

North West England District: Consultation with the Manchester and Stockport District

MC/24/14

Date of meeting	29-30 January 2024
Contact name and details	Professor David R Matthews, on behalf of the Council scrutiny group
Action required	For approval
Resolutions	<p>14/1. The Council receives the report.</p> <p>14/2. The Council directs that the continuing consultations within the Bolton and Rochdale, Liverpool, Lancashire and Cumbria Districts concerning this change to the new North West England District now take place and are reported to the Council to enable it to make a recommendation to the 2024 Conference under the terms of SO 401.</p>

Summary of content

Background context and relevant documents (with function)	MC/23/6 MC/23/59
Consultations	The circuits of the Manchester and Stockport District.

Background

Following a consultation process under the terms of SO 401, the 2023 Conference agreed to the formation of a new North West England District with effect from 1 September 2024. The new District will comprise the present Bolton and Rochdale, Lancashire, Liverpool and Cumbria Districts.

The Council, in May 2023, authorised a consultation process with the present Manchester and Stockport District in respect of whether the new North West England District would also include the Manchester and Stockport district.

The task of the scrutiny group was to assess whether the proposals had been set out clearly, whether all the views (both for and against) had been reasonably considered and whether the proposal had support within the Manchester and Stockport District.

Were the proposals set out clearly?

The proposals were carefully set out by the District Chairs, and have been widely discussed both locally and at the Methodist Council. One early suggestion had been that the five Districts would merge together, but this proposal was not initially supported by the Synod of the Manchester and Stockport District, and it was therefore not part of the full consultation process which took place prior to the 2023 Conference. This outcome was entirely accepted by the Bolton, Liverpool, Cumbria and Lancashire districts and indeed by the Methodist Council who discussed the issue and were also fully accepting of that democratic outcome. The Council created no pressure whatsoever for the Manchester and Stockport District to join, though hoped that such a coming together might occur. This is now the case.

The plan has been not just to amalgamate but to find new flexible ways of working and a better basis for mission. In particular there is a clear plan for three working hubs within the new structure: mission and leadership; ministries and vocations; administration and compliance. Mission areas may reduce the risks

inherent in widespread geography. The imperatives of a reduced church membership and the strains of finding the necessary person-power to fulfil the needs for compliance and administration implies that many currently duplicated, but necessary, aspects of the church life should be brought together more efficiently. This is an economy of scale.

An excellent film was produced which outlined the case and there were clear videos relating to specific Q&As. The Governance was carefully delineated, and an appropriate process of consultation undertaken.

Was there adequate consultation?

Under the terms of SO 401, the Council authorised a consultation process with the relevant Synods and Circuit Meetings, and appointed the scrutiny group (comprising David Matthews, Luke Smith and Sandie Smith) to verify that all reasonable processes and consultations have taken place. The data available showed that indeed all the Circuits in the Manchester and Stockport district had been consulted. The voting in the circuits was as follows:

Voting figures from circuit & synod consultations under SO. 401 - 2023							
Number	Name	Date of vote	For	Against	Voting members present	Decision	
19/1	Manchester	16/09/23	22	8	37	Yes	
19/2	United Stockport	12/09/23	22	0	29	Yes	
19/3	Salford	12/09/23	5	5	24	Tied	
19/4	High Peak	07/09/23	17	0	20	Yes	
19/5	Glossop & Tameside	17/07/23	14	13	31	Yes	
19/6	Oldham	04/07/23	27	0	27	Yes	
19/7	Stretford & Urmston	19/06/23	14	0	14	Yes	
19/8	Altrincham	11/09/23	13	0	13	Yes	
19/9	Sale	13/09/23	20	0	20	Yes	
19/15	Bramhall & Wythenshawe	20/06/23	16	1	20	Yes	
19/19	Alderley Edge & Knutsford	21/06/23	13	0	17	Yes	
19/24	Macclesfield	13/09/23	7	19	29	No	
Total:			190	46	281		

It can be seen that there was a greater than 4:1 majority in favour joining the new North West England District, with only one circuit voting against.

The scrutiny group therefore attests that all due process has been undertaken carefully and with consideration to all parties and recommends that the Manchester and Stockport District should be part of the new North West England District.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

14/1. The Council receives the report.

14/2. The Council directs that the continuing consultations within the Bolton and Rochdale, Liverpool, Lancashire and Cumbria Districts concerning this change to the new North West England District now take place and are reported to the Council to enable it to make a recommendation to the 2024 Conference under the terms of SO 401.