher support for the creation of Commitment for Life services of worship. The Revd Ana Gobledale has volunteered to lead Commitment for Life services of worship among the northerly Synods.
- 1.3 There has been excellent feedback from URC congregations and members who have used the Go-with-Greta resources as online or Bible Study material. Kevin and Suzanne met with Nuzhat Jabin, the Christian Aid country manager from Bangladesh, who has indicated her willingness to assist Commitment for Life on a Greta-goes-to Bangladesh publication in 2024.
- 1.4 We are grateful to Wessex Synod for our invitation to the Wessex Big-Day-Out.
- 1.5 Commitment for Life donations are on track at the time of writing, with final 2023 figures expected by the end of January 2024. We are grateful for the enormous generosity of URC members in the face of the cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.6 Commitment for Life is in discussion with Christian Aid on a range of forward-looking issues including a possible link up with the URC Legacies of Slavery work, support for Gaza, and for the ongoing crisis of Ukrainian refugees with reference to General Assembly resolution 71.
- 1.7 The URC is a voting member at the Christian Aid AGM. At the last meeting, held on 28 November, it was agreed that, following the retirement of John Sentamu, the appointment of the new Chair would be decided by members remotely without having to convene a special AGM. CEO Patrick Watt reported that total income reached a new high of £90 million (not adjusted for inflation) despite significant economic headwinds. Institutional giving was up, although not helped by a decline in UK government giving (FCDO) and the loss of EU funding opportunities. Christian Aid is determined to shift decision-making to the local level along with increasing gender and ethnic diversity as it journeys towards becoming a truly anti-racist organisation. At this year's Christian Aid CEO's Consultation, there was an evening lecture with input from Kenneth Mtata (WCC) Nicola Brady (CTBI) and Susan Durber (WCC/URC). The lecture itself was delivered by Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Christian Aid's 2022/3 annual report and accounts can be found [here](#).

2. Interfaith Enabling Group (IEG)

- 2.1 The IEG has agreed to support Minority Concern, a group led by Aftab Mughal in Northwest Synod that seeks to foster interfaith relations in Pakistan, particularly in the wake of attacks on Christian minorities in the country.
- 2.2 The recent violence in Israel and Gaza has been deeply distressing. How should Christians, who are committed to dialogue, reconciliation, justice, and peace, respond? The CTBI Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group has produced a short resource that offers reflection and pointers for discussion out of a context of ecumenical and inter faith relations.
- 2.3 On Friday 8 December 2023 the US was the only government to vote against a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate, humanitarian ceasefire. Amnesty International's General Secretary has characterised the US veto as a display of 'callous disregard for civilian suffering in the face of a staggering death toll.' The US veto and the UK government's abstention are deeply disappointing. Their actions locate them in contrast to the URC, together with faith communities all over the world, who have called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire.
- 2.4 The URC continues to respond ecumenically to the crisis in Gaza and Southern Israel, knowing how problematic any response, or no response, might well be viewed. Our Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, is a signatory to the Christian Aid call for an immediate, unconditional ceasefire and release of all hostages. Tessa has also signed a Washington DC based call from churches to the US and UK governments advocating for an immediate ceasefire.
- 2.5 From 22-28 October our General Assembly Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, represented the URC on the Council of Christians and Jews' visit to Poland. The group progressed from Warsaw to Lodz, then on to Krakow, including a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The visits to Holocaust sites followed a broad progression from ghettos to deportation stations, and to concentration camps. Alongside this history, the group explored Jewish history before and after the Second World War. Participants engaged in conversations about interfaith issues in contemporary Poland, particularly around the question of preserving Jewish memory. Given the significant increase in the occurrence of antisemitic incidents in the UK, it is vital that we continue to hold open our Christian-Jewish relations so that the violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory is not imported into the UK. The URC was well represented at the 2023 Council for Christian and Jews' Rabbi and Clergy event at Westminster Cathedral in November.
- 2.6 The URC along with the UK Methodist Church has asked congregations not to light their second Advent candle (the 'Bethlehem Candle') to remember all those who have been affected by the devastating violence. A suggested liturgy can be found here on the Commitment for Life website.

Kevin Snyman, Programme Officer (Global Justice and Partnerships)

3. Church and Society

- 3.1 Responding to poverty: General Assembly 2023 backed a strong call to action in response to the gospel call to challenge poverty and structures that cause marginalisation (Paper I2/Resolution 31), which has been taken forward as a priority.
- 3.2 The URC, through the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), has been at the heart of the formation of Let's End Poverty, a new social movement that has come together to build the public and political will to tackle poverty in the UK. Its initial focus is on putting poverty on the agenda ahead of the next General Election. After a preview at Greenbelt, it was launched with ten regional founding assemblies in October 2023, and a rolling programme of online events. Support is growing and includes a diverse range of faith groups, local and national charities, trade unions and individuals, united behind a vision for a UK where poverty can't keep anyone down. Find out more and get involved at www.letsendpoverty.co.uk
- 3.3 A new course for small groups has been produced to help local churches to gain a deeper understanding of experiences of poverty, both in the UK and globally, and encourage action in the run up to the election. The Act on Poverty course has been produced by Christian Aid in conjunction with JPIT, Church Action on Poverty, the Trussell Trust and several other organisations. It is designed for use in Lent or later in 2024, and includes Bible study material, audio and video resources, and prompts for discussion and action. Find out more here.
- 3.4 Preparing for a General Election: An election will take place by January 2025 at the latest and creates many opportunities for churches and members to engage with the political process, build relationships with candidates, raise issues of concern and seek commitments to act. JPIT has produced suggestions for manifestos and questions based on 'Six Hopes' for society around poverty, refugees, the environment, peace, the economy, and politics itself. People need to be aware of changes to constituencies and also to electoral law, which means that photographic ID will be needed in order to vote (free Voter Authority Certificates are available but need to be applied for in advance).
- 3.5 Guidance for churches about holding hustings and other kinds of meetings with candidates has been prepared in conjunction with ecumenical partners. JPIT also wants to encourage churches to build ongoing relationships with MPs through its new Constituency Action Network, which will be launched in the spring, and provide people with support and resources in doing that.
- 3.6 Preaching politics: JPIT produces a weekly podcast, also available on YouTube, in which the host and a guest discuss the political dimensions present in the lectionary Bible readings and reflect on how they connect with the week's current news and our calling to be justice seekers. The host for the Spring 2023 season of 'Politics in the Pulpit?' is the Revd Jacky Embrey, recently retired URC minister and former Mersey Synod Moderator. Find it wherever you get your podcasts.

Simeon Mitchell, Secretary for Church and Society

The JPIT website (www.jpit.uk) provides more information on the above.

4. Mission team staff change

After more than six years as the URC's Secretary for Church and Society, Simeon Mitchell moved to the Methodist Church in January 2024 to take up the permanent position as Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team. This is a familiar role to Simeon since he has ably filled the role as acting JPIT Team Leader for the last couple of years. During his time with the URC, Simeon has guided us as a denomination with considerable skill and wisdom, always ensuring that the URC has been at the forefront of engagement in the public sphere, alongside our ecumenical partners. His incisive knowledge relating to Church and Society matters and his passion for social justice have been widely appreciated across the URC. Fortunately, we will have the benefit of continuing to work with Simeon through JPIT and he will become a very near neighbour at the new Methodist Church House in Tavistock Place when it opens in mid-2024. We wish Simeon every blessing in his appointment.

Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

5. Global and Intercultural Ministries (GIM)

In the period since General Assembly 2023, racial justice has remained high on the Global and Intercultural Ministries agenda. Many people – within our own Church, ecumenical partners, and around the globe – share a sense that we are operating in a particular window of opportunity in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder, an event which (re)awakened awareness of racism and racial injustice as a reality in our world. But it is a window that will not last forever. Racial injustice has a very long history; it comes in many guises; and it is a beast which will not be defeated easily. Our commitment to overcoming racial injustice – within our own body, and in our world – must be even more determined and long-lasting than the beast itself.

5.1 Legacies of Slavery (LoS): URC Commitment to Repairing Justice

Following the affirmation of General Assembly 2023, the LoS task group has been working to further the three-pronged commitment to acts of Repairing Justice (Reparations):

5.1.1 Local – within our own body: Anti-Racism Training

Professor Anthony Reddie has committed to delivering nine training days between January and May 2024, with up to 15 participants in each. (Further dates may be scheduled as necessary.) Members of the General Secretariat, Mission Committee, Mission Team and LoS task group will be part of pilot sessions in January 2024, and we are working to establish a rolling programme to train all the groups/individuals highlighted in Paper I3 (GA23).

It is extremely gratifying that many individuals and groups are expressing eagerness to receive the training, even while we are mindful that the prospect is not being welcomed by all.

5.1.2 Regional – within the UK: Mentoring Support and Pioneering Posts

The regional sub-group is considering how best to develop this proposal to support the mentoring of young black men (and possibly women) in four locations across the UK, which have significant links with transatlantic

slavery. They are exploring, with partner agencies, how four related pioneering posts might be established, with the potential to be hosted by local URCs. If an appropriate coalition of funding support can be put in place, the postholders would collaborate in developing joined up working across the whole URC.

The regional proposals are ambitious and will be the most complex strand to develop. The sub-group is carrying out research and seeking the input of external partners who can offer on-the-ground support, insights and experience.

5.1.3 Global: Working with Partners in the Caribbean and Africa (directly and/or through CWM)

Conversations are ongoing with partners in Jamaica as to how we might support work they are already advocating through the Churches' Reparations Action Forum (CRAF) 7-Point Plan for Reparations and exploring new project ideas to be developed together.

An Ecumenical Pilgrimage scheduled for April 2024 will see representatives from the URC, Church of Scotland and Christian Aid travelling together to Jamaica to express solidarity with partners in the Caribbean, and to further develop our individual church/organisational journeys.

5.2 Racial justice

5.2.1 Making Spaces

This 24-hour conference was held in July 2023, gathering 25 individuals from across the breadth of the URC to consider the predominantly white make-up in positions of senior leadership and influence in our Church, to share honest conversations, and to explore together how we might bring about change. Participants included people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, lay and ordained, individuals who occupy senior leadership positions and some who have applied unsuccessfully in the past. The event felt deeply meaningful and was very well received. It was requested that this should become an annual event, inviting different participants each time, and working in tandem with the anti-racism training to help bring about an anti-racist Church.

5.2.2 Speaking engagements/leading worship

The GIM Secretary has been pleased to accept invitations to share the URC's LoS/Anti-Racist Church journey through speaking and preaching engagements. It is a priority that local church Ministers and members should have opportunity to engage, to ask questions, and to help shape the journey if the commitment to becoming an anti-racist Church is to be understood and embraced as widely as possible.

5.2.3 Ecumenical

The URC continues to have an active presence in ecumenical racial justice conversations. We are amongst the founding members of both the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF), coordinated by Churches Together in Britain & Ireland (CTBI) and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, and the

Racial Justice Working Group, coordinated by Churches Together in England (CTE). The networks work together and independently to engage with individuals (particularly in light of emerging crises), churches, public policies, politics, and the police. Recent work has seen the GIM Secretary serving on the planning group for a Windrush 75th Anniversary Service held at Southwark Cathedral on 22 June and delivering workshops for a 'Church and Reparations' conference in October 2023.

The GIM Secretary continues to serve on the Methodist Church's Reparations Group.

5.3 Council for World Mission (CWM)

5.3.1 CWM (Africa Region) Church and Racism Consultation

This took place in South Africa in October 2023 and was an opportunity to reflect on issues of colonialism and racism in different contexts, including several regions of Africa, the Caribbean, and the UK. The GIM Secretary was amongst five people attending from the UK. While hugely educational in its own right, this was also an opportunity to develop links to feed into the URC's repairing justice proposals.

5.3.2 CWM Member Churches General Secretaries' Conference

This was held in Singapore in October 2023. The Deputy General Secretary (Mission) attended on behalf of the URC. 28 member churches were represented out of a total of 32, drawn from six regions worldwide. It was an opportunity to meet with partner churches, learn more of the work of CWM and to contribute to the global discussions.

5.3.3 CWM Youth and Racism gathering

This was held in partnership with the URC in December 2023. Participants were drawn from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, with the programme being planned and co-hosted by the GIM Secretary and Thames North Synod CYDO, Lorraine Downer, who is seconded to the LoS task group.

5.3.4 CWM Communications Workshop

This took place in Kuala Lumpur in January 2024 and was attended by the URC Head of Communications.

5.3.5 CWM Caribbean and Europe Gender Justice Working Group

The GIM Secretary continues to contribute to this group which is currently exploring how to embed its work in the two regions and beyond.

5.4 Global work

5.4.1 Partners in Mission

The URC continues to host two Partners in Mission (missionaries) sent by CWM partner churches to serve in our midst. The Revd Yufen Chen is located in Thames North Synod, sent by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, while Lay-Missioner Ms So Young Jung, sent by the Presbyterian Church of Korea, is based in Southern Synod. The URC also has two partners sent by us to serve with the Pacific Theological College in Fiji, the Revd Melanie Smith and the Revd Mark Meatcher. Oversight of these invaluable relationships is the responsibility of the GIM Secretary in

partnership with CWM, and recent work has been intricate and time-consuming.

5.4.2 The Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM)

The long-standing relationship between the URC and the PCM was interrupted by the February 2021 military coup, making it impossible for us to continue as before, yet difficult to shape meaningful ways to proceed. We are extremely grateful that recent months have seen the relationship renewed, with many thanks for the efforts of Lindsey Brown, the URC Mission Support Officer. We were delighted to host the PCM's new General Secretary, the Revd Pek Muan Cuang in June and October of 2023, and to hear news of how the PCM is continuing its work even in the midst of unimaginable difficulties. We are acutely aware that this partner Church is requesting our prayerful and practical support. The GIM Secretary and Lindsey are consulting more widely to develop opportunities for the URC as a whole, and for individual URC members and congregations, to offer their support.

5.5 Conclusion

The brevity and simplicity of this report do not reflect the time invested to develop the areas being outlined, nor the 'background work' which is not reported at all. This is not a complaint, but an observation. The GIM remit is broad, and it is challenging, but it is also hugely rewarding, and it is satisfying to report the progress being made.

Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

6. Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church.'

www.freshexpressions.org.uk

6.1 The Newbigin Pioneering Hub

Since the report for General Assembly 2023, the first students of the Newbigin Pioneering Hub have marked the end of their year-long course by presenting their projects to a panel of experienced pioneers and church leaders. They received their Certificate in Pioneer Mission from the Church Mission Society (CMS), and we congratulate them all. Applications for funding of Pioneer Projects are welcomed via the Discipleship Development Fund, with smaller grants available from the Mission Enabling Fund. URC students who have completed the course are now invited to apply to become Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers. The second cohort of students is now underway. See here for further information about the course and the Newbigin Pioneering Hub.

6.2 Thames North Pioneering Hub

We welcome this new pioneering project in Thames North Synod, which is intended to develop a fresh expression of church in East London.

6.3 'New Ways of Being Church' conference in the Pfalz

As Coordinator for Fresh Expressions in the URC, I shall be writing and presenting a paper at this conference in April 2024, with our long-standing partner churches in the Pfalz (the Palatinate region of Germany). The brief is to offer an overview of fresh expressions of church in the denomination (including ecumenical projects). To this end, we need to try to map our fresh expressions, and to understand how they interact with the more traditional churches.

Any wisdom from around the Synods would be most welcome. Please contact linda.rayner@urc.org.uk

6.4 Fresh Expressions Partners' Learning Community 2024

The Learning Community took place in January 2024 and a team of five Synod Mission Enablers, plus the Coordinator for Fresh Expressions attended. The Learning Community enables the team to consider the way forward for fresh expressions within the URC. The guest speaker was Emily Bradbury, founder and director of Courage to Thrive CIC.

6.5 URC Rural Hub

Many Synods have a named person who holds the brief for rural activities within the Synod. The first gathering of these officers took place online in December 2023. Intended to complement the ecumenical gatherings that are arranged from the Arthur Rank Centre, the plan for the first gathering was to discuss the format for the future, and was intended as a hub for mutual support and exchange of ideas and resources.

Linda Rayner, Fresh Expressions Coordinator

7. Ecumenical report

7.1 General Assembly 2023 Resolution 38

General Assembly endorses the measures for ecumenical working and resource sharing outlined in Reinventing the Ecumenical Vision of the URC Part 2 and encourages Synods to consider how they might make use of them to assist in addressing the areas of under-resourcing of our ecumenical commitments and in developing new ecumenical relationships.

7.1.1 With Church of England and Baptist partners we ran a joint training and information session for regional leaders (Moderators in the URC) on CTE's *Flexible Framework for Unity in Mission*. This attracted over 50 leaders, including nine URC Moderators.

7.1.2 With Methodist, Church of England, Salvation Army and Baptist partners we have drafted a 'boilerplate' job description for an Ecumenical Enabler, a paid, time-limited role to work in a specific local context. Initially a URC proposal, when introduced to our ecumenical partners there was a great deal of interest, and it was then further developed together.

7.1.3 We have drafted and circulated a job description for a full-time paid Ecumenical Officer role for those Synods considering this investment.

- 7.1.4 We are actively involved in both the South East Northumberland Ecumenical Area (SENEA) and Hertfordshire and Essex Borders Ecumenical Area (HAEBEA) conversations around forming Partnership Agreements in the face of the difficulties they have faced with the Charity Commission accepting their constitutions.
- 7.1.5 Lindsey Brown is actively involved in a number of pieces of work with CTE, including representing the URC at their Enabling Group, the CTE Group for Evangelisation, the Living with Diversity Working Group and the planning and delivery teams for the Learning to be Missionary Disciples conference, the New Ecumenical Officers Training Residential and the All Ecumenical Officers Residential.

7.2 General Assembly Resolution 39

General Assembly instructs the Ministries Committee to allocate six ministry of Word and Sacraments posts, available to Synods by application and open to all ministers of Word and Sacraments with a specific call to ecumenical working, and which will not reduce Synod stipendiary ministry deployment targets, to provide ordained ministry of word and sacrament in identified local ecumenical contexts, whether existing or new.

Working with Ministries and the Moderators' meeting, there has been interest shown in these posts, and the first phase of the application process has begun.

7.3 Ecumenical Dialogue Groups

- 7.3.1 The Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue group is coming to the end of its third quinquennial and is preparing what is hoped to be a practical document for local churches on the theme of *Journeying Together*. This will be ready by GA 2024. Since GA 2023 we have met in Edinburgh and had very productive conversations with local congregations and heard from the Church of Scotland on the subject of the St Margaret's Declaration, a significant ecumenical document between them and the Catholic Church in Scotland.
- 7.3.2 The Methodist/URC Liaison Group was unable to meet as scheduled this autumn in part due to the current vacancy on the Methodist Connexional Team.
- 7.3.3 The Revd Nigel Uden attended the November Synod of the Church of England, in place of our usual representative, the Revd Tim Meadows.
- 7.3.4 Lindsey Brown represented the URC at a recent meeting of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity (there is currently no URC/CofE dialogue group in the absence of a nominated Bishop). There were many interesting reports discussed, including work with the Orthodox Church and relations with Ukraine. There was also a useful discussion about sharing buildings with ecumenical partners, which the URC could be helpful with.

8. Joint Mission and Discipleship Work: Mission Team

8.1 General Assembly Resolution 51a

General Assembly asks the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.

8.1.1 We welcome this resolution and are delighted to rise to the challenge of how to encourage URC churches (often working ecumenically) to set up new expressions of 'church' (using the term 'church' in its widest sense and including fresh expressions of church). This work sits alongside the paper from the Worship Faith and Order Committee '*Ecclesiological considerations for the United Reformed Church in conversation with Fresh Expressions*', which was mentioned in the General Assembly report and clarifies the position of the denomination regarding accepting new expressions of church as United Reformed Churches.

8.2 The following work has been undertaken:

8.2.1 The resolution was discussed at Mission Committee in September 2023, at the Joint (Mission and Discipleship) departments' gathering and also at the Mission Enablers' residential in December 2023. It will go to CRCWs, SCMs, RCL staff and CYDOs before we submit a formal response.

8.2.2 A joint Mission and Discipleship residential is being planned to respond to Resolution 51a and to invest in national and Synod facilitators (the networks) in 'curating and producing appropriate discipleship resources' to support local churches.

8.2.3 The Mission and Discipleship teams have begun work on pooling resources to assist in structural and resource support for new communities of Christian discipleship. This is currently taking three parts: mapping existing pioneering and 'plant' work; examining process; identifying opportunities.

8.2.4 The Mission Team, with Mission Committee and the Mission Enablers Network, are working on a number of responses to questions around evangelism and how we address and resource it. One immediate practical response is to offer a church-wide webinar in the first half of 2024 and we are planning, with the Minister for Digital Worship, Andy Braunston, a series of Daily Devotions on the theme of evangelism to tie in with this. We are also examining both URC and other evangelism resources, including Leading Your Church Into Growth (LYCIG), with a view to wider sharing and potential partnerships.

Lindsey Brown, Mission Support Officer

9. Greenbelt

9.1 The URC's presence at Greenbelt in 2023 was exciting. It was our second year providing a low-cost café on site and of enabling the youth provision on site. This experience showed in how we had developed our provision of food, craft and a

programme of engagement in social issues, plus two popular and highly regarded youth spaces.

- 9.2 We continued the theme of 'Revolting Christians', which encourages Christians, inspired by the example of Jesus, Christians throughout history and Christians today, to take a stand against injustice and make a difference.
- 9.3 This felt very much like a flagship event for the URC, giving us significant visibility at a large Christian festival. Over sixty URC volunteers provided the welcoming environment that attracted large numbers to our marquee, which was packed to capacity almost constantly. Many of our volunteers shared how much being on the team meant to them personally and in their own faith journey.
- 9.4 In 2024, we will continue with our prominent low-cost café at Greenbelt, building again on our experience of the last two years. We will be working hard on growing the racial diversity of our team and also aiming to support a number of volunteers who are experiencing poverty, for whom coming to an event like Greenbelt would be impossible.
- 9.5 We will be putting together a proposal for General Assembly 2024, looking at how the Church can support our work at Greenbelt in 2025-2027. We are actively discussing with Greenbelt's management team an innovative approach to our involvement in 2025 which enables us to be 'even more URC' in creating a space which welcomes an even wider range of festivalgoers and enables us to reach marginalised groups and young people in new ways.

Roo Stewart, Programme Officer (Church and Society)

10. Net Zero Task Group

- 10.1 The Net Zero Task Group (NZTG) has met monthly by Zoom since March 2023. The initial kaleidoscope of issues, opinions and options occupied our first meetings. Aware that we can't resolve everything before starting something, we have begun to shape an approach to our task. It is far-reaching. For the URC to achieve net zero involves more transformation than adaptation, and requires us to rediscover and embrace the Church's fundamental nature, letting go much that is cherished.
- 10.2 Assessing the current situation. General Assembly (GA) resolved to "reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, with the aim of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030" and instructed "the committees and bodies under its control ... to adopt as a minimum the practices it sets out." A working distinction is made between: GA bodies that are required to comply, and associated bodies that GA 'encourages' to act (Trusts, Synods and local churches).
 - 10.2.1 Feedback from GA committees (initiated prior to NZTG) indicates that Net Zero 2030 is being taken seriously. There is varied understanding of the role of carbon off-setting and the place of in-person (face-to-face) meetings. We have been particularly helped by work already undertaken by Education and Learning. NZTG can help by providing some guidelines (or signposting) around:

- Buildings (and other premises)
- Transport (reduction and low-carbon)
- Venues (checklist to support selecting carbon-conscious settings).

- 10.2.2 Feedback from Synods indicates a varied picture, but most have an appropriate Environmental Policy. We have consulted with Synod Property officers regarding the information and resources they need when working with Local Churches. We are working on coordinating the guidance documentation produced by Synods. NZTG sees the Green Apostles network as a key partner that has already moved mountains.
- 10.2.3 Local churches vary between Gold Award Eco-Churches (Scotland: Eco-Congregations) and those which feel they have no capacity to move substantially towards net zero. Eco-Church/Congregation is now a major movement in British churches (with over 7,000 registered with the programme). A commitment to net zero is not a condition of registration, but it is still hugely encouraging that about a third of URC congregations have begun the journey. NZTG intends to use *Reform* to encourage local churches, but as yet we have been trying to see our way and have failed to find the capacity to produce an article. However, *Reform* has already been doing a good job of showcasing Eco Churches, with a profile of the newly Gold award-winning Clitheroe URC in the most recent issue.
- 10.2.4 Trusts and other associated bodies have not yet been asked to provide information, though the URC Trust is represented in our group.
- 10.3 Offering support and advice to all church bodies is largely about signposting to existing expertise and resources. NZTG has begun to look at how knowledge, resources and tools already in existence (or being developed) can be adapted to URC needs. Larger denominations have been able to assign/appoint staff capacity that the URC is unable to do. We have agreed a working partnership with the Methodists in which each denomination has a representative sitting with the other working group. NZTG has appointed Matthew McDade as our liaison for this partnership.
- 10.4 Finance, buildings and a pastoral earthquake. The willingness to act far exceeds the capacity of central funds to enable action. Synods vary in financial capacity, but probably none could enable all their existing local church buildings, manses and transport to reach minimal emissions. Church closures may ease this to a degree, but we will also need to encourage thinking that local churches may find unpalatable. NZTG has scarcely begun to assess the impact of the funding shortfall, but it is clear that a massive rationalisation of buildings is called for. The likely scale of disposal of buildings necessary to achieve net zero presents the Church with a substantial pastoral challenge and calls for a rediscovery of local church identity that is free of ties to buildings that cannot affordably be made suitable. There are encouraging signs (eg in the Buildings Forum, Green Apostles and some Synods) that some parts of the church are showing capacity for radical

action. It is noted that encouraging Church members to consider their own Net Zero opportunities would quite possibly have a bigger impact than focusing upon Church buildings.

- 10.5 Energy. Net zero means de-carbonising all our uses of energy, replacing fossil fuels with green energy. Even Zoom meetings are not currently carbon-neutral as data centres use significant energy. The transformation of all buildings retained (see 10.4 above) to reduce consumption and use only appropriate energy is a major part of the challenge. Offsetting energy from fossil fuels is not a sustainable option (see 10.7 below).
- 10.6 Travel: The Education and Learning Committee developed a spreadsheet to optimise journeys. NZTG will explore how this tool can be adapted for use across the church. Reducing in-person (face-to-face) meetings where it is viable to use internet platforms is an obvious direction of travel for committees and other bodies to develop.
- 10.7 Carbon offsetting. In response to requests and to our perception of uncertainties and abuses, NZTG has produced a statement on carbon off-setting (see appendix below) and offers it as potential URC policy.
- 10.8 Children will live the whole of their lives with the impacts of our carbon and other greenhouse emissions. NZTG is intentional about hearing the wisdom, insights, concerns and hopes of children and will encourage the whole Church to engage with the children.
- 10.9 NZTG feels that we have not made sufficient progress with our task. We recognise the magnitude of the challenge facing the Church, the limited time to accomplish it and the sense that our group includes key people who are already stretched. Maybe drawing up two cycles of three-year plans will help us become more effectively focussed.

Chris Baillie (Convenor), on behalf of the Net Zero Task Group: Philip Brooks (DGS Mission); Judy Harris (URC Children); Victoria James (COO); Jamie Laird (URC Youth, co-opted); Matthew McDade (Property Officers); Simeon Mitchell (Secretary for Church and Society); Eileen Newington (Green Apostles); Clifford Patten (URC Trust); Carole Sired (Staff); George Watt (Synod moderator); Maya Withall (URC Youth); Alan Yates (Finance Committee)

10.10 Appendix: NZTG Statement on Carbon Offsetting

Carbon offsetting is part of the landscape of efforts to combat climate change. To help us determine how it fits in to the URC Environmental Policy and net zero target, NZTG offers the following statement.

1. Eliminating emissions as far as possible is the priority. Offsetting does not offer an alternative to this. Only when all possible measures to eliminate carbon (and other) emissions have been identified should offsetting be considered. It is a last resort.
2. Some emissions are unavoidable, achieving net zero will involve offsetting these.

Many unavoidable emissions can be measured or estimated, and steps to offset these can be calculated. Additional allowance should also be made to offset those emissions which cannot be adequately quantified.

3. Carbon offset schemes need to be chosen with care. Some are scams, some enable 'greenwashing,' some are ineffective, some damage biodiversity and/or local communities. Pending the identification of an accreditation body, we recommend using schemes that have been verified (eg www.goldstandard.org/tags/carbon-offsetting; www.climatestewards.org/offset). Good schemes will take up and store atmospheric carbon, and will add benefits such as:
 - a) enabling carbon-neutral technologies where they cannot be locally afforded
 - b) helping restore indigenous biodiversity
 - c) supporting local communities.
4. Offsetting is part of the journey rather than the destination. When we do it, we have not arrived and should find ways to further reduce emissions. Offsetting can also be used during the period between a decision on an emissions-reduction measure and its implementation.

Paper J1

List of nominations

Nominations Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mrs Helen Lidgett hnlidgett@gmail.com Mrs Margaret Marshall nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Assembly Executive appoints according to nominations to urgent vacancies on Assembly committees and as URC representatives set out in Section 2 of the report.2. Assembly Executive appoints according to nominations to the Assembly Disciplinary Panel set out in Section 3 of the report.3. Assembly Executive notes the appointments to the Assembly Appeals Commission approved by Assembly Officers set out in Section 4 of the report.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To appoint to urgent vacancies.2. To advise Assembly Executive of progress towards using Safer Recruitment for the nominations process and the responsibilities of all Assembly Committee Convenors and Secretaries.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Nominations list, as at November 2023: www.bit.ly/URCNom
Consultation has taken place with...	All Synods are represented on the Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
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External (eg ecumenical)	Some roles involve ecumenical contact and collaboration.
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Report to Assembly Executive February 2024

The Nominations Committee advises that wherever possible nominations are made following Safer Recruitment processes. This requires Assembly Committees, sub-committees, task groups and those responsible for Assembly Panels to provide role descriptions and person specifications and to keep these up to date. Positions will be advertised widely as well as through the Synods. People expressing interest in a position will be asked to fill in an application form, complete a self-declaration of criminal history, have an interview or conversation with the Convenor and/or the secretary of the committee, provide references, and complete a DBS/PVG check where necessary. Some sort of trial or probationary period is also recommended. A full-time Recruitment Development Officer (volunteers) is being appointed to develop this process, including pro forma documentation, a skills audit template and training.

Assembly Executive should note that this process for recruiting volunteers is mandated by the Safer Recruitment process approved by General Assembly and set out in Good Practice 6. A similar process is increasingly practiced in churches and charities when recruiting volunteers.

In common with other Committees, the Nominations Committee has responded to the Net Zero Task Force, but noting that a much smaller Nominations Committee will be in place from General Assembly 2024, possibly contributing to a lower carbon footprint.

A full list of Assembly Appointments is on the URC website at:

urc.org.uk/committees (If you type that into an address bar, it will redirect to the right page without the need for the 'https'). **The List will be updated following Assembly Executive.**

1. Amendments to published list of nominations to be noted

Assembly Executive is asked to note the following amendments to the Nominations List updated November 2023.

2.7 Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

Delete Deputy Convenor.

4.1.1 Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee

Joint Secretaries: Insert Secretary for Ministries and Development Worker (SCM&CRCW).

4.2 Education and Learning Committee

Delete Convenor-Elect.

5.2 Communications

Delete Convenor-Elect.

2. New appointments and Re-appointments

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Assembly Executive makes the following appointments:

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>From</i>	<i>To</i>
4.1	Ministries Committee	Mrs Maggie Kirkbride	Advocate for Leadership In Worship**	Oct 23	GA27
8.1	Meth/URC Liaison Group	The Revd Memona Shahbaz	Member**	Oct23	GA27
9.2	Westminster College: Board of Governors	Mr Gilbert Heathcote	Member** and Treasurer**	Nov23	GA29
10.4	Milton Mount Foundation	Mrs Daphne Bembridge	Member†	GA23	GA27
11.6	The Lord Wharton's Charity	Mr Neil McKenzie	Member††	Oct 23	GA27

Key:

** = new appointment,

† = extension of service,

†† = further term of service after a break.

3. Disciplinary Process Appointments

Members of the Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel and the Disciplinary Investigation Panel are appointed for unlimited terms.

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Assembly Executive makes the following appointments, with the exception of Ms Maria Lee, the members will commence to serve following the Assembly Executive.

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>From</i>
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline	The Revd Jonathan Hill	Member**	
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline	The Revd Terry Jin	Member**	
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline	Ms Marie Trubic	Member**	
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline	Ms Nneoma Chima	Member**	
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline	Ms Maria Lee	Member**	GA2024

4. Disciplinary Process Appointments

Members of the Assembly Appeals Commission are appointed for unlimited terms. The people below have been appointed by Assembly Officers, as set out in The Manual Section O (amended 2023) Appendix V and the names are for information only.

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>
	Assembly Appeals Commission	The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe	Member**
	Assembly Appeals Commission	The Revd Peter Flint	Member**
	Assembly Appeals Commission	Professor Bill Gould	Member **

5. Appointment Group

The following person has accepted an invitation to be Convenor of the South Western Synod Moderating Group: The Revd Janet Adamson, Convenor.

Paper R1

Investigation Teams

Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group (CDAG)

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	Acceptance of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Amend Section O Appendix K to read:</p> <p>6: On receiving the material transmitted by the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, the Senior Member is to appoint three willing members of the Panel to form an Investigation Team for that case, and one panel member to assist the accused minister to address the issues and, if required, before the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Disciplinary Appeal Commission, having regard to geographical proximity to the accused, complainant and likely witnesses as well as to appropriate skills and experience. No Panel member who is related to, belonging to the same local church as, or otherwise closely concerned with the accused minister or the complainant, has any pastoral or personal involvement with the case or is liable to be a witness, may be appointed to an Investigation Team for that case. Subject to these considerations, the Senior Member should also consider the desirability of all members of the Panel having regular involvement with disciplinary cases. The Senior Member may him- or herself serve on an Investigation Team when that appears appropriate. If, from the information available at this stage, the case appears to be onerous due to the likely volume of evidence or the complexity of such evidence and that professional assistance in investigation would be appropriate, the senior member shall refer the matter to the Executive Group of the Disciplinary Process who may appoint a suitably qualified person, whether or not a member of the URC, as an additional member of the Investigation Team. the Assembly Representative for Discipline will appoint an Investigation Team comprising a Human Resources specialist supported by a suitably qualified member of the United Reformed Church, with relevant subject experience, appointed by the General Secretariat.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To refine the existing provision in Appendix K to have an external person assist Investigation Teams by creating a smaller Investigation Team comprising an HR specialist and a suitably qualified URC member – who may be a member of the existing Disciplinary Investigation Panel – appointed by the General Secretariat.
Main points	<p>Since General Assembly 2022 adopted the new Section O process, 11 cases have been dealt with by the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline; the vast majority of which have needed investigation. CDAG has, therefore, had the opportunity to see the new process work and learn many lessons. Whilst there are many positive aspects to the new process, it has not, as hoped, led to a faster procedure. Whether suspended or not, Ministers can be left in limbo for many months before their cases are resolved, which can lead to stress and frustration for minister, complainant, and local churches.</p> <p>It is expected that the use of an HR professional will greatly speed up the Investigation Stage – the phase which is taking the most time.</p> <p>The external HR professional will be supported by a suitably qualified member of the URC who can advise on our culture and polity.</p> <p>CDAG will review and evaluate this way of working over 2024 and, in due course, bring further resolutions to Assembly.</p>
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	The Officers of the Finance Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	There is a cost for an HR specialist to work with us, but this will be mitigated by the shorter Investigation Stage meaning ministers may be suspended for less time on full stipend.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Paper R2

Ministerial resignations

Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group (CDAG)

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	Acceptance of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Amend paragraph 8.2 of the Framework to read (new words in red)</p> <p>Should a minister resign from the Roll of Ministers, or from their particular office, after a concern has been raised but before it has been considered by the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, the resignation will be accepted but the process will continue as if the resignation had not been tendered.</p> <p>The Disciplinary Process continues notwithstanding the fact that After the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline sends a matter to be investigated the Process shall continue notwithstanding an accused minister declining to cooperate, failing to appear at a Hearing, or declaring (or implying by conduct) their desire to resign from a particular office, the Roll of Ministers, the ministry or from the United Reformed Church, and also notwithstanding the non-appearance of any potential witness.</p> <p>Amend Appendix X paragraph 9 to read (new words in red)</p> <p>If a disciplinary case enters the Investigation Stage, Once a complaint has been considered by the ASPD an accused minister may not be invited to resign from the Roll of Ministers before the case is disposed of, although the minister's attention may be drawn to the possibility of admitting allegations under the rules in Appendix Q. Should an accused minister in receipt of a stipend resign from any pastorate, role, or office, any stipend and associated benefits will cease. Should an accused minister nevertheless declare that he or she has they have resigned from the pastoral charge or other office formerly held, or completely from the ministry of Word and Sacraments or of a Church Related Community Worker, Roll of Ministers or from membership in the United Reformed Church, the United Reformed Church does not accept such resignations, and the Process is to continue...</p>

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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To clarify our practice that accused ministers may not resign from the Roll of Ministers when a disciplinary case is underway.
Main points	The current wording is not as clear as is needed to embody our long-standing practice that once a discipline process starts a minister may only resign from their charge but not from the Roll of Ministers. Ministers may not circumvent the church's control of its Roll by seeking to resign before a disciplinary process is concluded.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	Other communions are entitled to know if, and why, a minister has been removed from our Roll. A premature resignation may seek to circumvent this, and it is not our practice to allow such circumvention.

Paper R3

Section O: New Appendix C Assembly Mandated Matters

Ministries Committee and Complaints and Disciplinary Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of new Appendix C in Section O of the URC Manual.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive adopts the new Appendix C in the Ministerial Discipline Process as outlined below. (currently there is no Appendix C).

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide a streamlined process in dealing with ministers who refuse to engage in Assembly Mandated Matters.
Main points	<p>From time-to-time Assembly requires ministers, as office holders, to undertake mandated activities to ensure fitness to hold office. Whilst most ministers engage well and fruitfully with these mandated activities, the church's discipline processes are used to ensure a clear, open, and fair way to deal with those who decline to satisfactorily follow the mandates of Assembly.</p> <p>The process outlined below in a suggested new Appendix C sets out the steps to be taken if a minister refuses to comply with mandatory training.</p> <p>The term minister applies to ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.</p>
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators Ministries Committee CDAG.

Summary of impact

Financial	This process will save money, as it will be faster.
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External (eg ecumenical)	
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New Appendix C Assembly Mandated Matters

1. First stages

- 1.1 Synods will, usually through their Moderators, make ministers aware of what is required. Ministers who are in any sort of difficulty meeting these requirements (eg illness of self or spouse, sabbatical, or extended leave) will inform their Moderator of these circumstances and discuss suitable ways to meet the Assembly requirements.
- 1.2 Ministers who undertake Assembly roles are still under the discipline of their Synods and it is for Synods to ensure that these ministers have fulfilled any Assembly mandated activities.
- 1.3 Where ministers have not engaged, or not engaged fruitfully, in Assembly mandated activities despite information and reminders given by their Synods, the Secretary for Ministries (or their duly appointed deputy) will write to the ministers concerned reminding them of their obligations.

2. Moderator's Recorded Warning

- 2.1 Where a minister has not met these requirements in a timely manner a Moderator's Recorded Warning (Appendix D), issued in line with guidelines from the Ministries Committee, will be the first stage in the process. This recorded warning will include a reasonable deadline for the Assembly mandated activity to be completed.

3. Referral to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline

- 3.1 Where a minister has not fulfilled the Assembly mandated activity by the deadline specified in the Moderator's Recorded Warning the Secretary for Ministries will refer the matter to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline (ASPD). The referral will outline the various attempts made to encourage the minister to undertake the Assembly mandated activity and this referral will be copied to the minister with a deadline for the minister to respond to the Secretary of Ministries and the ASPD with any comments or mitigation.
- 3.2 A special ASPD will be set up, convened by the Assembly Representative for Discipline or their duly appointed deputy, to deal with all such cases.
- 3.3 The ASPD will consider the information from the Secretary of Ministries, any response from the minister, and safeguarding advice, and decide whether to issue an Agreed Caution (giving further time for the Assembly mandated activity to be completed) or refer the matter to the Assembly Commission for Discipline. If the ASPD refer the matter to the Assembly Commission for Discipline, it shall also consider whether to suspend the minister referring to Appendix J.

4. Referral to the Assembly Commission for Discipline

4.1 If the matter is referred to the Assembly Commission for Discipline (ACD), the Commission Panel will be set up and proceed in the normal way, save that if several ministers are referred at the same time to the ACD it is preferable that the same Commission hear all the cases.

4.2 Prehearing submissions in writing will include:

4.2.1 The Secretary of Ministries' case against the Minister

4.2.2 The Minister's response which might contain rebuttal or mitigation

4.2.3 Advice from a Safeguarding officer.

4.3 At the hearing the case against the Minister shall be presented by the Secretary for Ministries. The Minister may be assisted by a colleague, legal counsel or a Trade Union Representative.

4.4 The Assembly Commission for Discipline will have the usual sanctions outlined in Appendix S at its disposal if matters are proved.

5. Appeals

Appeals proceed in the normal way, save that the Secretary of Ministries, rather than the Investigation team, will either be the appellant or respondent as the case may be.

Paper S1

URC roles eligible for a criminal record check – updated

Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sharon Barr sharon.barr@urc.org.uk Roger Jones rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive approves the updated matrix of roles eligible for a disclosure and barring scheme checks.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update the matrix of roles eligible for a disclosure and barring scheme check (DBS) that was agreed by Mission Council in November 2018 and updated at General Assembly 2021.
Main points	To add certain roles to those eligible for a DBS check, and to amend the level of check for others.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council: November 2018 – Paper R3 General Assembly: July 2021 – Paper T6.
Consultation has taken place with...	Safeguarding Committee Synod Safeguarding Officers Secretary for Ministries Data Analyst and Administrator for Ministries.

Summary of impact

Financial	None anticipated.
External (eg ecumenical)	None anticipated.

Background

In November 2018, as part of a larger paper about vetting, disclosure and barring checks throughout the URC, the Safeguarding Advisory Group presented a matrix outlining roles within the United Reformed Church, and the level of check required this was reviewed and updated at General Assembly 2021.

It is now appropriate to update that matrix as below, additions are highlighted in **BLUE**. It is likely that further updates will be required due to changes with PVGs in Scotland.

	Enhanced with barring information		Enhanced without barring information		Basic check	No checks	New and five year renewals To be actioned by
	Adults	Children	Adults	Children			
Ministers, stipendiary/NSM and Church Related Community Workers– Active (including active retired) see here for definition	✓	✓					Ministries Office
Ministers, stipendiary/NSM and Church Related Community Workers – Non-active						✓	Ministries Office
Ministers of other denominations employed by the URC	✓	✓					Ministries Office
Others in special category ministry posts	✓	✓					Ministries Office
Ministers and CRCWs in training	✓	✓					Ministries Office
Synod appointed lay pastors, local leaders and interim ministers	✓	✓					Ministries Office
URC Assembly accredited lay preachers in England and Wales			✓	✓			Ministries Office
In England and Wales: URC locally recognised lay preachers and locally recognised worship leaders			✓	✓			Synod
In Scotland: URC Assembly accredited lay preachers			✓ (using DBS)	✓ (using DBS)			Ministries Office
In Scotland: URC Locally recognised lay preachers and locally recognised worship leaders			✓ (using DBS)	✓ (using DBS)			Synod
Assembly staff and Church House support staff who undertake regulated activity with children and/or adults	✓	✓					Ministries Office
Synod Safeguarding Officers or other safeguarding designated professionals, including safe church advisers	✓	✓					Synod

Paper S1

	Enhanced with barring information		Enhanced without barring information		Basic check	No checks	New and five year renewals To be actioned by
	Adults	Children	Adults	Children			
Church Safeguarding Coordinators, Lead / Primary contact and Deputy/Joint	✓	✓					Local Church
Interim Moderators						✓	Synod
Children's and youth workers (voluntary or paid), children and youth workers, stewards and drivers in settings with regulated work with children and young people	✓	✓					Local Church
Vulnerable adult workers (voluntary or paid), elders and pastoral and personal care visitors where the role includes direct feeding, physical care, assistance with financial matters, bereavement support/counselling or driving to medical or social care appointments	✓						Local Church
Vulnerable adult workers (voluntary or paid), elders and pastoral care without personal care			✓				Local Church
United Reformed Church trustees or Elders as local church trustees, registered charities providing regulated activities for children or adults at risk			✓	✓			Local Church
United Reformed Church Trustees					✓		Ministries Office
Synod Trustees			✓	✓			Synod
Serving Elders			✓	✓			Local Church
Assembly accredited lay preaching and locally recognised worship leaders in training			✓	✓			Ministries Office
Authorised Elders **			✓	✓			Local Church

Paper S1

	Enhanced with barring information		Enhanced without barring information		Basic check	No checks	New and five year renewals To be actioned by
	Adults	Children	Adults	Children			
Church caretaker and cleaners or equivalent					✓		Local Church
Church Administrators (or equivalent working from a Church Office)					✓		Local Church
Church treasurers or equivalent					✓		Local Church
Synod administrator/PA/Office manager/ Admin Assistant (Safeguarding) or equivalent whose role involves safeguarding administration					✓		Synod Admin Assistant (Safeguarding): Ministries
Synod treasurers / Synod Finance Officer or equivalent					✓		Synod
Children and Youth Development Officer	✓	✓					Ministries Office

** Authorised Elders – it has been the practice of the United Reformed Church to authorise elders and lay preachers occasionally to preside at the sacraments of communion and baptism

Paper X1

Synod changes

North Western and Mersey Synods

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Tim Hopley clerk@nwsynod.org.uk Rita Griffiths synodclerk@urcmerseysynod.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	General Assembly transfers Wilmslow United Reformed Church from the North Western Synod into Mersey Synod, and instructs the two Synods to effect this transfer at a date convenient to all parties, and to notify that date to the General Secretary.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Agreement of movement of a Church between Synods.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Following conversations within North Western Synod, Wilmslow United Reformed Church began thinking about its place within the Synod and sensed a call to consider whether it might be better located within Mersey.

Those conversations led to the following process, described on behalf of Wilmslow URC:

In the Autumn of 2022, the Elders from Wilmslow URC contacted North Western Synod Executive with a request to explore the possibility of moving from North Western Synod into Mersey Synod as one option in thinking about the future ministry and mission of the Church.

The meeting with representatives of North Western Synod and Mersey Synod was held with three Elders in January 2023. At this meeting both Synods made it clear to the Church that it was for it to discern its future and that the Synods would support that

decision. What was originally thought to be a meeting when we might need to argue our case, became a completely different discussion and exploration of what the future might look like in a very prayerful and reflective manner. For this we remain extremely grateful to both Synods.

Over the next couple of months, the Elders reflected and prayed about the next steps and in March 2023 we informed the Church meeting of what we had been discussing and thinking about.

On the return of our Minister, the Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe, from sabbatical in April 2023 we held a special meeting of the Elders to consider our options and discuss our feelings. The result of those discussions that Saturday morning resulted in a unanimous decision by the Elders to hold a special Church meeting to discuss the options with Church members.

This one agenda item meeting was held on 28 May. There were a number of questions from Church members that were answered but following discussions it was agreed that a formal resolution would be brought to the regular June Church meeting to seek a move to Mersey Synod.

“With the unanimous approval of the Elders Meeting, the Church Meeting of Wilmslow United Reformed Church proposes that the said congregation be transferred from the North Western Synod of the United Reformed Church to the Mersey Synod and commits itself to engage prayerfully in the process of discernment by the wider Church.”

This resolution was presented to the meeting on 25 June and was passed (49 in favour and one abstention). The gap between the two meetings was deliberate to allow members time to reflect, pray and consider what they were being asked.

Every Church goes on a journey in working to build the Kingdom and find its mission and ministry for the community and neighbourhood.

Wilmslow’s history as one of the largest Churches in the URC may not be quite the same now as it once was but we bring with us a legacy of a lot of work within the local area with other Churches and charities, for the Synod and for the National Church. Our Elders and members have been heavily involved in the Councils of the Church and therefore the feelings of making a move should not be read as being easy decisions. Our links to North Western Synod have been very strong and in a couple of cases continue to the present day.

Two things in particular thought have brought us to this point in our journey.

When North Western Synod invited the Churches in each Missional Partnership to think about whether they were in the right Partnership for them, this opened a door to a conversation in Wilmslow about how we felt about being in a Partnership that was, other than Macclesfield and Bollington, focused on Stockport and South Manchester. We decided that in thinking about this and presenting our conclusions to our Church meeting that we should think about all the possibilities, including moving Synods. It felt right to look at all options in order to be sure and clear about recommendations that we might make, whatever they might be.

More particularly though, in preparing our section for the Missional Partnership vacancy profile issued early in 2023, we came to a growing realisation that our mission was focused on our community in Wilmslow and was very definitely linked in all kinds of ways

to Cheshire East. That is where our hospital is and where the crematorium is. Our youth work through the Wilmslow Youth charity that we helped to give birth to is focused on the High School in the town with a clear Cheshire focus. And before, during and since the pandemic, our work with the local Health Centre and support for the pharmacy are linked to the Cheshire health services. We host meetings of the Town Council and have been working with them on the provision of support to Ukrainian families. We work with Cheshire East through the Bollin Partnership, are a Connected Community Centre for Cheshire East and were a Warm Places hub this past winter.

Whilst we recognise that geographically we are marginally further away from the URCs in Cheshire than we are to those in our Missional Partnership, our people, our town and inclination is looking south and west rather than north. We are on the doorstep of Greater Manchester and our town was created as a suburban setting for the owners of factories to get away from the cities, but in all of everyday life we are part of the Cheshire community.

We have reflected in a couple of settings that our process and decision making has taken some time as we look back over the past twelve months. However, we have refused to apologise for this as it has taken us that time to pray and reflect on what we were asking of each other and what it would mean for our future.

For these reasons, shifting our focus in a different direction for our continuing journey feels to be the right decision to us. Over 175 years have passed since our Church started in the town and the foundations of the building were laid down. Whether the Councils of the Church concur with our decision is in God's hands, but we know that God has guided our thoughts and discussions, answered our prayers and helped to signpost us to our next steps for ministry and mission for all God's people in our town and in the wider world.



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