

Paper A3

Denominational shared resources hub

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Melanie Campbell, Consultant, Church Life Review melanie.campbell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 12 General Assembly resolves that the URC shared resource hub will be known as <i>myURC</i> and instructs Resources Committee and relevant staff to implement the URC shared resource hub, as soon as feasible. Resolution 13 Assembly resolves to establish a myURC helpdesk to receive and respond to emails, chat, and phone calls from myURC users, and instructs Resources Committee to implement the helpdesk as soon as feasible. Resolution 14a Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to give advice to URCT in relation to providing funding out of the restricted Church Life Fund for the operation of the myURC shared resources hub and helpdesk. Resolution 14b Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to review the operation of myURC and the helpdesk annually. Resolution 14c Assembly instructs Resources Committee to ensure sufficient staffing for the myURC helpdesk at its inception, and to monitor and review staffing levels to ensure effective staffing levels are maintained. Resolution 15 Assembly affirms the proposed myURC hub and helpdesk, governance model, and apportions operational governance responsibility to Resources Committee, with PLATO to contribute on questions of content.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To summarise the status of the project to establish a denominational resources hub, outline the proposed governance, operating, and support model, and review next steps.
Main points	Executive summary This paper introduces myURC, a new denominational resources hub designed to give everyone in the URC simple, consistent access to the technical, legal, and procedural guidance/documentation they need. Developed through extensive consultation and learning from North Western Synod's helpdesk pilot, myURC will host policies, templates, and advice on governance, safeguarding, property, HR, finance, and compliance, reducing duplication and easing administrative burdens. The hub is intended as a practical tool to make running churches easier, more efficient, and more consistent across the denomination. Alongside the hub, a helpdesk is proposed to support users by phone, email, and chat – triaging queries, guiding users to resources, and signposting where specialist advice is required. Governance will rest between Resources Committee (with PLATO providing content oversight) and ongoing funding oversight Church Life Fund Committee. Together, myURC and the helpdesk aim to create a modern, reliable support system that complements synod provision and strengthens denominational church life.
Previous relevant documents	Paper N1, General Assembly 2023 (Resolution 50) (This work also follows on from the PLATO Handbook)
Consultation has taken place with...	CLR Steering Group and Sub-Committee Business Committee Resources Committee Officers of General Assembly staff (including Senior Leadership Team, Safeguarding Officer, Head of Compliance and Services) Synod Clerks November 2024 CLR Shared Services Consultation attendees (synod and trust officers, staff, and volunteers) Several focus groups drawn from across the denomination, including ordained/commission ministers, church secretaries, lay workers, and synod clerks)

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs for the development have been borne by the Church Life Review's programme budget (the Annenberg Fund) within URC Trust. Ongoing operations will be funded through the Church Life Fund.
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External (eg ecumenical)	Local churches which are part of ecumenical arrangements will have access to the portal and helpdesk.
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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This report provides a summary background to the development of the Shared Resource Hub to be known as myURC. It explains some of the learning from North Western Synod which informed the hub design and the concept of a helpdesk.
- 1.2. The report outlines the main features of the hub and how the testers' suggestions helped us amend our prototype. Recommendations are given for the ongoing oversight and governance for myURC.
- 1.3. The report suggests a helpdesk model to offer support to churches using a myURC contact number, email address, and chat facility.

2. Background

- 2.1. General Assembly set out Church Life Review Phase Two's portfolio of work in 2023, Resolutions 47-51a. Resolution 50 states:
General Assembly invites the General Secretariat and PLATO to re-establish the PLATO handbook (or equivalent), providing a central online resource of advice and proformas for trust, property, financial and related matters for local congregations, to be available online at the latest by General Assembly 2025.
- 2.2. These resolutions were motivated by a desire to support churches with the administrative, legal, and compliance tasks associated with managing their buildings, and supporting their volunteers and employees. A series of consultations and surveys, an exploration of 'customer journeys' through a 'living lab', technical development, testing, and working groups have jointly led to the version of a shared resource hub, myURC, which is now recommended to Assembly.

3. Exploration, suggestions, innovation

- 3.1. The CLR consultation in Yarnfield (2023) recommended exploring the possibility of establishing a form of shared resources for churches to easily access. The CLR Steering Group sought to understand more about the support churches were receiving and valued, or the support they couldn't get but needed. A survey followed which was sent to churches and synods in September 2024. The survey asked about resources available within the URC and elsewhere, and specifically, how the URC might better support local churches.
- 3.2. Both churches and synods identified the need for an online shared resource for all aspects of managing buildings, governance, running churches, and working with volunteers and paid staff.
- 3.3. A residential workshop in Milton Keynes (November 2024) agreed to pursue developing an online portal of resources for churches. The safeguarding pages on the URC website were suggested as a model to follow.

- 3.4. General Assembly has now made clear the denomination's commitment to improving the accessibility of resources and finding ways to make the experience of running a church much easier for local congregations. Providing a shared resource portal is one way of meeting this aim.
- 3.5. The subsequent development and design of the shared resource portal has been overseen by the CLR Steering Group.

4. Two journeys – same problem

- 4.1. In 2024, North Western Synod were exploring how they might provide consistent and readily available support to churches, with a specific emphasis on HR. They had the idea of a helpdesk of some nature.
- 4.2. Conversations between CLR and North Western Synod identified an opportunity to work together, to explore the concept of a helpdesk, intended to help understand how churches seek and obtain support, to inform the shared services workstream.
- 4.3. **Development and co-design:** In November 2024, North Western Synod established their helpdesk as a 'living lab'. This approach seeks to learn through co-production; in this way immediate practical issues can be resolved through learning and joint solution finding. It is important to note the North Western Synod helpdesk did not set out to provide all answers for developing a portal; it was a pragmatic and realistic approach to gaining some relevant and contextual learning in a short space of time about how queries are received and made, and what might improve the experience for churches and synod alike.
- 4.4. **Helpdesk (not helpline):** North Western Synod provided one free phone number for all queries. Staff mainline numbers were removed, individual mobile numbers were retained. New software was required to enable easy use. Calls were initially answered by the Deputy Clerk and Assistant who triaged or responded to queries. (Safeguarding queries were passed directly to the Safeguarding Officer, unless they related to booking on to safeguarding training events).
- 4.5. The source and nature of queries was recorded.
- 4.6. Shortly after introducing the free-phone number, a helpdesk email address was introduced.
- 4.7. Three months later an online events booking system was planned.

5. Experimenting and learning: learning points for hub design

- Helpdesk calls were monitored from November to December 2024. In January 2025 the monitoring extended to include emails to the helpdesk address. The data collection was designed by the synod team and provided the following learning points:
- 5.1. **Content:** The highest volume of queries (in order) were administration processes, property, finance, safeguarding, trust, and legal.

- 5.2. **Calls vs emails:** During the monitoring period, North Western Synod received three times as many queries via the helpdesk email address than calls. There is a perception that many URC churches prefer to contact synods by telephone, yet the volume of telephone calls was less than imagined.
- 5.3. **Helpdesk email address:** The synod experience suggests a preference for churches to submit queries by email. Churches adapted well to the anonymity of the helpdesk address. The synod always responded quickly to these queries.
This indicates the potential for a wider application of the helpdesk email concept across the URC.
- 5.4. **Streamlining access:** The team recognised that the wide range of queries received by the helpdesk could be triaged. Over time the triage team found their knowledge base broadening, and noted that they could field more calls and emails, which in turn reduced calls to other team members.
Triaging calls and emails therefore holds potential for managing and streamlining activity in other URC settings.
- 5.5. **Event calendars:** The team were surprised to discover just how many queries related to booking events. They identified efficient ways for these processes to be automated, reducing staff workload and releasing capacity. The synod is now implementing an online event booking system.
Online calendars and event booking systems offer potential to streamline all such processes remotely across the URC.
- 5.6. **Logins and access:** The team noticed significant time was given to supporting people to login to systems requiring passwords e.g. church returns. They found that access to an online resource portal would need to be as simple as possible to reduce barriers to use, and avoid synods being inundated with login and password queries and ensure users are not deterred.
Logins create a barrier to usage; a resource portal will be most widely used if access is as simple as possible.
- 5.7. **Portal feedback and evaluation:** Church years are characterized by seasons and the administrative tasks related to them. For this reason, North Western Synod became very busy in the Spring, and this significantly impacted upon the data collected.
The learning point from this is that any feedback or evaluation mechanism must be as automated as possible, unless significant time and resources are to be dedicated to it.
- 5.8. **Further support:** Whilst the synod noted the wide use of email for queries, 25% of queries were received by phone. Customer service models indicate that self-service online resources are most successful when there is an option to gain further support from an advisor. Within the synod, the team were able to directly pass people on to specialists for advice and support. This suggests that a resource portal might be helpfully supplemented by a staffed helpdesk: a friendly voice to help provide general advice, to assist with finding documents and other useful information, just as the synod helpdesk had done.

A helpdesk function might guide towards generic resources which may be used by URC churches, and signpost for further specialist support and encouragement.

- 5.9. These learning points from North Western Synod informed the portal design, and we are grateful to the team for their willingness to experiment, and their continued contributions.

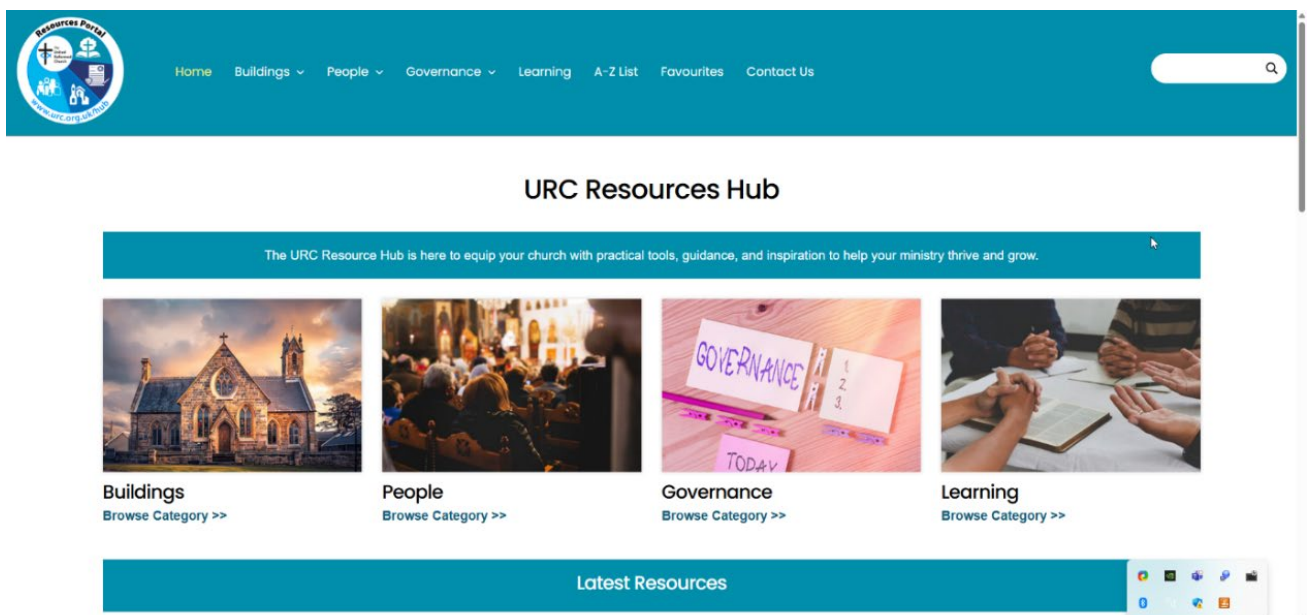
6. Resource hub: planning and prototype

- 6.1. **The brief:** Taking the brief from the Milton Keynes event, the portal would be recognisably a URC site. Its content would be the technical and detailed resources, guidance, information, and administrative forms necessary for running a church, including content from ministries and potentially also learning information (but not learning modules, i.e. SCORMs). The design principles identified at Milton Keynes informed the prototype and these were further refined by site testers.
- 6.2. The site would be available to all URC churches, LEPs, synods, and all else who engage with a URC community for whatever reason.
- 6.3. The portal prototype was initially designed in-house, before a web-designer developed the full site. In URC tradition, there were as many preferred ways of listing and organising resources as there were people! Even so, we reached a broad consensus on the current version.
- 6.4. **Prototype testing:** The prototype was tested in early June, and the subsequent site was tested by different groups at six-week intervals. We are grateful to everyone who participated and so willingly helped to improve the design. The site will continue to be tested as usage develops.
- 6.5. **What's in a name? From 'portal' to 'hub' to 'myURC':** The first prototype users asked for the portal to be renamed the Resource Hub. A few weeks later, myURC was suggested, and has become attached to the project.
- 6.6. **Emerging design features**
- 6.7. **Building community:** As the prototype was being tested, it was suggested that myURC could also be a resource which might develop a sense of community amongst users.
- 6.8. **Logins and security:** The prototype instigated questions about whether logins would be necessary, how would we extrapolate useful data without them, and whether logins could play a role in building a sense of belonging through the portal as well. It is fair to say there were voices speaking for and against logins; additionally, our learning from North Western Synod, and all our testing groups, advised that logins would be a barrier to usage, contrary to the aims of the shared resources. How might we balance these equally valid claims?

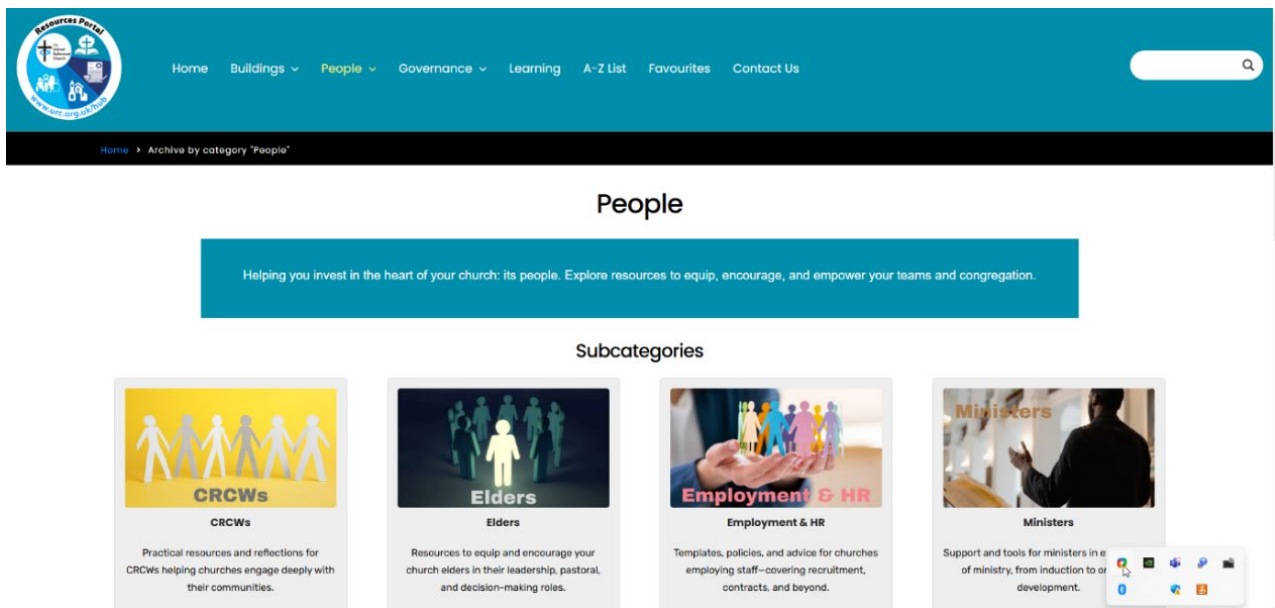
Listening to all voices, we have sought to find technical solutions to creating community whilst still obtaining useful data about hub usage and value, without the constraints of secure logins. At the time of writing these solutions are focusing upon integrating myURC news into stronger and consistent social

media and other communication campaigns; seamless logins may remain a longer-term development aspiration once the hub is widely used.

- 6.9. **Chatbots:** The success of the North Western Synod helpdesk affirmed the value of digital processes for seeking information. During the prototype testing, users asked for a hub chatbot to help find resources and respond to simple queries; this will be added once the site has gone live.
- 6.10. **Search and ‘you may also like...’:** Our testing groups helped immensely with improving the search function. This is now a predictive function with a ‘you may also like’ box of similar resources appearing, depending upon the page used.
- 6.11. **Calendar:** The site includes a calendar for key events, to be developed over time.
- 6.12. **Feedback/evaluation:** There will be a feedback box for users to report errors such as missing or broken links, or any other site issue. We would actively encourage such help from our users, as well as some positive comments too!
- 6.13. The site will use Google Analytics to monitor usage and identify which resources are most readily used. A chatbox will ask users if they have found the information they were looking for, and again at the point of download.
- 6.14. At regular intervals, pop-ups will be used to ask qualitative questions connected to success criteria. This approach utilises the site to generate as much information as possible, minimising the cost of other research and analysis.



Overview of draft myURC landing page (branding not updated to reflect name change), with main categories including Buildings, People, Governance, and Learning.



Overview of draft myURC people page.

7. Links and hyperlinks

- 7.1. **URC/myURC:** There will be both visible and behind-the-scenes links between the portal and the main URC site, so that users can be redirected. We aim to keep the number of clicks to a minimum.
- 7.2. **Synod links:** Synods are invited to link their websites to myURC as appropriate. It is not advised for synods to download myURC resources and post them directly to their sites, since this may risk resources remaining on synod sites beyond their expiry dates (i.e. when new versions have been uploaded to the hub).
- 7.3. **Hyperlinks:** We recognise that many URC resources contain links to other relevant documents. Where hyperlinks are used, there will be a technical fix to ensure users are carried to myURC although this may require multiple clicks. In time, as resources are checked, hyperlinks will be amended.
- 7.4. **External links:** Links to frequently used sites will be provided, e.g. Charity Commission, ACAT, ACAS, HMRC, HSE, and more. These will be added to the relevant hub pages, e.g. ACAT links will be found with finance resources, ACAS links will be found on the relevant 'people' pages.

8. Content: easier to find and locate

- 8.1. It is a principle that hub content will be checked by relevant legal and content specialists to ensure that the best advice and information is shared.
- 8.2. **Differentiating between myURC and URC website:** The main website will remain the outward face of the denomination, with missional and attractive information to inspire, guide, and assist people with mission, faith, and caring for their communities. myURC will be the place for all technical and procedural information a church may need.

9. Schedule of content for upload to myURC

- 9.1. Phase one will see all readily transferrable resources transferred from the main URC site to myURC. These resources will be known to be compliant and up to date. This includes some finance, legal, compliance, and administrative forms, URC governance information, the full suite of communication resources, and ministries resources.
- 9.2. Safeguarding pages will be transferred when all resources have been fully tested. Their format will remain similar to their current version. The URC website homepage will link directly to the myURC home page for safeguarding resources, so that they are prominent, highly visible and easily found.
- 9.3. Over time, the content will start to include those items which will take longer to agree such as property templates and policies. Please note that the table below is not meant to imply an order of *importance*, just the order in which content will be uploaded (due to increasing complexity).

Table 1: myURC schedule of module development

No.	Item	Resource	Comment
1.	Readily transferrable material from main site	The Manual GA policies Ministries Communications resources Administrative forms	All content which is known to be compliant and up to date.
2.	Safeguarding resources	Safeguarding	When all hyperlink testing is completed. There will be prominent links on both sites.
3.	GDPR resources	Policy, processes, including SAR <i>External links including Information Commissioner's Office</i>	New resources legally checked and applicable for churches, synods and Offices of General Assembly.
4.	Advisory content	Net Zero advice* Other advisory and helpful information as sourced from Church House or contributed by synods. *recognising some NZ materials may be applicable to main website	Advisory content when confirmed legally compliant and up to date.
5.	Health and Safety	Advisory information, processes, policies	Developing new information is underway. The resources will be relevant to church settings.

			The survey suggested Health and Safety as a priority area.
6.	HR	Advisory information, processes, policies, standard templates, documentation ACAS links to be added	The new Worker's Rights Bill will be a priority. A significant amount of material exists across the URC.
7.	Finance	Advisory information, processes, policies. ACAT, Charity Commission links to be added	
8.	Property	Advisory information, processes, policies	

- 9.4. GDPR and SAR resources have recently been developed for churches, synods and the Offices of General Assembly. Approved by a legal specialist, they will be uploaded to myURC by November 2025.
- 9.5. Essentially, the uploading of useful advisory content will be an ongoing feature of the hub's life. Materials known to be up-to-date, helpful and which are non-contentious in nature, will be added continuously and as they become available.
- 9.6. Health and Safety resources are the next to be developed, since church survey returns consistently asked for these.
- 9.7. HR resources will be pursued from November onwards.
- 9.8. Property and finance resources will be the last to be developed, simply because synod and trust practices vary most widely in this area. This excludes advisory and good practice information, which will be uploaded as it becomes available.
- 10. Interface with synods**
- 10.1. A key learning point from the Milton Keynes consultation and the survey returns, is that synods differ widely in how they provide support to their churches. Some specialise in areas which others may not. Some provide a broad range of support, whilst others may signpost to the URC main site. Subsequently, the experience of synod support to churches cannot be generalised.
- 10.2. For this reason, the focus for myURC is to provide consistent information and resources for all churches, in as many subject areas as possible. This recognises that some churches cannot access the services or support available to those in other synods.

- 10.3. The Milton Keynes and Yarnfield consultations cited the waste of developing resources 13 times in each synod, and myURC is intended to be the vehicle for beginning to address this.
- 10.4. The development of myURC invites collaboration and partnership in developing new resources, for the Offices of General Assembly and synods alike. Opportunities can be created to ask one another about plans for writing new support materials and documents, creating openings to work together where possible.
- 10.5. Of course, there will remain the need for synod/trust specific documents. However, in time, myURC will be a repository of information that will be helpful to frontline users in churches, and synod teams too.
- 10.6. Synod presence in the oversight of myURC and owning the content and its development will be key to myURC becoming a shared and valued resource.

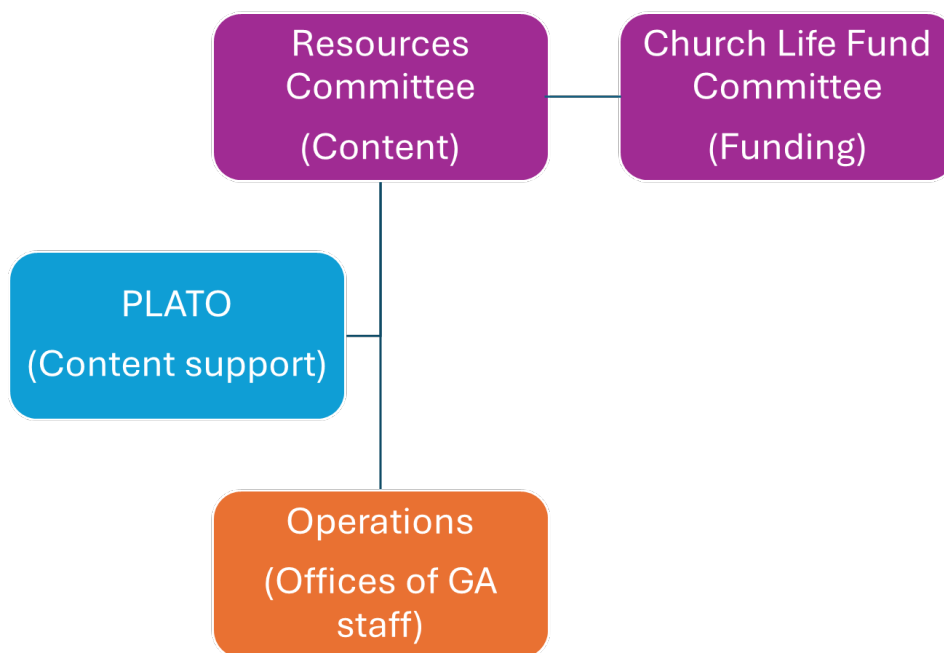
11. myURC Governance

- 11.1. It is proposed that the Resources Committee will hold overall governance responsibility for all content and operational aspects of myURC. This responsibility will be undertaken alongside Church Life Fund Committee for funding oversight, connected to overall success measurement. Resources Committee will work in conjunction with PLATO for content accuracy purposes. To enable this, an updated membership list for PLATO has been prepared. Governance functions will include:
- 11.2. Editorial oversight of new content, its appropriateness, and that all legal checks have been made.
- 11.3. Ensuring existing content is up to date; version controls are in place and effective.
- 11.4. Ensuring suitable legal disclaimers, cookie policies, GDPR and other compliance requirements are adhered to properly.
- 11.5. Ensuring operating policies and procedures are in place to guide the operational activity of myURC.
- 11.6. Identifying, managing, and mitigating any risks relating to myURC.
- 11.7. Considering and ensuring that any ethical issues relating to myURC are addressed.
- 11.8. Ensuring the suitable delegation of authority and control to operational staff responsible for the day-to-day running of the site. This will be important to ensure staff can act upon feedback, and ensure the site is responsive to requests and suggestions.
- 11.9. Ensuring an effective evaluation process.

12. Operational oversight

- 12.1. The management and oversight of the myURC site will be undertaken by Offices of General Assembly staff with responsibility for technical web support, and URC denominational information resources. This is principally to ensure alignment and technical coordination with the existing URC website and offers Senior Leadership Team (SLT) oversight of myURC and denominational, ministries, and compliance information.

- 12.2. It is recognised that the link with synods is crucial. The governance model engages synods through Property, Legal, and Trust Officers (PLATO), and equally requires similar engagement with synods.
- 12.3. A mechanism is required to coordinate and align the technical, content, and funding arms of myURC operation, and to resolve any shared issues and interdependencies.
- 12.4. It is suggested that Offices of General Assembly departments and synods nominate a team member to be their myURC champion. The myURC champions would contribute to operational coordination groups, become familiar with myURC and the content being developed and become the link between departments, synods and the myURC gathered resources.
- 12.5. Regular feedback between the coordination groups and governance committees would offer an opportunity to consider quality assurance, developments, and improvements.
- 12.6. The governance arrangements and their connections with operational performance will be reviewed to ensure they are suitable.



myURC governance and operations model

13. myURC Risks

- 13.1. **Legal risks:** Providing freely accessible information will bring risks. However, these risks are already present in the content of the current URC site and many synod sites. Legal disclaimers will be prepared.
- 13.2. **Operating risks:** A suite of policies and processes will be prepared to outline the operating parameters for myURC. Risk management for the site will be included within the Church House risk management processes.

- 13.3. **Reputational risk:** myURC and any associated helpdesk will provide resources only, and users will be signposted to synods for any further advice; this limits the risk of incorrect information being given to churches.
- 13.4. **Safeguarding risk:** Safeguarding resources will be uploaded and made available as directed by the denomination's safeguarding lead.
- 13.5. **Managing expectations:** myURC cannot resolve the inequitable provision of specialist advice which synods may make available to churches experiencing complex situations. Addressing this concern comprehensively would require a regional or denominational approach to making such advice available to churches. This is integral to the shared services workstream as it seeks to provide professional advisors; for example, with HR support (see 'a myURC helpdesk' below).

14. myURC Costs

- 14.1. **Set up and implementation costs:** With much of the development led in-house, the direct web-development and project management costs are not expected to exceed £25k for 2025/6. This will be covered by the Church Life Review's existing programme budget, rather than the Church Life Fund.
- 14.2. **Running costs:** Running costs will cover myURC technical, content and governance functions, as follows:
- 14.3. **Technical costs:** These costs cover the technical support to manage and keep the site working well for front-end users. They include technical upgrades, alignment with the URC main site, managing content uploads and acting upon feedback relating to missing links, hyperlink issues, etc. These will be absorbed within Offices of General Assembly operations.
- 14.4. **Automated evaluation/feedback:** The site will generate data which will require analysis. Automated processes will be relied upon as much as possible, to reduce costs.
- 14.5. **Content costs:** Costs will be associated with the staff time to develop new resources. There remains the opportunity for synods to offer resources to myURC.

Version controls would identify which resources would be due for review, and whether synods may have similar resources which can be uploaded. This would require dedicated time for development and coordination. At the time of writing, plans are being developed for such processes.

- 14.6. **Management and governance costs:** Meeting costs, together with staff time to carry out myURC governance tasks.
- 14.7. **Evaluation costs:** Evaluation and feedback is essential to ensure myURC fulfils its remit. North Western Synod demonstrated that the more automated the process, the lower the costs and time resources required. This creates a more sustainable outcome.

14.8. At the time of writing, potential automated feedback and evaluation processes are under development. The Resources Committee and CLFC may wish to consider other costs for ongoing evaluation over time.

14.9. **Legal costs:** Some hub content may need to be reviewed by legal experts to ensure it remains compliant. Care will need to be taken that these costs are kept reasonable, to avoid taking up too much of the available Church Life Fund resource.

15. A myURC Helpdesk

15.1. Helpdesks are a recognised customer support model and often supplement online resources.

15.2. myURC as a standalone resource provides information 24/7. The basic model does not offer any interactive support. The variable provision of synod support to local churches, together with the North Western experience, suggests a helpdesk to respond to queries might be the only constant source of support for some churches during working hours.

15.3. General Assembly has sought to make it easier for local congregations to run their churches. Providing a shared resource hub is one way of meeting this aim; a helpdesk augments this ambition by providing a personal contact to assist, and contextualise the resources provided. Collectively the resource hub and helpdesk represent a comprehensive resource, with a friendly voice to help churches find the information they need.

16. Potential remit for a helpdesk

16.1. The helpdesk would be available to all myURC users. The helpdesk would triage queries received by email, chat, and direct calls.

16.2. Queries from churches can be anticipated to be about:

16.3. **Using the site:** how to access and download information, which search terms might help find information, how to sign-up, etc.

16.4. **Information specific:** questions about the status of information, whether it applies to churches, etc.

16.5. **Situation specific:** presenting a particular situation and asking for advice about the type of resources which would be helpful.

16.6. **Other:** calls to myURC from external sources, contacting the denomination for whatever reason.

Example of different levels of possible support:

A church youth worker has made a complaint about the paid administrator who insists upon taking phone calls on loudspeaker. The church elder calls the myURC helpdesk to ask if there is a General Assembly complaints policy.

Using the site: The helpdesk advisor guides the caller to find the complaints policy. The caller asks if the policy applies to all churches and

has further questions about the process. The helpdesk advisor directs the caller to their synod for advice.

Information specific: the helpdesk advisor can also confirm the General Assembly policy does apply to URC churches. The caller has further questions, and the advisor signposts the caller to their synod for advice.

Situation specific: In response to the caller's questions, the helpdesk advisor recognises the situation requires HR support and guides the caller to the relevant pages. The 'you may also like' box suggests equalities materials may be helpful. The advisor explains these resources. The caller has further questions about their situation, and the advisor signposts them to their synod for specialist advice.

Situation specific with professional advice: As above, the helpdesk advisor signposts directly to a professional advisor who can help further.

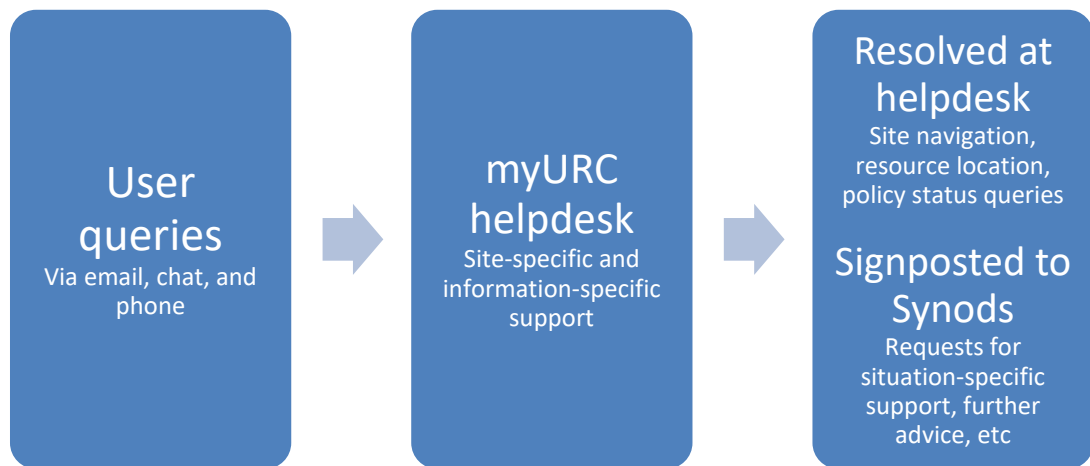
17. Level of helpdesk provision possible

- 17.1. **Situation specific with access to professional advice:** This is the only model which fully supports churches whose synods are unable to provide the advice and help they may need for any situation. It requires a network of professional providers approved by trusts to which churches can be signposted. This relates directly to the shared services workstream.
- 17.2. For helpdesk advisors to provide **situation specific advice** requires them to hold a detailed knowledge of the policies and processes which may be relevant as well as an ability to interpret the situations users present.
- 17.3. Helpdesk advisors would require experience of general church and management situations as well as extensive knowledge of URC policies and procedures, and those of synods/trusts.
- 17.4. This model would require well-prepared training and support for the advisors, and the acceptance and agreement of the synod trusts in the advice and information provided.
- 17.5. This model still requires the user to contact their synod for advice about any local synod and trust direct intervention and support available. It potentially results in a variable outcome for the church
- 17.6. Giving **information specific** advice requires the understanding of whether a General Assembly policy or any policy might be applicable to a church or Synod over many subject areas. It might also include checking the status of information and whether external links might be helpful. This level of advice also potentially touches upon some synod and trust requirements which may be relevant to the church context. Since most policies and resources will explain their scope, and the option is really between synod or church, this could be feasible. Checking document status and version-control would be a quick process for an advisor who knows where to look for this information.

17.7. **Site specific advice:** This is the most clearly bounded option, limiting support to how to use the site, and where resources might be found.

18. Recommendations

- 18.1. It is accepted that the more skilled the helpdesk advisor, the better the frontline user's experience. There is also a direct correlation with the costs involved. Additionally, whilst it is possible for a helpdesk to signpost sources of professional and specialist advice to churches, the complexity of the URC's trusts and specific policy provisions across England, Scotland, and Wales, would render this a step too far at this time.
- 18.2. In the above scenario, three models result in the user accessing professional advice via their synod; the model which accesses professional advice offers a comprehensive level of professional support.
- 18.3. Developing a network of preferred providers of professional advisors would be feasible and suggested as the mid-term objective is to meet the aim for all churches to have access to effective support. This would be developed in tandem with the shared services workstream.
- 18.4. **Recommended helpdesk model:** For the reasons given above, it is recommended that a transitional approach is taken to develop a myURC helpdesk from **site specific support to information specific advice** within a suggested timeframe of 9 months (assuming governance and management arrangements are suitable for the transition to be made).
- 18.5. This model would help churches navigate the site and find resources. Queries about the scope of policies and procedures, their status and the nature of links provided would also be responded to. Requests for further support with individual situations would be redirected to synods. This can also include bookings for URC events.
- 18.6. This model provides interactive and email support to myURC users.
- 18.7. This first level of helpdesk service offers the option to learn from site monitoring data in conjunction with helpdesk usage before maturing to fuller provision in time and considering how the helpdesk can relate to accessing other shared resources.



Recommended helpdesk model, after scale-up.

19. Benefits

- 19.1. The helpdesk would support users with navigating and using myURC and its resources. Churches would find support with and by using myURC.
- 19.2. Limiting the helpdesk's purpose to site and information support is the simplest and easiest to implement, since other options require time-consuming involvement and engagement with synods and trusts.
- 19.3. myURC and the helpdesk would enable churches to find resources and interact in modern and efficient ways which are convenient for them.
- 19.4. A helpdesk augments the impact of myURC's support for local churches.
- 19.5. Since no professional advice or guidance will be offered by the helpdesk advisors the liabilities and risks are lower.
- 19.6. URC workloads peak at particular points of the year and support teams are typically small. myURC and the helpdesk have the potential to absorb some of the changing and seasonal demands from churches; for example, the myURC home page could display prominent information about church returns at the beginning of the year, and the helpdesk would be another source of support to churches with login queries and similar. Collectively the site and the helpdesk would be a resource which can complement synod teams during busy or lean times.

20. A helpdesk operating model

- 20.1. **Location:** Since myURC emails, calls, and chat messages can be received remotely, helpdesk advisors can be geographically located across the UK.
- 20.2. **Capacity:** North Western Synod volume email and call data cannot be readily extrapolated to a new national model. This is because the helpdesk impact on synod email and phone queries cannot be known for certain. It can be anticipated that some calls and emails would be resolved by the helpdesk as users gain confidence. An initial volume of 150 emails each month, and 40 calls might be realistic.

- 20.3. **Helpdesk advisor role:** It is suggested that one person be appointed as a helpdesk advisor, with backup from Offices of General Assembly or a synod to cover annual leave and other absences.
- 20.4. Since it is difficult to gauge the volume of calls and emails which will be received, it is recommended that the role includes content and technical functions required for myURC to operate, for a set period.
- 20.5. **Line management:** The helpdesk advisor could be managed from Church House. Whilst it is possible for the myURC site operation to be managed separately from the helpdesk, for example by a synod; the close interaction between the site and the helpdesk, would create additional coordination, governance and communication complexities. This is particularly the case if the helpdesk advisor undertakes content or technical tasks.
- 20.6. **Governance:** The governance mechanism for myURC should include oversight of the helpdesk function.
- 21. Conclusion**
- 21.1. A helpdesk is necessary to provide full email and phone support for myURC.
- 21.2. A helpdesk advisor, managed from Church House, in conjunction with myURC is the quickest and simplest to implement. Planning for the model is underway, pending General Assembly approval.
- 21.3. The initial **site and information** level of support would minimise risk and restrict costs, and requires the least capacity to absorb change elsewhere.
- 21.4. This last factor is important, since there will be other process changes arising from the CLR, and limiting the operational changes arising from the helpdesk will assist other strategic changes for synods and the denomination alike.
- 21.5. The North Western Synod demonstrated that a generic level of helpdesk support with signposting to specialist advice might be an effective model for the URC. This would be the mid-term aim for myURC and the helpdesk.