

Paper A6

HR, IT, payroll, and property shared services

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Revd Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 23 General Assembly affirms that, wherever possible, the provision of support services for local churches, provided by synods and General Assembly, is best done in a coordinated and joined up fashion. Assembly encourages the whole church to develop a culture in which we develop resources collectively for the benefit of the whole church, whilst engaging within synods and locally to ensure those resources actively support local congregational life. Resolution 24 General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with developing an IT infrastructure that has the potential to serve the General Assembly and the Synods. Resolution 25 General Assembly encourages synods to, when possible, move their IT infrastructure provision to that which has been developed for the whole church. Resolution 26a General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with bringing together key stakeholders together, to devise a means by which each local church has access to professional HR advice, at a minimum in the form of a helpline. Resolution 26b General Assembly encourages synods to work constructively and generously with the Resources Committee in working towards HR provision available to each local congregation within the United Reformed Church.

	Resolution 27a General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with developing a model of payroll services that can be made available to each synod and local church. Resolution 27b General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with consulting widely with synods and the members of the Church Life Fund Committee to arrive at a workable, affordable funding model for a shared payroll provision. Resolution 28 General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with hosting a consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from synods, General Assembly and the Retired Ministers' Housing Society to explore issues surrounding the existing, and possible future, arrangements for supporting the maintenance and development of buildings held in trust for United Reformed Church purposes. Resolution 29 Assembly instructs Resources Committee to prioritise this work, starting with more easily attainable shared services, like payroll and HR.
--	---

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To review completed work and propose a future direction in relation to HR, IT, payroll, and property shared services.
Main points	Executive summary This paper addresses the inconsistent patchwork of support services across the URC, focusing on HR, IT infrastructure, payroll, and property. Drawing on the proven safeguarding model, it proposes more joined-up provision to reduce duplication, strengthen Synods' ability to support local churches, and ensure reliable, professional services across the denomination. The aim is to enable cost-effective, high-quality support in core "back-office" areas, freeing local capacity for mission. Coordinated approaches to IT, HR advice, payroll systems, and property management will help address gaps, ease pressure on volunteers, and foster greater collaboration between Synods and Assembly structures.
Previous relevant documents	Paper N1, General Assembly 2023 (Resolution 49)
Consultation has taken place with...	CLR Steering Group and Sub-Committee Business Committee Resources Committee

	Attendees at November 2024 CLR Shared Services Consultations (synod and trust officers, staff, and volunteers; Offices of General Assembly staff; others) Every synod, plus 10 local churches per synod, as part of the shared services survey Synod Moderators, Clerks, and Treasurers in various fora
--	---

Summary of impact

Financial	It is intended that the cost for many of the shared services will be borne by the Church Life Fund. It is the intention that economies of scale will mean that the overall cost of services across the denomination is lower.
External (eg ecumenical)	Conversations with ecumenical partners, particularly the Methodist Church, have been part of the process, and will be an ongoing consideration in the establishment of new shared services.

1. Background

- 1.1. From the perspective of the local church, the first port of call when support is needed on almost any front is normally the synod. Whether a church is seeking support with developing their youth and children's work, a major property development, training for Elders of health and safety, a vision for mission, or dealing with a situation which has gone wrong with an employee, it is to synods that churches turn (or should feel able to turn – we note a dual frustration that emerges at times with congregations feeling they lack the support they really need, and synods feeling that if only churches had come to them earlier or at all, they would have been able to give support they were not aware was needed).
- 1.2. Currently there is a huge patchwork of support services for local churches, which by and large has developed ad hoc, and on an area-by-area basis. In some areas, we develop denominational resources which local churches can access. The most clearly developed and appreciated resources which demonstrate how effective this can be are in the area of safeguarding. Here, policy and practice is developed denominationally through the publication of *Good Practice*, and the development of the training framework and online training provision.

Local churches are enabled to access this, and are supported in ensuring that material is tailored to their specific situation by Synod Safeguarding Officers, rooted in the nations and regions within which the United Reformed Church exists. Within that denominational provision, where necessary, there is national variation where the provisions in Wales or Scotland require specific material to be developed. There are other areas where denominational guidance is developed, for example around GDPR where resources are developed for the whole denomination, or registration with the Charity Commission in England and Wales.

- 1.3. In many other areas the nature and level of support available to local churches varies, particularly from synod to synod. Some synods have Human

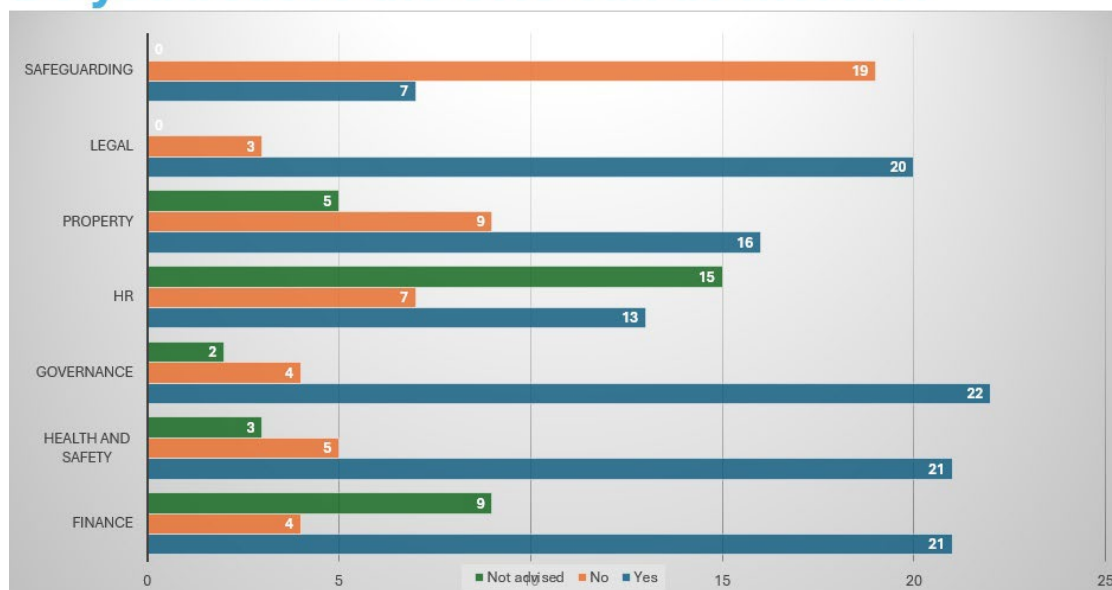
Resources support available to the synod and to local churches, while others do not. Some can offer support with accounting to local churches, while others cannot. The range of training, development and support roles varies, and support in areas like property varies from professionalised property officers to volunteers.

- 1.4. Whilst the overriding aim of the Church Life Review in terms of support services has been to support the flourishing of local churches, one aspect that has become clear is that synods, as the primary vehicles for that support, have in many cases few opportunities for creative collaboration. Hence, in a whole variety of areas, synods develop resources independently from one another. Each synod will take decisions on where it sources key support from in areas like HR, IT infrastructure, payroll – all the various ‘back-office’ functions that allow any organisation to function.
- 1.5. A major consultation on support services took place on 20-21st November 2024 at Kents Hill Park. This brought together relevant people from each synod and the Offices of General Assembly, to work through a variety of issues, and helpfully identified areas where collaboration across the synods and the General Assembly might better allow for effective working of synods themselves, and more effective supporting of local churches through the services that could be provided.
- 1.6. One thing which emerged clearly is the complexity of the current picture, and the variability in the ways in which synods source the necessary ‘back-office’ function which support synod and local church life. This makes any work in this area complex because we are not all starting in the same place. This often comes down to local experience. Some synods feel they have fantastic IT infrastructure provision; others have struggled to source the provision they need.

Some synods have arrangements with HR consultants, others have employed HR staff, yet others have no permanent HR support and seek it on an ad hoc basis. What are experienced as the ‘pressing needs’, therefore vary. Equally, whilst some synods might desire in principle to source service provision in a more collective way, they are tied into contracts with existing providers – some of whom might be excellent, others of whom might be more problematic.

- 1.7. Prior to the consultation, a survey had been conducted among a selected sample of local churches to gain a clearer understanding of the forms of support that churches are looking for. This has informed work both on the myURC Resources Hub, and also the shared services streams of work. One clear theme to emerge from this was the very strong appreciation for the support the United Reformed Church offers in total in the area of safeguarding. When asked whether the URC ‘could do more...’ to support in various areas, there was a strong sense that support in the area of safeguarding is already strong. In comparison, in other named areas, there was a strong feeling that more was possible, for example in support in areas such as legal, property, Human Resources, governance, health and safety and finance.

Do you believe the URC can do more...?



2. The lessons from safeguarding

- 2.1. A common theme has emerged in a number of ways in the last while within the life of the church, which is the effectiveness of our support in the area of safeguarding. It is noteworthy that if there is one area of the life of the Church we have invested in massively over the last decade or so, it is this area.

It was rare 15 years ago for there to be professional safeguarding officers in synods, the safeguarding team in the Offices of the General Assembly was a single person, and safeguarding was often structured as a sub-set of Children's and Youth Work. Now each synod has professional safeguarding support, and there is a team who work in safeguarding denominationally, continually developing and updating Good Practice and the training material, managing denominational cases, and supporting the case work of Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Whilst Synod Safeguarding Officers are employed by synods, there is good collaboration between them as a whole team, and excellent arrangements for covering across synods where necessary. Key in all of this is that we have one, excellent, up-to-date set of resources in the form of Good Practice and the Training Framework.

This is developed once, for the whole denomination (with variations where necessary in Scotland and Wales). The practical implementation and training, however, is supported within synods, by permanent staff rooted there who build effective working relationships and local knowledge, enabling the effective support of local churches.

- 2.2. It is notable that it was not only in the Shared Services Consultation that safeguarding emerged as an effective model. In a parallel consultation on the learning needs of the Church which brought together the key practitioners and those engaged in education and learning across the synods and General Assembly, it emerged as a highly respected model to follow there too (which was not an explicit Church Life Review consultation, but followed the good

practice we have developed in terms of effective consultations within the CLR, and using some of the same individuals to support it).

- 2.3. The kind of approach that is used in safeguarding in terms of standard denominational materials and resources, supported by hands-on support delivered locally, also emerged within the questionnaire before the Shared Services Consultation. One of the concluding aspects was that churches are looking for financial help, resources, and practical hands-on support. This was one of the summary slides from the presentation at the consultation:

Three broad areas of help requested...



Financial help – to outsource tasks, make things possible ...



Practical help – guidance, advice and hands-on support..



Resources – templates, directories, software, check-lists...

- 2.4. One point of note, which has resurfaced in a number of places recently, is that one of the challenges that safeguarding noted when presenting their model of working at the Shared Services Consultation was the lack of accessible shared IT provision. This is something felt keenly by those who work collaboratively across the denomination, but are rooted in synods.

Safeguarding Officers are one group, another are the Synod Moderators. Each synod has its own IT infrastructure, which might often be a Microsoft 365 infrastructure, supported by SharePoint in terms of file management and sharing (although not universally).

The General Assembly also has such an IT infrastructure. However, because each synod and the denomination as a whole have their own IT infrastructure and SharePoint (where it is used), many people end up needing at times to work in the denominational SharePoint (accessing and working effectively with the Case Management System used to track and monitor safeguarding, disciplinary and complaints cases) or the materials that support moderators in their work, but for their day-to-day basic IT work, have to work within the synod infrastructure. This often necessitates them having two different Microsoft 365 accounts (each of which costs): one to log into the denominational SharePoint, another to access synod systems. We note this at this point in the report, as it is an example of where the lack of joined-up provision in one area impacts the effectiveness of its operation in other areas.

3. Moving forward from the Shared Services Consultation

- 3.1. There was a high level of energy and desire to move forward on various fronts that emerged within the consultation. There was an initial sense that in some areas, there might be some 'easy wins', and that it might be possible to move ahead of the wider Church Life Review process. However, that has not proved possible instantly, in part because there are certain key building blocks which would need to be in place to enable this. One key element of this is the staffing restructure which has taken place in the Offices of the General Assembly.

This, in and of itself, has not attempted to provide the levels of capacity which might be needed to deliver on some of the aspirations which emerged from the consultation, but has attempted to ensure that at the level of the structure itself, and the levels of expertise in key roles is such that the delivery of more widespread shared services provision amongst and between synods and the General Assembly can be supported.

Additional capacity might well be required, and this may or may not be located within the Offices of the General Assembly, in many ways much of it would be better located within the nations and regions we serve. There needs to be a level of expertise available to facilitate and enable evolution in the way the consultation imagined. Where this impacts on different areas of potential shared provision, we will indicate in the relevant sections below.

4. Key areas for exploration which emerged within the consultation

- 4.1. Resolution 49 of General Assembly 2023 asked the Church Life Review process to explore support for local churches in areas including (but not exclusively) finance, property, health and safety, Human Resources and safeguarding. Some of these are clearly addressed in proposals elsewhere in this Assembly (in terms of accounting support for local churches, and the content of the portal). Emerging from the consultation were a range of areas where support services might be helpfully developed between the synods and General Assembly.

Those areas which were seen as the most potentially helpful were HR advice, IT infrastructure, payroll and church closures. Church closure is a complex matter, because the arrangements that each individual synod trust company has when it comes to the disposal of buildings will vary. There is a range of technical advice which it would be possible to develop collaboratively, and there is no technical bar to standardising disposal processes (in that they are all controlled by the same legal framework set out in the URC Act of Parliament).

This is one area which, as work on the portal develops over time, can sit within the portal, and therefore is not addressed explicitly within this paper. The remainder of this paper addresses HR advice, IT Infrastructure and Payroll as areas which might, in a reasonably short space of time, become areas where the whole church, including local churches, might benefit from working towards shared provision.

5. IT infrastructure

- 5.1. It has been noted above that in various areas where we do collaborate together effectively, a source of frustration can be the lack of a shared IT infrastructure to enable the smooth performance of collaborative work.
- 5.2. It is important in addressing the question of IT infrastructure to be clear about two distinct ways in which we need to think about IT support. One is the behind-the-scenes system that is being used. This is often a Microsoft 365 system, where an organisation has a file storage structure in SharePoint, which allows for collaborative working and sharing of documents within an organisation whilst keeping material secure and in ways compliant with GDPR.

This is the basic system that is used, although it is not used by every synod. This is a different thing from the kind of support for the use of IT which is provided by someone who supports an individual user with use of their personal computer or laptop. For ease of reference, 'IT infrastructure' will refer to that overall system, and 'user support' as that which directly assists users and their devices.

- 5.3. For many IT users, when things go wrong, there is nothing more helpful than a real human standing alongside them to assist in resolving whatever issue has arisen. Whilst remote support, and phonelines, can offer helpful support, there will be moments when a real human being is required onsite. This can be, however, sourced separately from the IT infrastructure which is being used (although, some larger, national, providers may offer on-the-ground support across the three nations).
- 5.4. There is already a working example of shared IT infrastructure. The Synod of Wales has, for some years, used the IT infrastructure of the Offices of the General Assembly. Their users have email addresses which are from the General Assembly system. The synod has its own section on the URC SharePoint, but the licenses and back-end system are the General Assembly infrastructure. Support in terms of user issues with the interface (difficulties logging on, or the need to set up new users on the system, and so on) is provided by IT staff at Church House. Local arrangements are in place, however, for user support onsite. This is a model that could be extended to incorporate other synods over time.
- 5.5. Each synod at the moment has its own provision. The experience of this provision varies, from that found to be excellent, to that found to be dreadful! There will clearly be greater reluctance to consider shifting provider to one that serves the URC as a whole where existing experiences are positive. All synods are likely to be tied into contracts for periods of time, which makes shifting provider impossible until the end of a contract period.
- 5.6. It is also necessary for the General Assembly IT infrastructure to be able to expand in the necessary ways, and for the whole Church to have confidence in it. We changed supplier around three years ago, and whilst performance has been satisfactory, it has not been to the levels that we would have hoped. We are in the process of running a project to award the contract for IT infrastructure provision to the General Assembly, to identify a provider who

can deliver excellent, not merely satisfactory, service. Part of that process will be to ensure that any new vendor can provide an IT infrastructure that is expandable in ways which would allow, over time, other synods to come onboard with the General Assembly IT provision.

- 5.7. We believe that there is likely to be a cost benefit overall, taking what the Assembly and the 13 synods are each separately paying for IT provision currently. It is impossible to know the scale of this, and it is important to factor in that many synods may currently get their IT infrastructure and on-site support from the same place, and on-site support would still be required to be sourced, which may be better sourced locally than as part of denominational provision. Thought would need to be given to how we might best mitigate risks associated with a non-local service provision.
- 5.8. We believe that there will be significant benefits, including to our ability to share information and resources, as well as limiting the number of Microsoft 365 accounts those folk who work across both the URC as a whole and within a specific synod need, to make moving in this direction worthwhile. It is obviously something that the General Assembly cannot demand of synods, but can strongly encourage.

The best encouragement, however, will be the lived reality of excellent IT infrastructure in the experience of those using it. Our hope is that, over time, as existing synod contracts come to an end, it will be possible to migrate synods into the URC-wide system. Doing this in a phased way, over an extended period of time, is likely to lead to better results than attempting to migrate everyone at the same time.

- 5.9. It is hoped that at the least, the shift envisaged would be cost-neutral to the denomination overall, and that the costs would continue to be borne from existing synod IT budgets, rather than making calls on the Church Life Fund.

6. Human Resources provision

- 6.1. There exists a complex patchwork of support available to synods, and to local churches, with regard to HR provision. Some synods have a member of staff who handles HR for the synod and may be available to local churches. Others use a consultancy on a permanent basis; others make ad hoc arrangements as necessary. The General Assembly Office has Human Resources expertise available to it. As part of the recent staffing restructure, a 'People and Benefits' department has been created, which brings together the areas of HR, Payroll, Pensions and any other related administrative support function. A Head of People and Benefits has been appointed, who is an expert in HR.
- 6.2. It is clear that as more local churches employ lay workers, which is already happening in many places and we hope will be more widely possible through the Church Life Fund, it will be necessary for local churches to be able to access high quality, and easily available HR resources. Some of these needs will be met through the myURC Resources Hub, which will provide pro-forma policies, processes and templates. However, many local contexts will need assistance to tailor generic advice to specific local requirements, and may well over time require more specialised HR support, either as changes need to be made to staffing structures, or when issues such as grievances or

performance management arise.

- 6.3. The HR staff of the Offices of the General Assembly have always, when they have had capacity, tried to help local congregations or synods when they run into HR difficulties. This has been an informal arrangement, and one not widely publicised, because capacity has been very limited. As noted above, provision within synods varies considerably.
- 6.4. It seems that there are some basic principles we would wish to adhere to in thinking about how we move forward to better provide joined-up HR support and provision for local congregations, synods and the General Assembly.
- 6.5. That pro-forma policies and processes should be developed only once as denominational resources, rather than multiple times over (employment, not being a devolved matter, is unlikely to require material developing separately for Wales and Scotland, but the varied legal contexts may require some material to be contextualised appropriately).
 - That where there is existing local expertise and knowledge of the HR context in synods, this should be retained as a valuable and difficult to replace resource.
 - That each local church, at a basic level, should have HR expertise available to it, at a minimum in the form of a helpline to offer assistance in making local use of denominationally available pro-formas, and for advice in handling difficult cases as they arise.
 - That the gold standard is HR resource rooted within the nations and regions, available to people in-person and locally.
- 6.6. Achieving HR resources that are available to every local church that needs it, from the context of our current patchwork provision will be a challenge, and can only be evolved over time. The approach we propose is to invite the Resources Committee to act in taking a lead in initially mapping in more detail the existing arrangements across the life of the Church, identifying key stakeholders (such as existing HR employees within synods, or consultancies on permanent retainers, or staff within synods who may not technically be HR experts but act as a help to churches) and bringing them together to consult, and to form what initially might be a loose HR network across the denomination.

From this, it will be possible to evaluate more carefully provision which needs to be bolstered. This may be through increasing capacity in the People and Benefits department, to ensure that a phonenumber service can be offered to the whole church. This may, where there is better suited local provision, point people to synod staff or retained consultants. It may offer support directly where more local support is unavailable. It would be entirely possible for any increase in staffing required to give this capacity to be located not in London, but potentially in a synod office (or even working remotely).

- 6.7. There is a sense in which, given the patchwork provision we currently have, we will need to evolve how this can better function as a whole, to provide support to every local church within the denomination. It may be that initially, there is basic helpdesk provision for everyone, but some places have more

local support that can be referred to. It may be that existing HR expertise within synods could be made available more widely, as part of a team who provide HR support to the whole denomination. One could imagine, in time, a network of HR advisers covering the whole denomination, located regionally (or within the nations of Wales and Scotland).

We recognise that this is unlikely to be an employee per synod, as many will simply not generate sufficient HR work to merit this; regionally located staff who work as part of a denominationally coordinated team might better enable support, particularly when someone attending in-person locally would be helpful. This can only be worked through in what will be an evolving set of conversations, over a long period of time, involving synods, the People and Benefits department of the Assembly, and existing synod staff who support HR.

There will inevitably be questions about the funding arrangements, which we believe will be best answered, initially at least, in ad hoc ways depending on the existing arrangements. It may be that synods who budget for HR support would, over time, be willing to pool this expenditure with others to assist in forming a wider HR network. It may be that to achieve denominational provision, we need to seek funding from the Church Life Fund.

It may be that as CLF work evolves, synods will evolve their contributions to the fund partly on the basis of being willing to pay more into the fund at points at which they start to access more services from the fund. The massive variation (not just financially, but also structurally, in terms of the availability of volunteers, and a whole range of factors) between the 13 synods suggests that only approaching this with grace and generosity, rather than attempting to pre-determine what 'fairness' might look like, will achieve what is needed.

7. Payroll

- 7.1. As with HR, there is a very patchwork provision for payroll across the denomination. The payroll of the offices of the General Assembly runs the payroll for all Ministers and staff of the Assembly. It also runs the payroll for some synods, and for Westminster College, as well as the Minister's Pension Fund – and therefore pays the pensions of all retired ministers. This is not something which has ever been a paid-for service.
- 7.2. Looking forward, once the buy-out of the Ministers' Pension Scheme is achieved, the payroll provision will move to the insurer who is purchasing the scheme. This will considerably increase the capacity within existing provision. That this will happen at a moment when there is increased employment of lay workers within the denomination is potentially fortuitous. Many local churches who have employees may make use of a payroll company, at some cost, who will run their payroll for them. Some may rely on volunteers to do this (who become ever harder to find). It should be possible to envisage the provision of a payroll service that could serve the needs of the whole denomination. It is difficult to estimate the capacity that would be required, and it will shift over time.
- 7.3. Again, we believe that it is most helpful to ask the Resources Committee to oversee the creation of a payroll service that can serve the whole

denomination. This would not require anyone to use it, but hopefully will offer a cost-effective way of providing payroll for local churches and synods. Until the scale is fully understood, we will not be able to estimate fully the capacity that will be required, and whether this would be met through funding from the Church Life Fund, or whether existing provision, repurposed, along with small subventions from users, would be the most appropriate way to fund this. This we would envisage being part of the work the Resources Committee would pick up, consulting widely as they do.

8. Property

- 8.1. The property portfolio of the United Reformed Church is vast. It runs, probably, to a portfolio worth upwards of a billion pounds, if one considers every church building and every manse. It is impossible to fully know, because a quirk of accounting regulations mean that most properties held in trust for the URC do not appear on any balance sheet (they are held in trust normally by synods, and so don't appear on the balance sheet of local churches, but equally are held in trust for local churches, and cannot be sold by synods and the funds applied to something else without resolution of the Church Meeting, so they don't appear on synod trust company balance sheets as disposable assets of the company).

When one also adds in the sister organisation of the URC, the Retired Ministers' Housing Society (RMHS), our combined property portfolio is even larger. Some manses, owned by Synods in manse schemes, but not directly attached to specific local churches, will appear on balance sheets – and in some instances auditors have insisted that manses held in manse schemes appear on synod trust company balance sheets).

- 8.2. Not only are our buildings one of the greatest resources we have financially, they are also one of the major investments in our mission. In local communities up and down our three nations, our buildings form a core part of our mission, evangelism, witness, and service within local communities. They are often viewed by those not directly associated with the church itself, as valuable community assets.
- 8.3. We are aware that one thing we heard loud and clear in all the consultation in phase one of the CLR is that local churches want much more help with property. Many congregations are struggling to keep on top of maintenance of buildings which are often complex, and require specialist knowledge to engage effectively in terms of maintenance or development. Most synods and synod trust companies put huge amounts of time and effort into trying to support congregations with their buildings, and yet the experience on the ground is that far more is required. At the same time, many people within synods are working well beyond reasonable capacity delivering what is already offered.
- 8.4. We have not had the capacity, or time, to do this issue justice in this phase of the CLR. We are, however, very aware that we were tasked with doing so, and that if there is one thing that local churches are often crying out for, it is more support with their buildings. This is partly because engaging with this as a topic is so complex and difficult. Structurally, we could not be more complicated if we tried. The URC Act of Parliament which controls our

property determines the trusts under which local churches and the manses of local churches are held. These make clear that the trustees, whilst having overall responsibility for the buildings, are not expected to be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of them or provide funds for that – this has always been the responsibility of the congregations for whom the buildings are held in trust. Each synod trust company operates in a somewhat different way, even though they are all operating identical trusts on each building held under the URC Act of Parliament. Some synods have a synod manse scheme; some do not. Each scheme operates somewhat differently to the other schemes.

- 8.5. We have a situation where 1,200 local churches each have their own approach to maintaining their buildings, supported in different ways to different extents in different synods. By and large, our building maintenance rests in the hands of volunteers, who are increasingly hard to find. As building work becomes bound up in ever more regulation, having the expertise to even know where to begin, particularly where listed buildings are concerned, can be challenging. Many synods are finding they can no longer run their listed buildings advisory groups in a meaningful way.
- 8.6. And yet, we return to the reality that this is how, at the moment, together as the Church, we are exercising our responsibility for over a billion pounds of assets. There is a very strong sense that ‘there must be a better way’. Working out what a better way might be, never mind how one might get from where we are, to a better way, is challenging indeed. We also look at some ecumenical partners who run a more centralised approach to holding buildings in trust and offering support in this, and recognise that this does not necessarily provide a neat and effective model to follow!
- 8.7. It is the conviction of the current CLR Steering Group that we ought to initiate a further consultation, bringing together a wide range of people from all synods who might be considered stakeholders in terms of property management, which are likely to be people from trusts and property officers. Prior to this, some further consultation with local congregations about the types of support they might be looking for would probably be helpful.

Our experience to date has been that getting all the relevant people together for a well-facilitated conversation has only ever produced excellent results. For the reasons outlined briefly in this section of the report, attempting to grapple with the issues that surround our denominational stewardship of the properties that those who went before have bequeathed us is massively complex. Even if all an initial consultation can do is map the issues, and dream some dreams – that would be potentially a starting point.

9. Funding for HR, IT, payroll, and property services

- 9.1. Services provided by the Offices of General Assembly (for example, payroll) are currently funded out of the M&M budget. Some synods are funding their own services in areas like IT provision.
- 9.2. As explored above, the split of funding for any new shared services will need to be considered as part of an evolving conversation between Church Life Fund Committee, Resources Committee, and synods.

10. Integration with the resources hub helpdesk

- 10.1. Where relevant and appropriate, shared services will be integrated with the myURC Resources Hub helpdesk function. When relevant calls are received and triaged by the helpdesk, they will be forwarded to one of the shared services. This is of particular relevance to the HR provision.