

THE NORTH WEST DISTRICTS' REGIONAL DISTRICT REVIEW UPDATE

Interim Report of the Regional Review Group – September 2022

Proposed resolution for consideration by the Bolton & Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire, Liverpool and Manchester & Stockport District Synods:

The [Name] District Synod agrees:

- a) *to receive the paper on regional regrouping in the North West of England to the Spring 2022 Synod and the September 2022 update set out in this interim report;*
- b) *to participate as a partner in further consultation to develop a regional North West of England District, including by hereby directing its District Policy Committee (or equivalent) to consider a formal merger proposal once prepared; and,*
- c) *to ask the Methodist Council, in accordance with Standing Order 401, to consider the merger proposal at their meeting in January 2023; to consult the five Districts formally about this (at their circuit meetings in the first part of 2023 and at their Spring 2023 Synods); and, subject to that consultation, to submit a formal proposal to the Conference of 2023 for implementation of a North West of England District, if approved, on 1st September 2024.*

Update since Spring Synods 2022

The model before you today is a different way to fulfil the district's purpose (under Standing Order 400A) to provide a regional perspective for advancing mission and to support the circuits, recognising their central importance. The model before you is missionally conceived.

The present conversations between districts in the North West Region began in July 2020, and in spring 2022 the Synods and DPCs reviewed or noted the proposals and agreed to develop further a regional district model. Since then the Regional Review Group (comprising a lay and ordained representative from each of the five districts appointed by their DPCs) and four task groups have developed the model further. It has been developed in more detail than can be contained here, plus several aspects are still being refined, but when fully developed the model will be shared with the DPCs and Synods. In the meantime, this document provides an update of some of the key developments since the previous report.

Governance and Resourcing:

The governance and resourcing structures of the District Hubs and the Mission Areas will act as a bridge and connexion across the district that serves and supports circuits to be the primary focus of mission. The central Hubs will provide economies of scale and ultimately help to lift some of the governance and resourcing burden from circuits. The Mission Areas will not be separate governance units, but are intended to connect circuits relationally and to support their focus on mission and ministry in context. As such, the two aspects of the governance and resourcing structures will not add a further layer, but rather offer a different way of being district.

Mission Groups or Areas:

The Regional Review Group recently confirmed a previous decision that these should be geographically defined units (the Areas are being identified). The recommendation is pragmatic, enables both face-to-face and online relationship building, and enhances connexions with the communities that circuits serve, whilst still generating innovative ways of being circuit (e.g. the Emmaus circuit within the Liverpool District). It will enable Mission Areas to cluster together the delivery of some of the district hub functions and to support circuits as the primary focus of mission.

The alternative possibility of non-geographical criteria for Mission Groups was explored, with the value of gathering similar work together across and between Mission Groups or Areas within the district being recognised. However, the Regional Review Group decided this would be provided for more effectively through the District Hubs, which are being developed to enable this to happen.

District Governance and Hubs:

The overarching governance structures of the District will include the Synod, a District Policy Committee and a District Scrutiny Group. The Scrutiny Group will not itself be a decision making body, but will support the DPC by initially considering various governance matters and applications that the DPC will decide upon, enabling the DPC to maintain and concentrate on a missional focus.

The sub-functions and responsibilities of the District Hubs are now more defined, together with the ways in which they will work and who will participate in them (involving officers, groups and networks). The three District Hubs will provide the following support and resources for circuits:

1. **Administrative and Compliance Hub:** led by a lay District Secretary and supporting the efficient running of the District. Its functions will include EDI, Finance, Grants, Lay Employment, Property, Reconciliation & Complaints support, and Safeguarding.
2. **Mission and Leadership Hub:** led by the District Chair. It will promote Mission and Pioneering, including by connecting city, rural and other strands across Mission Areas. It will support outward facing activities such as Communications & Media, Education & Schools, Ecumenical and Inter/Multi-faith relationships, Public issues & theology and Social Responsibility, and World Church relationships. It will support Stationing, and the leadership of Superintendents.
3. **Ministry and Vocations Hub:** led by a lay or ordained District Secretary. It will support and network Candidates for Ministry, Chaplaincy, Children and Youth, Learning and Development, Local Preachers and Worship leaders, Methodist Women in Britain, Probationers and Under-5s, and Reflective Supervision.

Staffing:

There are a number of new key leadership roles in both the District Hubs and the Mission Areas, all of which are intended to operate in collaborative ways.

The Mission Area Lead and Deputy District Chair role description outline and person specification is almost complete (although subject to a wider Connexional review). This role is new and would be a key leadership role in the proposed North West Regional District, helping to connect the central district support and overall oversight of the regional District Chair with the circuits, and facilitating and enabling mission and pastoral and other relationships within a Mission Area. It will be fulfilled by an experienced presbyter in the Methodist Church.

Key to the 'Mission Area Lead and Deputy Chair' role will be the enabling of other leaders (ordained and lay) within the Area to develop, implement and evaluate circuit strategies for mission and ministry. This will be achieved through offering support, encouragement, advice, resources and information, facilitating networks of collaborative working and the sharing of good practice and learning.

Further work includes the development of the other new roles, the assimilating of roles already in place across the five districts, and recruitment processes.

Finance:

An initial consolidation of budgets and accounts for a single district will provide a starting point for relating the financial cost of the model to the resources available. The remaining unknowns around costs are being identified, but overall the intention is:

- To ensure that existing projects and other funding commitments are not compromised.
- That the model is not more expensive than the combined costs of the existing five districts. There should not be any additional financial burden on circuits due to the new District model.
- To find common processes and systems to provide a single financial platform that effectively releases resources for mission.