

The report of proposed amalgamation of Bolton and Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire and Liverpool Methodist Districts

MC/23/6

Date of meeting	25-26 January 2023
Contact name and details	Peter Gregson, Lay Representative for Cumbria on the Methodist Council and on the Regional Review Group, peterdgregson@btinternet.com
Action required	For approval and decision
Resolutions	<p>6/1. The Council receives the report.</p> <p>6/2. The Council notes the proposed amalgamation of the Bolton and Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire, and Liverpool Districts to form a single District from 1 September 2024, and, in accordance with Standing Order 401, directs that a formal consultation with the Circuit meetings and Synods of the participating Districts take place by the end of the spring Representative Synods, to enable the Council to consider submitting a proposal to the Conference of 2023.</p> <p>6/3. The Council warmly invites the Manchester and Stockport District to participate in the formal consultation, in order to provide a further opportunity for the Manchester and Stockport District to consider becoming part of the proposed new District.</p>

Summary of content

Subject of aims	The four Districts of Bolton and Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire and Liverpool propose amalgamation to form a single District commencing 1 September 2024. This report asks for the approval of the Methodist Council and the initiation of the processes laid down in Standing Order 401 around consultation in the four districts and proposals to the Conference of 2023. In addition, we ask the Council warmly to invite Manchester and Stockport District to participate in the consultation.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Proposals 2. The Rationale for the Proposals 3. District Hubs and Mission Areas: Collaborative Leadership 4. Financial and Governance Modelling 5. Timeline and Further Work
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	<p>The background context is supported by 3 documents:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. District Data: estimates to provide evidence of demographic changes – this is included as an appendix at the end of the report. 2. The Regional District Paper that went to Spring Synod 22 and September Synod 22 that was circulated to the four Synods plus Manchester and Stockport Synod 3. The Update to the Regional District Paper that was the basis of

	proposals at the September 2022 Synods in all five Districts.
Consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regional Review Group is the holding body for development of the ideas around amalgamation and approving the proposals to Synods and Methodist Council. The RRG includes the Chair and a lay representative from each district. The RRG members are Revd Dr Sheryl Anderson, Revd Dr James Tebbutt, Revd Dr Andrew Lunn, Revd Phil Gough, Revd Darren Garfield, Carolyn Hothersall, Dave James (ex officio), Peter Gregson and Steve Cooper. Alison Ball is the facilitator. Three open consultations called 'Shaping the Future' took place in the region in the Summer 2022 inviting anyone to attend and contribute their ideas. The proposals have gone to the DPC and the Spring and September 2022 Synods of each District.

Summary of impact

Standing Orders	SO 401
Financial	As outlined in paragraph 4
External, including ecumenical	The promotion of ecumenical partnerships are specifically considered in this proposal
Risk	Risks are identified in paragraph 2 Further financial modelling to include financial risk and mitigation is being undertaken

The proposed amalgamation of Bolton and Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire and Liverpool Methodist Districts

1. The Proposals

- 1.1. The Council considers and receives this report.
- 1.2. The Council is asked to consider the amalgamation of Bolton and Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool Methodist Districts to form a single Methodist District under Standing Order 401, and to direct that a consultation takes place with the Circuit meetings and Synods of the participating Districts to enable a proposal to be brought to the Conference of 2023. If approved, the four existing Districts will cease to be on 31 August 2024 and amalgamate to form a new District in the North West of England Synod from 1 September 2024.
- 1.3. The Council is also asked to consider offering a warm invitation to Manchester and Stockport Methodist District to participate in the formal consultation in advance of proposals being finalised for the Conference in June 2023. This will provide a further opportunity for Manchester and Stockport Methodist District to consider becoming part of the proposed new district.

2. Rationale

2.1. Formation of a single District

- 2.1.1. The Districts in the North West and Mann region have a history of co-working and covenant, which has strengthened and enriched each partner. The membership is dramatically smaller than when the present Districts were first conceived, and is likely to become smaller still should the pattern of change continue. The governance burden of current structures is disproportionate to our size. It is challenging to fill the offices, lay appointments, and meetings.
- 2.1.2. In 2024-5 connexional year we anticipate change of leadership as, of the four incumbent District Chairs, two sit down, and the interim period of one ends. This proposed amalgamation is a proactive alternative to reactive interim measures that are otherwise likely to result. Rather, an intentional amalgamation enables an innovative approach to being district with mission at the heart.
- 2.1.3. Notwithstanding the vote of Conference 2022, which removed the immediate expectation of a collective journey toward reduction in the number of districts, the reasons for the proposals in the North West remain both valid and pressing.

2.2. Consultation with Manchester and Stockport Methodist District

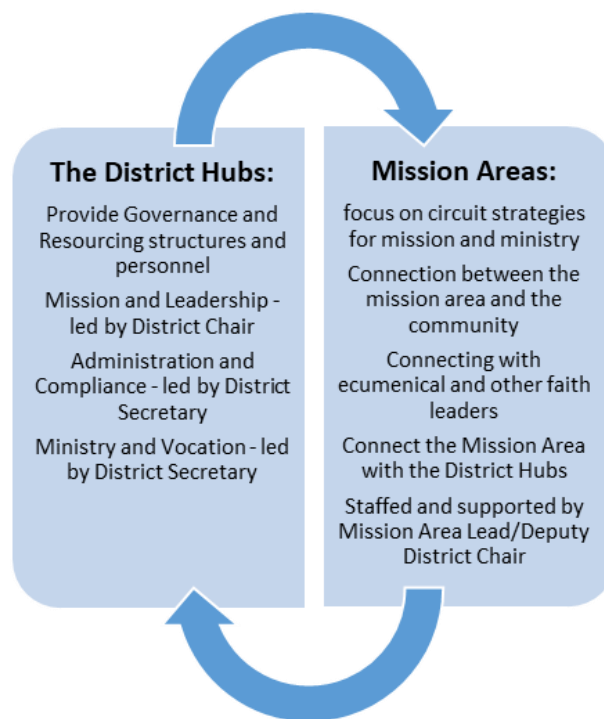
- 2.2.1. Manchester and Stockport District have journeyed with us in the development of this single district model from the outset until their September 2022 Synod. This Synod voted against the proposal to continue as partners in the conversation and subsequent proposals to the Methodist Council. Given their close relationship with Bolton and Rochdale District, who voted for continuing as partners, and their existing wider relationship with the other Districts involved, we would welcome the Council's agreement to include them in the consultation.

3. District Hubs and Mission Areas: Collaborative Leadership

3.1. The new District model proposes a different way of being District. It is a collaborative matrix model where the proposed District Hubs interact with the proposed Mission Areas to provide sound governance and resourcing whilst releasing energy and personnel to support Circuits to focus on mission in their localities. The District will have a single Synod and a single DPC.

3.2. We propose three District Hubs each with distinctive sub functions: Mission and Leadership, Administration and Compliance, and Ministry and Vocations. The District Chair and two District Secretaries lead the hubs as shown in the diagram. They will provide district leadership, governance and resource collaboratively.

3.3. The larger district still requires a local expression. The Mission Areas are smaller geographical groupings of Circuits within the District, initially taking into account existing identities but moving towards different ways of gathering where appropriate. We anticipate no more than four Mission Areas. Each will have a Mission Area lead whose primary role is to foster relationships and promote mission. They will deputize for the District Chair and hold a representative role, connecting with the wider community, ecumenical partners and leaders of other faiths. The Mission Area Lead role is presbyteral and will probably be part-time sitting alongside another presbyteral role. The Mission Areas do not hold governance responsibilities and so will not add a governance layer. The Mission Areas leads and district Hub leads will work collaboratively to ensure that Mission is at the heart of both loci of leadership.



4. Financial and Governance modelling

4.1. Initial finance and governance modelling has commenced. These initial reports are available if required (and will be available to Circuits and Synods as part of the proposed consultation).

4.2. The proposed district resource hubs will include various subfunctions, not only to fulfill the responsibilities given to Districts under CPD, but to resource Circuits for mission. The various paid or volunteer posts, or groups and networks, identified will provide a collaborative 'matrix' that connects and resources relevant people and functions across and between Mission Areas.

4.3. We hope to fund the District Hub and Mission Area Leads from the connexional contribution. Where there are further costs, we are exploring the options for district funding or part funding. Where additional finance, HR or property resources are required by Circuits, we are exploring district part funding or indicating outsourced resources, with Circuits buying in the services they require.

4.4. Circuit Assessments should not increase because of the different way of “doing District”. However, we recognise that regardless of these changes, Circuit assessment is likely to increase due to inflation and planned increases in stipends and pension contributions.

5. Timeline and further work

5.1. The Regional Review Group continues the work in preparation for a 1 September 2024 start date. The priorities for development are:

2022-3 Connexional Year

- Agree Mission Areas
- Agree the funding of the new District
- Be ready for the 2023-4 nomination and stationing processes for the roles of District Chair, the Ministry and Vocations Hub Lead/District Secretary (if ordained) and Mission Area Leads (Deputy District Chairs)
- Council consultation, Spring Synod approvals and proposals go to Conference

2023-4 Connexional Year

- Transitional planning for amalgamation including employment of lay roles (including the Administration and Compliance Hub Lead/District Secretary) and move towards a common financial platform.
- Station the ordained leadership roles

2024-5 Connexional Year

- The new District commences.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

6/1. The Council receives the report.

6/2. The Council notes the proposed amalgamation of the Bolton and Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire, and Liverpool Districts to form a single District from 1 September 2024, and, in accordance with Standing Order 401, directs that a formal consultation with the Circuit meetings and Synods of the participating Districts take place by the end of the spring representative Synods, to enable the Council to consider submitting a proposal to the Conference of 2023.

6/3. The Council warmly invites the Manchester and Stockport District to participate in the formal consultation, in order to provide a further opportunity for the Manchester and Stockport District to consider becoming part of the proposed new District.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: District Data

- 1 The decline in membership, churches and Circuits challenge the current organizations of Circuits into the existing four Districts proposing amalgamation. The 2020 published figures of membership range from 2560 to 5705 across the four Districts. Each District has between 8 and 9 Circuits. All the Districts experience staffing challenges to both paid and voluntarily roles and meetings essential for the Districts to operate effectively.
- 2 If the new District came into being today its membership would be approximately 16000, arranged in 33 Circuits and we anticipate a further reduction in both membership and the number of Circuits by 2024 should current trends continue.

Appendix 2: Regional District Paper NWM v6

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:5c807d67-aead-3935-bb51-d71ad29c7209>

Appendix 3: The North West Districts' Regional District Review Update

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/track?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:76726882-912e-392f-ad73-f917d2376bac>