Paper C2

Withdrawal of Call (revised)

Ministries Committee

Basic information

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Action required	**Decision**
Draft resolution(s)	**Resolution 5** **Assembly Executive agrees the revisions to the framework and process set out in this paper for the withdrawal of a Call where a pastoral relationship has broken down and the matter is not appropriately addressed through the Church's competency or disciplinary processes.**

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper revises the paper agreed by GA in 2023. It establishes a clear, consistent and pastorally grounded framework for the withdrawal of a Call, recognising the distinction between the enduring nature of ordination or commissioning and a particular Call to serve in a specific context. The paper clarifies when existing competency or disciplinary processes should be used and provides a process for situations where a pastoral relationship has broken down but those processes are not appropriate.
Main points	The paper: • distinguishes withdrawal of Call from competency and disciplinary processes; • provides a process for situations of pastoral breakdown where mediation is inappropriate or has failed; • establishes appropriate involvement of Church Meetings, Synods and other councils of the Church; • preserves the minister's right to respond, receive support and appeal; • provides arrangements for local pastorates, LEPs, Synod/Special Category appointments and General Assembly appointments; and • sets out transitional arrangements relating to stipend, housing and expenses following withdrawal of Call.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H5 GA 2023. This paper uses the text of that paper and uses red text to highlight the proposed revisions.

Consultation has taken place with...	Head of Legal Services

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Call and vocation

1.1 Within the United Reformed Church, ministry is exercised by the whole people of God. Call and vocation are intrinsic to our faith. God calls and we respond, seeking ways to use our God-given gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities, to be faithful followers and God's presence in the world. Every moment of every day for every follower of Jesus is a response to this call on our lives; all people are called by God – believers or not.

1.2 However, within the whole people of God "the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church" (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 20).

1.3 Where someone feels a sense of prompting by God to ordained or commissioned ministry the URC seeks to discern this vocation through its various Councils.
The Assessment Board discerns if the call is to Church Related Community Work or the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Reformed tradition always sites Call to ministry within the context of the consent of the people with whom ministers serve. According to the *Basis of Union*, those called as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments "…may be called to be ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office" (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 21). Those called as Church Related Community Workers "… may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period."
(Basis of Union, paragraph 22).

1.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to their particular ministry (which might be a local pastorate or project, a Special Category Ministry, a Synod role, or a General Assembly post) normally by a Church Meeting or combined Church Meetings in a Joint or Group Pastorate, or by a Call Group which acts on behalf of a Synod or the General Assembly to which the wider Councils of the Church are asked to concur. Therefore, the *Basis of Union*, is clear that the call of God is confirmed by one of the Councils of the Church. Our Councils, other than that which Calls, determine where and when ministry is needed and ensure good order.

1.5 It is recognised that, whilst a call process may be used for non-stipendiary ministers (NSMs) with concurrence given by the Synod, NSMs (categories 1-4) are appointed by the Synod to their particular ministry. However, Synods always appoint to, and sustain in, such roles considering the views of the church with whom the NSM will be ministering.

1.6 Therefore, within the United Reformed Church, a particular call to exercise ministry in a certain time and place is rooted in the call to serve the whole Church which, through its Councils, give concurrence to local calls in both the receiving and sending Synods.

1.7 Most calls come to an end when the minister accepts a call to another pastorate/post/partnership. Concurrence to leave the pastorate/post/partnership is required in both the sending and receiving Synods.

1.8 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers enjoy, by way of ordination or commissioning, recognition as ministers of the Church as outlined in the *Basis of Union*. Any withdrawal of a Call from a particular post or appointment will not normally affect that recognition, as ministers may still be able to receive a Call and serve in some capacity elsewhere.

1.9 For the sake of clarity in this document the term minister shall apply to both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

2. Purpose and Scope

2.1 This paper establishes a clear, coherent and pastorally grounded framework for the withdrawal of a Call within the United Reformed Church.

2.2 It affirms the URC's theological understanding that ordination or commissioning is enduring, whilst any particular Call to serve in a specific context may be time-limited and subject to the discernment and concurrence of the councils of the Church.

2.3 The paper clarifies the circumstances in which a Call may come to an end, including through:

- the normal movement of ministry;
- competency (capability) processes;
- disciplinary processes; and
- situations of pastoral breakdown not appropriately addressed by those processes.

2.4 It provides guidance on the appropriate use of existing procedures, including mediation, and establishes a consistent and transparent approach where withdrawal of Call is being considered.

2.5 The paper further sets out expectations for the involvement of the relevant councils of the Church, ensuring that decisions are taken in a conciliar manner, fairly and with proper accountability.

2.6 In addition, it offers guidance on practical matters arising from the withdrawal of Call, including stipend, housing and transitional support.

2.7 In all such matters, the intention is to uphold the integrity of ministry, to ensure just and proper process, and to enable situations of difficulty or breakdown to be addressed with pastoral sensitivity and good order.

3. Withdrawal of a Call Through Competency or The Process for dealing with cases of Discipline involving Ministers and Church Related Community Workers Discipline Processes (Manual's Section O process, 'the Disciplinary Process').

3.1 There are two scenarios where a Call might be withdrawn which are covered by existing URC policies and processes:

3.1.1 *As a result of the Competency Process*
Where concerns arise regarding a minister's ability to fulfil the requirements of their role, the Competency process may be invoked. Such concerns may be raised by:

- an Elders' or Church Meeting;
- the Local Steering Group of a Church in a Community Project
- the Synod Moderator and Synod Committee,
- by the ministry supervisor/support in a Special Category post, Synod or General Assembly role.

3.1.2 *As a result of the Discipline Process*
An Assembly Commission for Discipline, or successor, may, following a finding of ministerial misconduct, curtail a Call or Appointment. Such a sanction might be seen as more serious than a warning but less serious than deletion from the Roll of Ministers.

3.2 The Competency Process provides a structured and supportive framework through which concerns may be addressed, expectations clarified, and improvement enabled.

3.3 Where this can be used which may result in the Call to serve in that particular context being withdrawn.

4. Ministers Move On

4.1 Active ministers, of course may end a Call by seeking a new Call at any time for a number of reasons:

a) a minister accepts a new Call at any time, realising a new challenge would be welcomed or that their ministry in that particular place is concluded;
b) a minister retires normally upon reaching the normal retirement age unless the processes for an extension of service have been followed;
c) a minister resigns seeking some other form of work or ministry outwith the United Reformed Church;
d) a post might be time limited;
e) a minister wishes to leave because of a breakdown in relationship with colleagues, Elders, or significant people within a church, project or post.

4.2 Where relationships have become strained or broken, concerns may be addressed through the appropriate provisions – complaints about ministers are normally dealt with through the Manual's Section O process. Sometimes it is appropriate to deal with complaints through the Section Q process with the agreement of the complainant. However, a minister may wish to complain about how Elders or other office holders have behaved. In these cases, either the Manual's Section Q or the Discipline of Office Holders process should be used.

5. Breakdown of A Pastoral Relationship (non-disciplinary)

5.1 On occasions pastorates, or projects, and ministers find themselves in a position where there is a breakdown in relationship with talk of withdrawing Call. This breakdown might be because of intractable difficulties which aren't related to capability or discipline such as a complaint under Section Q of the Manual or might simply be as a result of a sense that this ministry has gone on for too long.

5.2 In these cases, the Synod Moderator shall: -

- engage with both the minister and the relevant council, normally the Elders Meeting;
- determine whether concerns are substantive;
- explore whether mediation would be fruitful. The local pastorate must engage with the Moderator, the minister and the relevant Synod Committee or equivalent if mediation is to take place.

5.3 In a multi-church pastorate, the Moderator (or their deputy) shall speak with the Elders' Meeting of each church to ascertain whether the issues have been replicated across the pastorate.

5.4 Where mediation is appropriate, all parties are expected to engage constructively.

5.5 Where mediation is not appropriate, or has failed, the Church may proceed to consider whether the Call should continue.

5.6 In these cases, the Moderator should also consider whether using the Competency Process is appropriate.

6. Process for Withdrawal of Call

6.1 Local Pastorates and Church-in-Community Projects

6.1.1 The Elders' Meeting (or Steering Group) may bring a proposal to the Church Meeting to consider whether the minister should continue in office.

6.1.2 Where a Call is to a pastorate comprising more than one church, the Call is to the pastorate as a whole and not separately to each constituent church. A minister may not normally resign from one church within the pastorate while remaining minister of the others; resignation from the Call is resignation from the whole pastorate. Similarly, where the Elders' Meeting of one church wishes to propose the withdrawal of the Call, the matter must be considered by the pastorate as a whole. A constituent church cannot withdraw from the Call independently; withdrawal of the Call is withdrawal by the whole pastorate.

6.1.3 An Interim Moderator (or equivalent) shall oversee the process, ensuring:

- a clear statement is provided explaining the concerns;
- the minister is given full opportunity to respond (in writing or in person);
- appropriate pastoral support is available.

6.1.4 The Church Meeting shall vote on the resolution:
"That the Minister shall continue in office."

Where the Call is to a multi-church pastorate, the resolution shall be considered by each of the Church Meetings within the pastorate. The outcome shall be determined across the pastorate as a whole, in accordance with the arrangements by which the original Call was issued.

6.1.5 If the minister attends in person, they will be invited to bring a friend or ministry colleague with them for support.

6.1.6 The majority required shall be that originally required to issue the Call.

6.1.7 The right of appeal is preserved using the normal Appeals process.

6.2 **In an LEP** where a URC minister is in post, the same steps outlined in section 6.1 (6.1.1 to 6.1.7inclusive) above should be completed.

6.3 Synod appointments including Special Category

6.3.1 Where breakdown occurs in Synod or Special Category, and mediation is not an option, the relevant council shall appoint an independent body (Commission) to determine the matter.

6.3.2 That body shall:

- receive written statements;
- hear from both parties in person and in writing;
- determine, by majority, whether the minister shall continue in office.

6.3.3 The right of appeal is preserved.

6.4 **General Assembly** appointments. It is always open to the General Assembly to appoint a Special Group from the General Assembly Appointment Panel in the case of those appointed by the Nominations Committee, or an Assembly Commission in the case of those appointed by an appointments panel, to resolve the issue of withdrawal of Call.

6.4.1 Where mediation is no longer an option that body shall:

6.4.2 receive written statements;

- hear from both parties (in person or in writing);
- determine, by majority, whether the minister shall continue in office.

6.4.3 The right of appeal is preserved.

6.5 Because call is issued locally and confirmed in a conciliar manner, its withdrawal must also involve the appropriate councils of the Church.

6.6 The local context, Synod, and relevant committees all share responsibility for ensuring that such processes are conducted faithfully, fairly and in good order.

7. Manse provision and Expenses when a Call is withdrawn

7.1 Manses are provided for the better performance of the minister's duties. It is usually a place where some functions linked with the role of ministry are fulfilled.

7.2 The policy recognises that Synods operate different manse policies.

7.3 Once ministerial service to the local pastorate, post, project or church-in-community ceases, so does the provision of a manse.

7.4 If the whole Call is withdrawn the vacation of a manse would be a matter of negotiation between the Minister (and/or family) and the Synod or Pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements; normally three months' notice is given. During this time all other expenses would be reimbursed as normal eg. car and other allowances.

7.5 A Call to a new pastorate may take some time. However, it is envisaged that the minister and their family will remain in the manse and receive the normal expenses and allowances whilst a new Call is sought, normally for three months but may be extended up to six months. This support may be continued up to a further six months where the minister continues to actively engage with the process. Any extension to this would be a matter for the Synod or Pastorate depending on local ownership and management arrangements.

7.6 Whilst the minister is engaged in the process of seeking a Call, the Synod or Pastorate would continue to be responsible for the manse costs.

7.7 When the scoping has been reduced the minister and their family can remain in the manse and is normally responsible for the percentage of manse costs outside the scoping although in some cases the Synod or Pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.

7.8 Where a Housing Allowance is paid, this should be continued for the period of stipend/stipend support being paid.

7.9 Where scoping is reduced a Housing Allowance is given appropriate to the scoping although in some cases the Synod or Pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full

costs.

8. Stipend Support

8.1 Where the minister is actively engaging in the Call process, their stipend should continue for six months whilst looking for a new Call.

8.2 This support may be continued up to a further six months where the minister continues to actively engage with the process.

8.3 After 12 months, and where there is a concern for welfare, the Synod Moderator shall make an application to the Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee for further stipend support.

9. Appeal

9.1 The appeal will be conducted in line with the United Reformed Church's appeals procedure as set out in the Rules of Procedure and should be notified to the Clerk of the appropriate Council of the Church. Appellants should ask for a copy of the minute of the decision within 14 days of being notified of the decision, and lodge their appeal with the Clerk of the appropriate Synod within a further 14 days.