

Paper CH1

URC Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee

Pastoral and Reference Welfare Committee and the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee of the Ministries Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 26 General Assembly creates a single Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee, bringing together the work of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) and the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee (MoM), and adopts its Terms of Reference.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper proposes the creation of a single Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee, bringing together the work of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) and the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee (MoM). It recognises that, over time, the responsibilities of these two bodies (pastoral care, wellbeing, conditions of service, and oversight of ministry) have increasingly overlapped and caused duplication of work.
Main points	<p>The proposal arises not from concern about the quality of existing work, but from a desire to strengthen coherence, simplify governance, and ensure that care and accountability in ministry are held together more effectively.</p> <p>The new committee will bring together pastoral support, casework, stipend and conditions of service, ill-health processes, and oversight of welfare funds, including the Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund. By unifying these responsibilities, the new committee will provide clearer lines of</p>

	<p>accountability, more timely decision-making, and a more consistent and compassionate response to ministers' needs.</p> <p>The committee will retain a strong pastoral focus while operating within a clear procedural framework, ensuring that sensitive cases are handled with wisdom, discretion and fairness.</p>
Previous relevant documents	<p>Terms of Reference of PRWC (Paper A6 GA 2024)</p> <p>Terms of Reference for the MoM sub-committee (Paper A2 GA 2025)</p>
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee

1. Background

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church has long sought to hold together the care of its ministers with the ordered life of its ministry. This has been expressed, in recent years, through the work of two committees.
- 1.2 The Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) has carried significant responsibility for responding to complex and often sensitive situations in the lives of ministers. Frequently engaging at points of difficulty or crisis, it has exercised a ministry of care, discernment and judgement, often when other routes have been exhausted. In doing so, it has also sought to offer guidance to Synod Moderators and others, particularly in navigating challenging pastoral circumstances.
- 1.3 Alongside this, the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee (MoM) has provided oversight of the structures, expectations and conditions within which ministry is exercised, including ill health. Its work has been rooted in the Church's responsibility to order its ministry well: to ensure clarity, accountability, and the faithful exercise of office within our conciliar life.
- 1.4 These two committees have developed with distinct purposes. Yet over time, their work has increasingly converged.

2. Reasons for Change

- 2.1 This proposal arises not from dissatisfaction with the work of either committee, but from a recognition that the Church's structures must evolve in order to serve its ministry more faithfully and coherently.
- 2.2 The recent restructuring of committees and sub-committees has invited us to reflect on how our governance can be simplified and strengthened. In that context, the continued existence of two separate bodies addressing closely

related aspects of ministers' lives and work has become increasingly difficult to justify.

- 2.3 In practice, all the matters considered by PRWC relate directly to ministers. Questions of wellbeing, crisis response, and exceptional circumstance cannot be separated from the wider framework of ministry within which those situations arise. Yet PRWC has, until now, sat outside the Ministries structure. This has led to a misalignment between responsibility and location which is no longer sustainable or helpful.
 - 2.4 Moreover, there has been a growing overlap between the care of PRWC, MoM and Synods. This has, at times, created uncertainty about where responsibility lies. Decisions have risked being duplicated or delayed, and those seeking guidance have not always been clear which body holds authority in a given situation. The fact that several individuals have served on both committees is itself a sign that, in practice, the distinction between them has already begun to erode.
 - 2.5 The work undertaken by PRWC in producing guidance for Synod Moderators was both valuable and revealing. While intended to bring clarity, it also exposed the extent to which existing processes were open to differing interpretations. This, in turn, prompted a deeper question: whether clarity would be better served not by additional guidance layered onto complexity, but by a more integrated structure.
 - 2.6 There is also a theological and organisational coherence to be recognised. Ministry in the United Reformed Church is not fragmented. It is one ministry, held within the councils of the Church, and sustained through patterns of accountability, care, and discernment. It follows, therefore, that the structures which support that ministry should also be held together.
 - 2.7 PRWC has often functioned as a “committee of last resort”, stepping in when other processes have reached their limits. While this has been necessary, it has also meant that its work has sometimes been disconnected from the ongoing life of Ministries, requiring frequent recourse to the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries). This separation is neither efficient nor pastorally helpful. Bringing this work into a single committee enables a more joined-up, relational and timely approach.
 - 2.8 PRWC also has oversight of the Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund. It is anticipated that this will be incorporated into the new committee in a fourth strand of its work.
 - 2.9 Finally, the creation of the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) role provides a clear and appropriate locus for all matters relating to ministers. It is therefore both logical and faithful that this work should now sit wholly within the Ministries sphere.
- 3. The Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee**
 - 3.1 PRWC exists to consider cases which are referred to it, normally by Synod Moderators, and to have oversight of the welfare funds of the General Assembly.

- 3.2 As such, the committee seeks to offer support and assistance after other sources have been explored, often at times of difficulty, but when no other relevant assistance has been found to be available.
- 3.3 The committee has key responsibilities across several interlinked and interdependent operational areas. These areas are:
- Synod Moderators' Meeting
 - MoM Sub-committee
 - Resources Committee
- 3.4 Because of the nature of its work, the particulars of any support are always kept confidential.

4. The Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-committee

- 4.1 MoM exists to advise on, and recommend the annual revisions to, the stipend to the Finance Committee, using the agreed formula and the annual revisions to associated allowances for ministers to Finance Committee;
- 4.2 It recommends amendments to ministerial conditions of service in the Plan for Partnership in the light of experience, legislation and recommendations from the Offices of General Assembly;
- 4.3 It resolves questions where the circumstances do not exactly fit the Plan for Partnership, or where it may be appropriate to make an exception;
- 4.4 It offers pastoral support to both the minister and the church, and makes decisions about the stipends of ministers who have been unable to work for some time through ill health;
- 4.5 It receives a report on pension matters and ill-health retirements at each meeting by the Pensions Convenor to keep members up to date.

5. Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund

- 5.1 The Fund exists to ensure that it operates as a provision of last resort, available only in cases of genuine and exceptional hardship. The Fund is not intended to guarantee a universal minimum pension for all ministers. Accordingly, applicants must first have explored and, where eligible, claimed all statutory benefits and other sources of income before recourse is made to the Fund.
- 5.2 In assessing applications, the Committee shall take account of the overall financial circumstances of the household, rather than considering the minister's income in isolation. The purpose of the Fund is to address a sustained shortfall in income over a period of at least one year; it is not designed to meet short-term or one-off financial needs, such as unexpected repairs or replacement of household items, for which other provisions – such as Synod welfare funds – may be more appropriate.
- 5.3 All awards made from the Fund shall be discretionary, determined on a case-by-case basis, and subject to annual review. No award shall be regarded as a lifetime entitlement, and eligibility to apply does not confer a right to receive support. The Committee shall ensure that clear financial parameters are applied,

including an income threshold above which applications will not be considered eligible.

- 5.4 In exercising its responsibilities, the Committee shall apply the thresholds agreed by General Assembly (initially agreed – Paper A8 Resolution 5 in July 2024), namely that eligibility is limited to those whose income falls below 50% of the current in-service stipend together with the full standard state pension, and that awards are subject to an annual cap of 15% of the current in-service stipend. Initial assessment of applications shall be undertaken by the retired minister's Synod of residence, which is responsible for discerning eligibility and forwarding supported applications to the Fund.

6. The Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee

- 6.1 In light of these considerations, it is proposed that the work currently undertaken by PRWC and MoM be brought together within a new Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee.
- 6.2 This Committee will hold together what has too often been experienced separately: the pastoral care of ministers and the procedural frameworks within which ministry is exercised. It recognises that questions of wellbeing, conduct, capacity and conditions of service are not discrete categories, but interwoven realities in the life of ministry.
- 6.3 The intention is not to diminish the pastoral nature of this work, but to strengthen it. Care that is disconnected from structure risks inconsistency; structure without care risks becoming impersonal. The Church is called to hold both together.
- 6.4 At the same time, the proposal recognises the need for proper safeguards. The bringing together of responsibilities for conditions of service and individual cases raises the potential for conflicts of interest. This must be addressed through careful composition and clear process. The inclusion of independent members, two lay and one ordained, will be essential in ensuring transparency, accountability and trust.
- 6.5 Equally, it is important to affirm that this work will continue to require wisdom, sensitivity and discretion. Many of the situations considered will remain complex and deeply personal. The formation of a single committee must not lead to a loss of attentiveness to the pastoral realities involved.

7. Proposal

- 7.1 The Church is always called to order its life in ways that enable it to be faithful to its calling. Structures are not ends in themselves; they are means by which we seek to serve God's purposes with clarity, integrity and compassion.
- 7.2 Therefore, in order to provide a more coherent, accountable and pastorally integrated approach to the care and oversight of ministers, it is proposed that the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee and the Maintenance of the Ministry Committee be amalgamated into a single committee, to be known as the Ministries Support Wellbeing Committee.

- 7.3 In this way, the Church seeks to bring together care and accountability, wisdom and clarity, so that those called to ministry may be supported faithfully, and the life of the Church may be ordered well.

APPENDIX 1

Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee

Revised Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The care and wellbeing of ministers is crucial to the health of the mission of the church. Healthy, fulfilled, maturing, joyful ministers who feel valued and supported are an enormous gift to God's Church. A sense of being cared for and loved will give energy and vigour when they face ministerial or pastoral challenges.
- 1.2 The wellbeing of ministers has been high on the Church's agenda for many years. Wellbeing is more than just 'feeling good'. A positive wellbeing involves the interplay of physical, emotional, and spiritual health, together with the availability and quality of personal and professional relationships, within the wider context of vocation, all contribute to an overall sense of wellbeing.
- 1.3 Whilst recognising that Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are office holders, the Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee exists to advise the denomination on best practice concerning the welfare of ministers, ill health of ministers and ministerial conditions of service, including stipend increase. It shall consider special cases referred to it not covered by normal practice and after other sources have been explored so that, where appropriate, a minister can continue in service of the United Reformed Church.
- 1.4 It has oversight of the welfare funds of the General Assembly.
- 1.5 The Committee has key responsibilities across several interdependent operational areas, namely:
 - Synod Moderators' meeting
 - Resources Committee
 - Assembly Executive
 - The Officers of General Assembly

2. Terms of Reference

2.1 Ill health

The Committee will

- make decisions about the stipends of ministers who have been unable to work for some time through ill health;
- receive a report on pension matters and ill health retirements made to each meeting by the Pensions Convenor to keep members up to date.

2.2 Conditions of Service

The Committee will

- advise on, and recommend the annual revisions to, the stipend to the Resources Committee, using the agreed formula: the average of the Consumer Price Index for the latest month available (September) and the Average Weekly Earnings increase over the latest three months (June – August), for regular pay;

- advise on, and recommend, the annual revisions to associated allowances for ministers to Resources Committee;
- recommend amendments to ministerial conditions of service, the Plan for Partnership, in the light of experience, legislation and recommendations from the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries);
- resolve questions where the circumstances do not exactly fit the Plan for Partnership, or where it may be appropriate to make an exception;

2.3 Special Cases

The Committee will:

- consider the cases and need for support of United Reformed Church ministers which are referred to it because of some perceived pastoral need by Synod Moderators, Assembly Executive or the Officers of Assembly, having explored all other avenues;
- seek to enable the minister's service within the URC to be continued, if that is seen by all concerned to be appropriate, and to this end may consider financial support including a course of retraining, or therapy, or counselling;
- authorise the payroll to provide stipend or part-stipend, and may authorise the Chief Finance Officer to pay other necessary expenses to a minister not in pastoral charge for a specific period. Such period will not exceed six months in the first instance, but may be extended by the committee. This does not apply to ministers who have been removed from the Roll under a disciplinary. See Paper H2 Assembly Executive November 2025. The Chief Finance Officer will accept this authority for payment;
- respond to any questions posed to it by the Payroll Manager regarding applications for welfare grants;
- in consultation with the Resources Committee, determine the level of welfare grants to be paid from Assembly funds.

2.4 Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund

The Committee will:

- consider exceptional cases of hardship after all other all statutory benefits and other sources of income have been exhausted, and
- taking into account overall household income:
- make up a shortfall in income over a period of at least a year. It is not for covering one-off needs such as car repair bills or replacement of white goods, for which Synod welfare funds are often available.
- grant awards on a discretionary and case-by-case basis: eligibility to apply for an award does not equate to entitlement to receive one;
- review awards annually: they will not be 'lifetime' payments.

2.4.1 Eligibility

- The Fund must be equally applicable and accessible across the whole URC;
- The retired minister's synod of residence must be responsible for assessing eligibility in the first instance and for supporting and forwarding applications to the Fund;
- There needs to be an income threshold for eligibility (i.e. income above the threshold disqualifies an application to the Fund). GA agreed that this should be the sum of 50% of the current in-service stipend and the full standard state pension;

- There should be an annual cap on the maximum payable under the scheme in each case. GA agreed that this should be 15% of the current in-service stipend.

3. Confidentiality

It is evident that the work of the committee will be confidential, fair and pastoral. Nevertheless, it will need to keep a record of its meetings. Due to the need for confidentiality, the committee should use the URC's SharePoint site for all meeting papers. The committee's conclusions should be recorded there and on the minister's file, given to the person concerned, and shared with others directly involved in the matter who need to know the outcome. It would be inappropriate for the committee as a body, or individual members of it, to divulge any additional information about ministers or churches concerned.

4. Membership

Convenor

Three members (two lay and one ordained)

Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Deputy Treasurer

Synod Moderator

Pensions Committee Convenor

Payroll Manager

Minutes Secretary: PA to the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

5. 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.

6. Conducting business

- The Committee meets four times per year and reports to Ministries Committee. 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 Convenor/Secretary and noted at the next meeting, with updates on progress as needed.
- Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects, and it may instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work.
- The committee has the power to seek external professional advice if it is deemed necessary, with reference to the Chief Operating Officer for unbudgeted professional fees.
- The committee has discretion to seek input from the wider staff team, as deemed necessary, bearing in mind the need for confidentiality.