

Paper A2

Business Committee update

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mark Robinson mark.robinson@urc.org.uk
Action required	For note.

1. Overview of the Committee's work

Since the last General Assembly, the Business Committee has undergone significant changes in composition and remit, enabling us to undertake a more strategic role within the church. The updated composition has been expanded, as per resolution 53 of the 2023 Church Life Review paper N1, to now include all members of the General Secretariat, the Assistant Clerk and the Moderator Elect of the General Assembly, as well as an Independent Convenor, the General Secretary as Executive Secretary, the Moderator of the General Assembly, the immediate past Moderator and the Clerk and Treasurer of the General Assembly, and two members appointed to reflect the diversity of the United Reformed Church. This new structure positions us effectively for the strategic oversight and governance tasks with which we have been entrusted.

The committee's expanded remit encompasses overseeing the practical arrangements and ordering the business of the General Assembly and its Executive, maintaining a strategic overview of the Assembly's work, ensuring coherence in governance and operations and, when necessary, taking urgent decisions on behalf of the General Assembly. These responsibilities are detailed in the appended terms of reference document.

2. Revised approach to key tasks

Despite our initial efforts, we were unable to fill the roles required to set up the three intended task groups as outlined in Paper N1, at resolution 48: Task Group on Resource Sharing, resolution 49: Task Group on Local Church Support Services, and resolution 51: Task Group on Locally Employed Lay Workers. Consequently, we have revised our approach to ensure the critical work continues effectively. This is reported on separately.

3. Steering Group formation

Working with the Nominations Committee, we have established a Steering Group to replace the three task groups initially planned. This group will oversee the workstreams, support the Programme Manager and General Secretary, commission work with consultants, and prepare reports and recommendations for General Assembly 2025. The Steering Group consists of individuals with suitable knowledge and experience, drawn from the nominations process and other relevant sources.

4. Finance and resource sharing workstream (resolution 48)

The finance task group was intended to develop models for financial resource-sharing across the United Reformed Church. Given the revised approach, most of this work will now be undertaken by consultants, guided by the Steering Group and supported by the Programme Manager. A series of workshops and events will engage Synods, Trusts and other stakeholders to identify and evaluate resource-sharing options, with feasibility studies conducted by external consultants. This process aims to present well-researched recommendations to the extraordinary General Assembly in 2025.

5. Local church support services workstream (resolution 49)

The task group for local church support services will also be replaced by the Steering Group, which will explore models to provide consistent support functions in areas such as finance, property, health and safety, human resources, and safeguarding. The Steering Group will coordinate consultations and feasibility studies, ensuring comprehensive support models are developed and evaluated against the values and principles adopted by the General Assembly.

6. Lay workers in local churches workstream (resolution 51)

Instead of forming a dedicated task group, we will implement 'living labs' to test models of employed lay work within local churches. These labs will gather examples of good practice, compile job descriptions, and explore infrastructure needs. Moderators, we hope, will help guide the discernment of roles and test sites, and findings will inform the Steering Group's recommendations to the General Assembly 2025.

7. PLATO handbook (resolution 50)

The re-establishment of the PLATO handbook remains a priority. A facilitated consultation event will be organised to agree on the content and structure of the handbook, which will serve as a central online resource for trust, property, financial and related matters. This event is a critical step in ensuring that the handbook is comprehensive and up to date by 2025, and also forms a central plank in the possibility of creating more effective support services for local congregations.

8. Extraordinary General Assembly in 2025

To accommodate the significant decisions arising from the Church Life Review and other ongoing work, an extraordinary General Assembly will be held in addition to the regular General Assembly in 2025. The extraordinary meeting will focus exclusively on the Church Life Review and related strategic initiatives. It will take place from Friday November 14 2025 to Sunday November 16 2025, at Kents Hill Park in Milton Keynes. This venue offers excellent accessibility and facilities to ensure a productive Assembly.

9. Assistant Clerk role review

A paper reviewing the role of the Assistant Clerk is appended for discussion. It highlights the need for clarity in the distribution of duties between the General Secretary and the Clerk, proposing that the Assistant Clerk be recognised as a full member of the General Assembly. This role review is essential as we seek to appoint a new Assistant Clerk who can effectively support the Clerk's responsibilities.

10. Decisions taking on behalf of the General Assembly

The Business Committee has appointed the following people as Synod Moderators on behalf of the General Assembly, following their nomination by the appropriate nominations process: The Revd Dave Salsbury as the Moderator of the National Synod

of Wales; The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins as the Moderator of Wessex Synod; and The Revd David Downing as Moderator of the South Western Synod.

The Business Committee initiated an independent review into the Ministerial Disciplinary process, to be conducted by Dr Ed Morgan, KC. The results and consequences will be reported when the review is complete and recommendations for a revised process have been made.