

Review of the Role of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order

Contact Name and Details	Dudley Coates Email coatesdudley@gmail.com
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolutions	66/1. The Council adopts the recommendations set out in the report and directs that; a. The Strategy and Resources Committee makes the necessary provision within the Methodist Church Fund budget for the post of Deputy Warden. b. Where necessary Standing Orders be drafted to give effect to the recommendations in this report.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To review the role of the Warden of the MDO
Main Points	The 2010 Conference directed the Methodist Council to review the responsibilities of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order. This report provides recommendations for strengthening the role and supporting the Warden of the MDO. The Council submitted some recommendations to the 2013 Conference but required further work by the Working Party and by the SRC on others particularly, after consultation with the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order. This is the further report from the Working Party.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Report 8 to the 2010 Conference and Daily Record 7/8/6 MC/12/67, MC/13/37 and 13/37A Section 11 of the Methodist Council Report (Report 44) to the 2013 Conference
Consultations	The Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order The Warden and Pastoral Co-ordinator of the Diaconal Order The Secretary of the Conference/General Secretary

Summary of Impact

Standing Orders	Amendments to Standing Orders would be required to provide for the establishment of a MDO Leadership Group and for the creation of a post of Deputy Warden.
Financial/Personnel	Provision for the new post would need to be made within the budget.

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Summary

We make the following further recommendations:

1. that a new Standing Order be drafted creating an MDO Leadership Group representing the whole church who share leadership collaboratively with and offer support, oversight and accountability to the Warden.
2. that the MDO Leadership Group should consider how best both the Order and the wider church might be helped to understand the role of the Order, its place in our ecclesiology and the role of Convocation.
3. that the Methodist Council accept the case for a full time post of Deputy Warden.
4. that the proposed MDO Leadership Group (and the shadow group being created for the current connexional year) should give attention to the precise way in which the duties and related committee attendance should be shared between the posts of Warden and Deputy Warden.
5. that the Warden remain a member of the Connexional Leaders' Forum and of the Stationing Committee.
6. that a conversation take place between the Warden and those responsible for planning the Chairs' Meeting both about the shape of the Warden's involvement and about shared oversight and connexional responsibilities.
7. that there is regular conversation within the Chairs' Meeting about the Order to ensure that there is good understanding amongst the Chairs of the nature of the Order and their own responsibilities with regard to deacons stationed within their districts.

Background and Introduction

- 1 The 2010 Conference adopted the following resolution which was one of the recommendations from the working party on Leading and Presiding:

R 8/12 The Conference directs the Methodist Council to review the responsibilities of the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order in the light of this report and after consultation with the Convocation of the Order bring recommendations to the Conference of 2011. (Daily Record 7/8/6).

- 2 The Council appointed the present Working Party comprising Revd Sheryl Anderson, Deacon Eunice Atwood, Dudley Coates and the Revd Jenny Impey. We reported to the Council in April 2013 (MC/13/37) and some of our recommendations were put to the 2013 Conference. This report deals solely with those recommendations on which we were required to undertake further consultation notably with the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order. Further background to our recommendations can be found in MC/13/37 which also includes an annex listing the references to the Warden in the Deed and in Standing Orders.
- 3 At the heart of all our thinking is the conviction that the present role of the Warden of the Order is far too big a job for any one person. This is not simply a matter of workload. It is also about the Connexion respecting the decisions we have taken over the last twenty years about the Methodist Diaconal Order and its place within our ecclesiology. The Methodist Church understands oversight as a shared responsibility, not an individual one. Part of the reason that the role of the Warden of the Order is so big is because the responsibilities that are held corporately elsewhere in the Methodist Church are in this instance focused in one person.
- 4 In MC/13/37 we argued that the role of the Warden is very demanding for a single individual. In particular we argued that significant time needs to be available for

‘advocating diaconal ministry, our British Methodist model and the Order both within the British Connexion and beyond it; one of those we consulted called this ‘the voice of diaconal ministry to the wider connexion’ and we would add beyond the connexion also. This is, of course, a role in which many others – not just members of the Order - can and should share. But it is both inevitable and right that the advocacy role should focus in particular in the Warden as the Order’s senior representative.’

Since the abolition of the former MDO Leadership Team, the Warden has been supported in practice by the Order’s Pastoral Co-ordinator (Deacon Karen McBride), in a full time appointment funded from the Orders pastoral funds and on financial matters by Deacon Ian Murray who is in a circuit appointment. We also drew attention to the large number of committees and groups which the Warden is required to attend by Standing Orders. The sheer scale of the post, combined with the fact that it is by definition a singleton post, underpinned most of our recommendations. The remainder of this report needs to be read against that background.

5 The recommendations on which we were required to do further work were:

Original Recommendation 5

We recommend that a new Standing Order be drafted creating an MDO Senior Leadership Team representing the whole church who share leadership collaboratively with the Warden.

Original Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Methodist Council accept the case for a full time post of Deputy Warden recognizing that in due course it will need to be funded from the Central Services Budget.

Original Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Warden remain a member of the Connexional Leaders' Forum and of the Stationing Committee but should cease to attend the Chairs' Meeting except for agreed parts of the meeting which will forward collaborative ministry between Chairs and Warden.

Original Recommendation 9

We recommend that the MDO Senior Leadership Team when established consider whether further work needs to be done in either or both of the following areas:

- *to clarify the shared oversight of deacons between the Warden and Chairs of District as exemplified in the comparison between Standing Orders 426 and 754 explored in paragraph 11 above; and*
- *whether there should be further mutual alignment of the candidating, training, probation and discipline processes relating to deacons and those for presbyters.*

6 Consultation with the Convocation revealed issues around the functions of the Convocation and the role of the Order within a connexional church. We note that Standing Order 701(8) makes it clear that Convocation is 'the principal constitutional forum in which deacons account for their servant ministry and watch over and support one another as members of a dispersed religious order'. It must be consulted on some significant decisions (notably under Clause 25B of the Deed of Union on proposals affecting the continuance of the Convocation). Standing Order 753 makes it clear that Convocation is not a governance body and has limited (albeit significant) functions. The ultimate accountability of all ministers is to the Conference rather than the Convocation or presbyteral synod. Given the lack of clarity within the Order, we **recommend** that the proposed MDO Leadership Group should explore these issues further and consider how best both the Order and the wider church might be helped to understand the role of the Order, its place in our ecclesiology and the role of Convocation. This work links with the work which the Conference has directed to be done by the Faith and Order Committee and appropriate connections will be need to be made with that work.

MDO Leadership Group

- 7 Consultation with the with the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order revealed mixed views on the recommendation for the creation of what we called an MDO Senior Leadership Team. There was criticism of the proposed name, partly because of the use of the word 'senior' and partly because the name 'leadership team' was used recently for a group (comprising the Warden, the Pastoral Co-ordinator and four other deacons who were funded to undertake specific leadership tasks for and on behalf of the MDO) disbanded for various reasons (including budgetary pressures) in 2012. At its heart our proposal is for a body representing the whole church which offers support, oversight and accountability to the leadership of the MDO. We maintain our basic proposal but now propose the name 'MDO Leadership Group'.
- 8 More widely views in the Convocation on the proposal for such a group varied with both support for the proposal and questioning of it. Points raised included:
- issues around decision-making and the degree to which the Group would take decision-making away from the Order;
 - concerns that people (presbyters and lay) who were not members of the MDO would be directing the Order;
 - fears of a threat to the collaborative decision-making style of the Order;
 - suggestions that the group should be able to make theological input into the work of the Order;
 - suggestions that those members of the group who were not deacons should be people with understanding of the dual role of deacons as members of an order of ministry and of a religious order; and
 - suggestions that those members of the group who were not deacons be invited to Convocation.

As we said in MC/13/37 there is no precise parallel elsewhere in the church for the body we propose; but it would have some of the characteristics of a Circuit Leadership Team, of a District Policy Committee and of the Strategy and Resources Committee of the Methodist Council. We seek to deal with the concerns which relate to the role of the group in the formulation of the draft Standing Order in paragraph 11 below.

- 9 During the connexional year 2012-13, the Secretary of the Conference/General Secretary brought together an informal group with similar functions. It comprised himself and four deacons. But (a) it is clear to us that such a group needs to be permanent and governed ultimately by Standing Orders and (b) that the group should be representative of the whole church. We stand by our earlier recommendation that the composition of the Group should be two presbyters, two deacons and two lay people together with the Warden and Deputy Warden. We understand that the Secretary of the Conference/General Secretary is creating a shadow group with that composition for the connexional year 2013-14. The key role of the Group as we envisage it is to offer oversight, accountability and support for the Warden and Deputy Warden in the performance of their responsibilities and, in particular so far as the Warden is concerned, in the oversight of the Order. The Group should also be responsible for ensuring that the Order is properly consulted when other bodies are considering matters of relevance to the Order and should support the Warden and

Deputy Warden both in ensuring that appropriate consultation happens and in respect of the form which any given consultation should take.

- 10 Our earlier recommendation was that the group be co-chaired by one of its members (who should be a former President or Vice President of the Conference) and by the Warden. But co-chairing could be complicated. And, on balance, in view of the role of the group in providing oversight and accountability for the Warden and Deputy Warden, we now recommend that it be chaired by one of its members (who should be a former President or Vice-President of the Conference).
- 11 We envisage a Standing Order to appear after Standing Order 754 on the role of the Warden. Subject to scrutiny, we suggest that it might be drafted on the following lines:

There shall be an MDO Leadership Group appointed by and accountable to the Conference. The Group shall consist of two presbyters, two deacons and two lay persons, one of whom shall be a former President or Vice-President of the Conference who shall act as Chair. On behalf of the Conference, the Group shall advise and support the Warden and Deputy Warden on the performance of their duties, including duties set out in the Deed and in Standing Orders, but shall not have authority to direct them. The Group shall oversee arrangements for consulting the Order and be responsible for ensuring that such consultation happens in appropriate ways. The group shall meet at least three times in each connexional year.

Deputy Warden

- 12 The scale of the Warden's role, discussed in paragraph 6 above as well as in MC/13/37, led us to recommend that there should be a full time post of Deputy Warden. We envisaged that this post should encompass most of the work now done by the Pastoral Co-ordinator but should have a clearer status and authority within both the Order and the wider church. The Council referred the question of the availability of funding for such a post to the SRC and they will be reporting separately to the Council. This working party continues to believe strongly that ecclesiological arguments, the need for advocacy and the workload require two full time posts at the heart of the Order. By way of guidance, we suggest that work which mainly faces beyond the Order should belong to the Warden's post and work primarily internal to the Order should belong to the Deputy Warden.
- 13 A further question which has been raised is whether the post, if created, should be filled initially by Deacon Karen McBride or whether a new process should be initiated to make an initial appointment. As we said in MC/13/37, we see this post as evolving from the role of the present Pastoral Co-ordinator and we maintain our view that it should be filled by Deacon Karen McBride until the completion of her present appointment in 2017. We maintain our recommendation for the creation of a post of Deputy Warden. And we further **recommend** that the proposed MDO Leadership Group (and the shadow group being created for the current connexional year) should give attention to the precise way in the duties and related committee attendance should be shared between the posts of Warden and Deputy Warden.

The Warden and the Chairs' Meeting

- 14 At the April Council meeting, at the Convocation and in the brief debate in the 2013 Conference, one recommendation from the Working Party has attracted particular negative comment. In MC/13/37 we said:

We are quite sure that the Warden should be a member of the Connexional Leaders' Forum and of the Stationing Committee. Standing Order 230A does not specify that the Warden is a member of, or attends, the Chairs Meeting; but at least in recent years it has been the practice for the Warden to attend the whole meeting. We understand that attendance at this meeting offers the Warden collegial support in her or his unique role. But it seems to us that many matters of joint interest between the Warden and Chairs should in any case be considered at the Connexional Leaders' Forum. Considerable time can be given in the Chairs' Meeting to presbyteral stationing issues and to other matters of little relevance to the Warden. And we are not convinced that the seven further days annually involved in attendance at the Chairs' Meeting represents the best use of the Warden's time. Whilst we do not want to rule out attendance by the Warden for some items of business at the Chairs' Meeting, we think that it should be possible for creative conversation to take place between the Warden and those who manage the agenda of that meeting to ensure that matters which will forward collaborative ministry between the Chairs and the Warden are grouped and taken at times when the Warden could easily be present (e.g. when a CLF meeting precedes a Chairs' Meeting, they should be taken as early items at the Chairs' Meeting).

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the Warden remain a member of the Connexional Leaders' Forum and of the Stationing Committee but should cease to attend the Chairs' Meeting except for agreed parts of the meeting which will forward collaborative ministry between Chairs and Warden.

- 15 We recognize that there are important common features between the role of the Warden and that of District Chairs. And they share oversight of deacons. For that reason it is important that Chairs should meet the Warden regularly and vice versa. But, as we argued in more detail in MC/13/37, there are areas where the roles of Chairs and the Warden are quite distinct. In our view it can be unhelpful if the parallels between those two roles are overemphasised.
- 16 It should be noted that we were not recommending any change in Standing Orders. Equally, we were not recommending that the Warden should never attend the Chairs' Meeting. Our recommendation was, in effect, a request to the Chairs' Meeting to organise its business in such a way as to keep the time demands on the Warden to a minimum. We thought that given goodwill it should be possible to gather into one part of the meeting conversations of mutual benefit to both the Warden and the Chairs.

- 17 The Warden and Chairs meet regularly in the context of Connexional Leadership Forum (CLF). This is the key place in our system where those with different leadership responsibilities work together to understand roles and responsibilities, to increase understanding of how they can support one another in those responsibilities and where mutual support should be given. As to the Warden's attendance at the Chairs' Meeting, we remain concerned about the amount of time involved for the Warden in attending a meeting at which she is not a member and which does some business of little relevance to her. On the other hand, we recognise that both the Warden and the Chairs value this engagement. So we now **recommend** that a conversation take place between the Warden and those responsible for planning the Chairs' Meeting both about the shape of the Warden's involvement and about shared oversight and connexional responsibilities. We further **recommend** that there is regular conversation within the Chairs' Meeting about the Order to ensure that there is good understanding amongst the Chairs of the nature of the Order and their own responsibilities with regard to deacons stationed within their districts.

Further work

- 18 The recommendations in paragraph 17 above supersede our original recommendation 9.

*****RESOLUTION:**

66/1. The Council adopts the recommendations set out in the report and directs that:

- a. **The Strategy and Resources Committee makes the necessary provision within the Methodist Church Fund budget for the post of Deputy Warden.**
- b. **Where necessary Standing Orders be drafted to give effect to the recommendations set out in this report.**