

Basic Information

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Membership of the Review Group	Mrs Ruth Pickles, Revd Peter Whittaker, (Facilitators) Revd Rodney Hill (Reporter) Revd Richard Hall (Cumbria), Wendy Beard (Lancashire), Revd Ron Hicks (Bolton & Rochdale), Helen Boardman (Manchester & Stockport), Revd Mick Neal (Liverpool), Revd Peter Barber (Chester & Stoke-on-Trent), Revd Malcolm Peacock (Isle of Man)
Status of paper	Report of the Working Group to the Methodist Council Jan 2011
Resolutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Methodist Council approves the report for presentation to the Conference of 2011. 2. The Council endorses the conclusions regarding the enabling of mission-based change in the North West. 3. The Council commends the process undertaken as worthy of consideration by districts undertaking reviews in other regions.

The working group’s composition and purpose were defined by the resolutions of the Conference 2010, Resolutions 62/2 and 62/3.

Purpose:

To build on the work undertaken by the North West review group so as to present to the Conference of 2011 a model that will resource and support churches and circuits in the North West Region for mission-based change.

Accountability:

Conference appointed the working group, which is accountable to the Conference through the Methodist Council

Consultation Process:

The working group met in July to consider possible models of ‘beyond circuit’ in the North West. It identified a number of possible models by which the North West districts might be restructured. These are outlined in Appendix 1 to this report (p3 ff).

Model 1 contains two ways of working that at an early stage were considered inappropriate to meet the missional challenges we face and therefore further detailed work was not undertaken on these models. They are included in Appendix 1 for the sake of completeness.

The remaining three models were then worked up by sub-groups of the working group and evaluated against a common set of criteria shown as Appendix 2. The working group then reconvened to consider the work of each subgroup, and made a preliminary evaluation and

critique of the models. Paperwork from this consultation process was sent out to the representatives of the districts, with an invitation to them to discuss the models in appropriate ways within their districts before coming together for a further regional consultation.

Fifty representatives of the districts met at Leyland on November 20th. The evaluated models were critiqued firstly in small cross-district groups, then in same-district groups. There was vigorous and open discussion of the models and a sense of excitement and purpose with a real openness to the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

The outcome of that consultation was a strong consensus that the appropriate model of 'beyond circuit' for the North West was a refinement of model 2: namely, to develop a covenant relationship between the existing seven districts with a view to further enhancing existing networks (e.g. Regional Training Network, stationing) and to develop additional networks as the context demands. At the same time a desire was expressed to work towards fewer districts in the North West in an organic, progressive and permissive way, which would need to be dynamic and sustainable in this complex situation. It was the consensus of the meeting that this was not the time to put valuable resources of time and energy into a structural reorganisation, but into ways of working that would enhance mission.

The consultation felt that it would be appropriate to hold further regional gatherings to begin to flesh out this new way of working and proposed a '2020 vision' day later in the connexional year to explore how to develop a Covenant relationship with flexible networking and clear missional intent. The working group will reconvene early in 2011 to explore how to develop this approach further, taking into account any comments received from the Methodist Council.

Note:

The paperwork that supported the regional day at Leyland amounted to some fifty pages and has not all been included in the appendices. It can be made available on request. We have included that which we think will be most helpful to members of the Council.

Appendix 1 Models considered

Model 1: considered but not pursued

Whilst three models were being fully developed for our work 'beyond circuit' we considered briefly two other models:

1. (a) NO CHANGE (Stay as we are)

This model seems to be out of the question because change is happening. The way districts work has changed with the introduction of complaints and discipline processes, property consents, and stationing matching. There is a sharper mission focus expressed, for example, through the employment of District Evangelism Enablers and District Development Enablers, and an overhaul of committee structures. Although this is different in each district it is happening in all districts.

We are all working across district boundaries in a variety of ways. The most obvious example would be the Regional Training Forum. All these developments will lead to on-going change in the way we work 'beyond circuit'.

We can also already see that reducing the number of circuits as we regroup for mission affects, and will change, the dynamics of cooperation within districts. And we all recognise the burden placed on fewer available people to carry out district responsibilities.

1. (b) DIRECT FROM CIRCUIT TO CONNEXION (no middle tier)

This option is certainly raised in the pages of the Methodist Recorder and appears to be a straightforward and simple way of cutting out a layer of work and demand. It is beguiling to some people, but account needs to be taken of the following:

Our circuits vary enormously in size, access to resources, staffing and ways of working. And no strong argument is made to equalise circuits because we recognise that contextual mission means that "one size cannot fit all." The role of Superintendent is important and demanding, and we have struggled to find enough presbyters with the gifts and graces to lead in circuits. The creation of new circuits means the demand on leadership is perhaps even greater but we need to find fewer people to carry out the role.

'Direct to Connexion' would make greater demands on circuit leadership and also on the reduced staffing in the connexional team, which is already overstretched. It is possible that in a time of scarce resources, circuits standing alone could create a competitive mentality as they strive to meet all current expectations and the added demands without recourse to advice and collegiality, currently one of the chief roles played by a district.

Our relationship to each other as churches and circuits in connexion is a valuable part of our ecclesiology. We are meant to cooperate and relate rather than compete and stand alone. We are also meant to value the partnership of ordained and lay all

across our Church structures. The place of circuit stewards in any model of 'beyond circuit' needs to be seriously addressed. They carry huge responsibilities, and experience shows that meeting together from circuits within the current districts offers the opportunity for training and collegiality, and encourages a strong lay voice. How can that essential element of our ecclesiology be maintained in a model that goes directly from circuit to connexion?

The work currently undertaken by District Policy Committees (DPC) or their equivalents enables us to "bear one another's burdens" and "watch over one another in love." The challenge and support of these ways of working are essential mission and ministry tools allowing us to be in connexion, 'beyond circuit' and close enough to build and take advantage of relationships.

A 'beyond circuit' function that would therefore be missed greatly is the sharing of challenge, support and encouragement, enabling a movement for mission with partners with whom good relationships have already been built.

The district is also connexionally enabling in matters such as candidating and probation. Already therefore some elements of 'beyond circuit' would have to be re-introduced in this model unless the connexional team and its functions grow enormously.

Circuits alone could too easily revert to hierarchical models of leadership especially in the exercise of the Superintendent's role. And circuits alone would have no easy external mechanism for resolving conflicts of interest or competition for resources that may arise amongst themselves. Such conflicts are inevitable in times of scarcity.

'Beyond circuit' – currently in districts – offers effective resource sharing on a human scale built on relationships and dialogue. Mission intention is easier to build through sharing stories with each other in a trusted relationship. In these ways the districts' enabling mechanism is not another "layer of government." It becomes a natural way for circuits in an area to be encouraging, supportive and challenging of one another.

The office of District Chair offers support, challenge and encouragement to superintendents ensuring they do not stand alone. The Chairs' stationing role (with lay stationing representatives) on behalf of the Conference offers proper oversight and connexional deployment of the important resource of the ordained amongst us. These days, thanks to developing cooperation between the Chairs of District and the Warden of the Diaconal Order, that applies to both our orders of ministry.

Some elements of 'beyond circuit' could be delivered on an appropriate regional basis covering a large area. This would offer functional, task orientated aspects of our work. It would be appropriate for those tasks alone but not for the relationship-based togetherness we call connexion.

Model 2 (Develop networking based on current districts)

The sub-group determined some **principles** about 'beyond circuit'.

1. **The Connexionalism of the British Methodist Church** is to be affirmed in our structures. In terms of governance, the Conference and Circuit we see as 'given'. What is in question is the most effective body in between these two. Whatever that is needs to be effective in terms of acting as a conduit between Conference (and the connexional team) and Circuit, and in resourcing circuits to facilitate churches for their mission. Currently we have two middle layers of governance, the region (for stationing and training) and the district.
2. **Hard barriers of travel time and cost** must be taken into account in the reorganisation of circuits and districts. Rather than actual distance, we believe that an upper travel time of 30 - 40 minutes (one-way) should pertain to evening meetings, perhaps 1 hour for whole day events. A cost limit of about £50.00 (c60 miles 1 way at 40p per mile) should set the limit for size of circuit and/or district. Costs of meetings should be made explicit: currently district costs are often absorbed by circuits or personal finance.
3. **Perceived barriers** of identity (including cultural), geography, jurisdiction & local government, and ecumenical relationships have to be recognised and addressed satisfactorily before any new structure will work effectively.
4. **What we have now** is a situation where 7 districts, which vary in terms of the above, work mainly separately. They carry out the functions of a district in varying styles, though some functions may be neglected due to lack of human resources. They seem to be at different stages so far as the reconfiguration of Circuits is concerned (Mapping a way forward). Training is resourced by means of Regional Training Officers, though mainly they operate in 1 or 2 districts. A review of the effectiveness of the RTO scheme would inform any future thinking of additional regional working alliances. 6 of the districts are in the North-West stationing region; Chester and Stoke-on-Trent is in the West Midlands stationing region.
5. **The Importance of e-communication.** Given the pressures that we are under in terms of costs and time it is inevitable that networking through different forums, e-groups, e-mail, video conferencing, Skype, etc. will become increasingly important in the sharing of resources for almost all aspects of Church life. The use of electronic forms of communication for training, which needs face to face contact, seems more limited.
6. **The need for sufficient key people.** The limiter for networks and matrices is going to be having able and effective people in place to make networking happen and then cascade outward to individuals and chapels. No amount of network infrastructure will make communication happen if people will not use it or if there are not enough key people to facilitate its use.

7. **The need for effective, quality services to resource churches.** There is no quality standard for what the district does. What criteria are its functions currently judged by? If the new 'beyond circuit' costs more, but is more effective in resourcing for mission, would that be alright?
8. **In our first meeting we identified activities and responsibilities** and sought to create a series of matrices that could show clearly where each would fit most appropriately within the work of the church.
NB these tables take 7 sheets of paper and are not included but can be made available.

This process showed:

- That there are some activities that happen/are resourced at all levels (local church, circuit, district, region, national) and need to do/be so. There may be others that do not.
- A limiter on the effective provision of services in our current, and in any future, 'district' structure is the number of people available to take on key roles.
- There are some functions of church life that currently happen/are resourced at particular levels but this may not be the best way to serve the church.
- That the Circuit / Local Church are the primary areas for the delivery of the churches mission in the local context and therefore in this process is "a given". A circuit needs to be of a size where there are sufficient key people to ensure that the necessary functions of the circuit are carried out. It also has to be of a size that people can relate meaningfully to it.
- That the Connexion / Conference is the wider body that oversees resourcing and policy and is also "a given".
- It became very evident that there is need for something between Conference and the Local Church Context a role currently served by the Districts. Although larger circuits may lessen this responsibility, the evidence in the North West would suggest that, following the MAWF process, most Circuits are unlikely to reach a size by which they could fulfil some District responsibilities.

9. What we do in the future must reduce costs of time and travel of lay and ordained and make more productive use of their energy...

If the current functions are to be delivered by means of greater networking, then having able and effective people in place to make networking happen and then cascade outward to individuals and congregations is vital. Each function will need to be considered separately to decide the most effective network.

10. A new model will incur increased training provision.

It will be essential to provide training for the new ways of working. There will be both initial and on-going needs and contribution to induction programmes whenever new people are recruited (whether paid or voluntary).

11. Might Chairs operate more flexibly across districts?

This could be one consequence of greater networks, according to expertise.

12. What is the relationship between size of circuit and size of 'bigger than circuit'?

It would seem sensible to suggest that fewer, larger circuits would require fewer, larger districts.

One of the critical relationships seems to be the relationship of Chairs of District with presbyters and deacons, and in particular with superintendents. Currently, the NW Chairs say they have a manageable number of relationships, which is vital for good pastoral oversight and effective stationing matching. With the inauguration of fewer, larger circuits, the role of the superintendent must undergo significant changes of oversight and leadership, and consequently this will impact on her or his relationship with the district and the district chair.

Until we have a clear indication of where circuits will be, reconfiguring districts will be a haphazard exercise. What does seem necessary is the removal of unnecessary levels of structure and there seems to be a prima-facie case to look at region and district and create a structure that satisfies both levels of structure. A simpler administrative model helps for effective communication and better compliance.

Notes:

- In order for this model to be effective there would need to be a considerable amount of time and energy put into developing effective networks across the region that would benefit the whole church. Could it be done bit by bit?
- There is no mechanism in this working out for developing regional policy on the basis that each district continues to be its own policy maker – there would need to be a more formal relationship between the districts if policy is to be agreed for the whole region.
- Paid staff and volunteers appointed to each district are likely to be duplicating resources unless needs can be identified effectively and these needs met by establishing relevant and effective networks. Will districts really set up these networks voluntarily given the resources that will be required to do so? They might if the alternative was being dismantled / cut up/ subsumed into another district.

Model 3 (Reducing the number of Districts to, for example 3)

Section 1: the task of the sub-group

- To consider whether there were any models of working as districts but with possibly fewer in total

We recognised the following needed careful consideration as part of our analysis:

- What is the purpose of 'district'?
(What is it that 'district' does that is needed to be provided to support local circuits and churches?)
- Where do people naturally 'look to' as centres?
As our assessment was predominantly geographically based, consideration was given to which main centres/towns did communities shop in, go out in, go to theatres in, work in - so that any groupings were aligning (as best we could) local people's contexts within a larger overall context that they could still relate to
- Distances and practical implications with geographies
One of the issues we already hear at district level is that places are too far to travel to so as larger groupings may imply increased travel times and larger distances we recognised the need to consider ways of addressing these real issues as part of our assessments
- Maintaining interconnectedness in wider groupings
One of the key common elements shared in our sub-group and the main group was that of remembering we are a connexional church and as such, any groupings of churches or circuits would need to be able to demonstrate the ability to maintain this connexionalism, this ability to inter-connect and maintain contact across wider areas potentially, whilst remaining relevant to those on the ground in local churches.
- Cultural sensitivities in the region
Early on we identified there are a thousand different ways to define boundaries and groupings, and, whilst the ecumenical and statutory relationships are key for us as church moving forward, it was felt that the more prominent alignment that we should take into account was that of culture and context. Where do people see themselves aligned to and where not? If there are cultural clashes between neighbouring towns and places, how would these models take this into account, whilst also not ruling out the need to continue strategic alignment with the local authorities and our Christian and other faith partners in the areas?
- What could be learned from other regions?
Although the North West as a whole region is the first region in the connexion to be exploring this 'region-wide', there are other regroupings that have already taken place that we may gain insight from where they have lessons learnt and positive or negative experiences to share (Wales, London, Beds Essex & Herts, South East). This was felt to be particularly important to do when we consider

roles of leadership needed to be effective in a more complex and wider operating structure than before.

[Note: no official evaluation has been done as comparisons for this point yet – though unofficial observations and feedback has been gained from other areas]

Section 2: WHAT PURPOSE IS DISTRICT?

We listed all the activities that go on 'beyond circuit' and identified those that were felt needed to continue at a level BETWEEN local circuit and connexion. These are listed in the matrix below.

- Handling things from Connexion
(eg. DAF, consents, Rank)
- Authorised Ministries Support
(Stationing, candidates & probationers, LPs, pastoral support for staff – lay & ordained, retreats, vocational exploration days)
- Training and Development
(ADR, EDEV, Safeguarding, volunteer & paid staff development)
- Conferring on the Work of God
(Shared events, speakers, stories & networking)
- Synods, other District events
(Vehicles for celebration)
- Governance matters
(Provisional legislation debated at district level, reporting annual accounts to charity commission etc.)
- Discipline procedures and oversight
- Exposure to potential new areas for district to develop e.g. CIC*
(Commitments in Communities) partnership
- External relationships – development & nurture
- Stats for Mission – enhancing the way we gather data relevant to support local mission within our churches communities
- Creating Networks for Future Generations
- Facilitating Reviews
(Church and Circuit level, supporting developments of business plans, roadmaps and resources to equip local teams)

- District role of promoting best practice
- Communication

Key Leadership Roles (paid) required for 3 districts rather than 7 in the North West :

- **District Superintendent**

Up to 2 per district – one or both could have up to a quarter of their time in pastoral charge of a Church or in some other form of circuit appointment. A second District superintendent could possibly have pastoral oversight of a Church. Numbers needed in each district dependant on travel time, and how many circuit teams and ‘staff’ needed to support pastorally. To support the pastoral needs of all staff in the district, to provide strategic oversight with District Development Lead on the needs of the local teams within the district, to attend relevant connexional forums, representing the district (e.g. Chairs’ meeting, CLF, Methodist Council, stationing)

- **District Development Lead (DDL)**

Responsible for developing external relationships (statutory, ecumenical & inter-faith), engaging at strategic levels (board) and identifying areas internally (for example ongoing development reviews against our calling) to facilitate growth and ongoing re-development as a church across the district area; to attend relevant connexional forums, representing the district (e.g. with DS to be part of CLF – this would need a change to the constitution of the CLF)

- **District Ecumenical Officer** (subsidised, not full paid role) to support DDL with further developing ecumenical links within equivalent bodies (e.g. within diocesan teams)

- **District Team Operations Lead** (responsible for financial, legal and governance requirements to ensure the most efficient and effective running of the ‘district’/ Property matters could, for example, reside here)

- **District Training Officer** (responsible for shaping and delivering training across the district, working in partnership with other DTOs in the North West Region)

- **District Administrator** (responsible for supporting the district team in all areas of administration, including managing communications, website, meeting agendas, minutes)

Notes:

- For any form of this model to be effective a case would need to be developed to identify how these further improve the effectiveness of districts in the serving of their local circuits and churches. Cost comparisons to be included in these reviews, also the cultural and change impacts of moving to either model

- The group recognised that this model would benefit from developing missional networks (as in other working group) to further develop connections between similar groupings of ministries and areas of work
- *CiC is a Charity which supports and enables Methodist Churches around the North West through a bureau type service to help build capacity for local churches to further their mission within their communities (e.g. how to partner with statutory & 3rd sector organisations, funding opportunities, good practice re governance)

Model 4: One Regional district

Introduction

Three members of the working group were tasked with developing a model for 'beyond circuit' which covered the present Region of the North West. This consists of Cumbria, Isle of Man, Lancashire, Bolton & Rochdale, Manchester & Stockport, Liverpool and Chester & Stoke.

- Chester & Stoke and Cumbria have a "foot in two camps" so to speak as they have some working relationships with other Districts outside of the Region but bordering their boundaries.
- Isle of Man ~ constraints of geography mean that being part of one District would need careful logistical management.
- Various ideas were looked at including the Diaconal Model, the Diocesan Model, the London District Review and the Australian system.
- The Regional model must reduce overall cost of resourcing Methodist Church at all levels; or at least make it more cost effective.

Vision of Regional/District

Each Region (maybe 10 across Connexion?) would be served by a Central Administration unit covering aspects of finance and property. This would consist of professional employed people, some devolved from Connexional Team posts and some local experts. The Connexional Team would therefore shrink as some of the work would be happening at Regional level.

- Networks would consist of circuits and/or churches with contexts in common. For example, Urban, Rural, Town Centre, City.
- Regional Admin centre
- Regional groups
- Uniformity would be protected by Connexional Team oversight but Local Preacher training, Children and Youth training and Safeguarding would be areas where the Regions would head up areas of expertise to share with the other Regions.

Regional Admin Centre

- Paid professionals plus local experts
- Finance ~ accounting post (accountancy technician) Full Time
- Travel expenses for all staff across region paid by central admin on a scheme to make it fair across circuits
- Regional Treasurer does the budget with Strategy Resource Group and presents it to Council (Trustees)

- Archives
- Advice and help
- Complaints
- Website maintenance
- Property consent, advice and help
- District manse management
- HR
- Legal

Management structure

- 2 detached Chairs ~ the lead Chair with responsibility for strategy, vision and organisation. The other for Pastoral matters (Ministers, Stationing, Candidating etc.). But both have shared leadership.
- A number of non-detached half time Chairs with a church in circuit and a specialised remit for certain areas or networks across the Regional District. For example, Rural, Urban, Town centre etc. having pastoral care of those ministers in the network. These Part Time Chairs have an equivalent to a Superintendent's stipend.
- Each Part-Time Chair role has equivalent lay officer alongside.
- Only 2 Regional District manses needed, managed by Admin centre
- Safeguarding ~ as at present, church reps, circuit reps, Regional Taking Care Group, training co-ordinated by RTOs
- Lay employment ~ managed by Central admin by small company/charity across the Region and Human Resources manager.
- Ministerial Support ~ by Pastoral Chair and Part Time Chairs.
- District Groups such as Racial Justice, World Mission etc. managed in networks, not committees, of interested people, churches, and circuits. Connexional communication direct to circuits. Central Admin to keep directory of officers and interested people to link the network.
- Regional Grants Committee.
- Regional Property Group
- Regional Finance Group
- Regional Training group
- Regional Mission Forum
- Regional Superintendents forum
- Regional Circuit Stewards forum
- DEEs ~ 6 over the Region, could be accountable to Regional Mission Forum and the Strategic Chair

Organisational Structure

Region run along Connexional lines with a Council meeting quarterly.

- Council consists of representatives from all regional groups
- Circuit representation ~ would need to reduce number of circuits by some joining (which is already happening where appropriate) and/or cluster circuits together for representation and/or representative from networks
- Chaired by Strategic Chair

Regional Strategy and Resource Group oversee mission in all areas, meet to enable vision, strategy and policy. Meetings called when necessary

- Consists of the 2 Chairs, co-opted part Time Chairs, Lead Superintendent, Lead Circuit Steward

- Other co-opted members
- Maximum of 8 at any time

An annual Synod resembling Conference.

- Synod representation ~ all ministers invited? One presbyter; one Diaconal and two lay from each circuit? How to make it fair for larger circuits? Under present standing orders there would be around 700 with a right to attend.
Ministerial Synods to be held twice yearly.

Ecumenical

Discussed whether the size of the Region would affect the appropriate involvement and number of people needed.

- One Part time Chair for ecumenical issues plus an Ecumenical Officer
- Links at local level through circuits and these could cross boundaries
- Circuits to be empowered to do things together with other denominations

Part Time Chairs

One each for:~

- Urban/industrial
- Inner City
- City/Town centre
- Rural
- Suburban
- Ecumenical
- Fresh Expressions
- Isle of Man

Need to know staffing at present and cost to Districts in order to show saving.

Appendix 2

Questions to enable models to be built and tested

What follows is intended to enable and encourage focused conversations as models are developed. They will not be the only questions that need to be asked. This paper is not intended to limit ways of working in the small groups or later in the process. However it is an attempt to ensure that certain core issues have been addressed. Therefore it helps to test the emerging models.

1. How will this model help engagement with secular authorities?
2. In what ways can this model encourage networking across the area for those engaged in similar work?
3. How will this model work ecumenically?
4. How are the pastoral and vocational needs of presbyters and deacons catered for in this model? (This includes stationing).
5. How will Superintendents relate to the wider structures through this model?

6. How will engagement with Circuit Stewards be facilitated by this model?
7. How does this model cope with reasonable travelling times for
 - a) Working Groups
 - b) Staff whose role covers the whole area
 - c) Meetings for encouragement and enhancement of role e.g. Superintendent, Youth Workers?

It is important to ensure that the model can develop policies and practices that cover (and this is not an exhaustive list) strategic thinking, stationing, lay employment, property consents, safeguarding, complaints & discipline, training, mission reflection, evangelism, consultation and collaboration.

Each model will also need to reflect on how the traditional role of the Synod can be replicated if we assume that the prime purpose of the Synod is to take counsel together, build relationships - in other words to be truly Christian conferring.

It may be helpful to make use of the Calling of the Methodist Church Statement of 1996, Our Calling from 2000, the Priorities Statement and the 5 Marks of Mission to check how the model actually achieves a significant mission edge in the work and witness of our church in the North West.

When models have been developed the following questions are prompts for some practical outcomes of what has been developed. Again these are indicative rather than comprehensive.

1. What key paid personnel would be needed for this model to work?
2. Where would they be located?
3. What roles currently filled by volunteers, both lay and ordained, would still be helpful for the model to be effective?
4. How would such volunteers work together and be related to other structures?
5. Will the model require an administrative centre or centres and if so, what are your reflections on possible location?

Background Conference Documents referred to in the process

Our Calling

The Priorities for the Methodist Church

Called to Love and Praise

The Missional Nature of the Circuit