

Report of the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning

MC/22/37

Date of meeting	2-4 April 2022
Contact name and details	The Revd Loraine Mellor, Chair of the Task Group
Action required	For comment
Resolution	37/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	This report shares with the Council the work of the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning in advance of its report to the Conference this year.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments arising from Council and CLF discussion • Key areas of working being taken forward: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The map ○ Timeline ○ Connexional Leadership ○ Structures within Districts ○ Finance
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	MC/21/71 MC/22/24A
Consultations	Connexional Leaders' Forum

Summary of impact

Standing Orders	SO 426
Financial	Outlined in paragraph 12 (v)
Legal including impact on other jurisdictions	Specific jurisdictions including the Isle of Man and Channel Islands have been taken into consideration
Wider connexional	The work of the Task Group considers the future connexional framework
External, including ecumenical	Ecumenical issues have been considered during the course of this work
Risk	Risks and issues have been identified during Task Group meetings and conversations with the Council and the CLF with key comments and issues listed in the report. It is also important to note the risk of doing nothing which has been shared previously over a number of years eg Larger than Circuit report (2016 Conference).

Report of the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning

MC/22/37

- 1 This report shares with the Council the work of the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning in advance of its report to the Conference this year.

Background

- 2 The terms of reference for the Task Group were agreed by the Council in October 2021 (MC/21/71):

The overall aim of the Task Group is to work collaboratively with district groupings to identify structures which work connexionally, contextually and consensually in fulfilling *Our Calling*, reporting to the Methodist Council on any proposed changes to district structures under SO 401(2).

The Task Group will therefore work:

- To ensure that all Districts continue to engage in conversations alongside others about regional ways of working and to gather the outcomes of collaborative models of leadership and oversight;
 - To consider the outcomes and offer regional groups the emerging connexional framework for the future structure following approval of the structure by the Council;
 - To engage with the regional groups on their proposals for the future, and to offer feedback from a connexional viewpoint on what has been proposed (including budgetary considerations);
 - To work with District Chairs and other leaders to map the emerging connexional framework for the future structure and the process for change through to 2023/24;
 - To ensure that any proposed changes in district leadership or the purpose of a district are informed by other work on leadership (from the Faith and Order Committee, the Ministries Committee, and elsewhere);
 - To bring together thinking about other senior posts in Districts (Deputy Chairs, Assistant Chairs, "District Steward", "Senior Deacon", and others) and to work with Faith and Order and Law and Polity on future development of these roles and incorporation as necessary in the Standing Orders;
 - To report to the Council in April 2022 and to the 2022 Conference.
- 3 The membership of the Task Group is listed in the Appendix below. The membership of the group is composed so that there is a representative of each of the stationing regions (on which the regional conversations that are taking place were established).
 - 4 The Task Group has met four times, with a further two meetings planned up to the beginning of May.
 - 5 An update from the Task Group was also provided to the Council in January 2022 by the Secretary of the Conference (MC/22/24A). This update shared that:

"...we have moved towards a place where it is commonly envisaged that a smaller number of Connexional Leaders (ie, members of the Conference and the Connexional Leaders' Forum) who are Chairs might fruitfully share and coordinate the work of ordained and lay leaders within a region (some of whom would be District Chairs).

However, a similar pattern of both District and connexional leadership could be achieved by enlarging the Districts and freeing as far as possible each new District to organise its internal life in a way that met its regional needs and made good use of its resources; each of those enlarged Districts would be able to retain or not the existing District boundaries under a different nomenclature if it chose and to reconfigure all or some existing Chairs' posts into Assistant or Deputy Chair roles."

- 6 The report noted that this may be the way towards the lighter and more affordable structure at which

'Reaffirming Our Calling' points, but also that there is a considerable amount of work needing to be done before a proposal can be taken to the Conference along these lines. It noted some of the issues that had been raised.

- 7 The Council was then asked to indicate whether or not it is in favour of future work being done to reconfigure the existing Districts into larger Districts that approximately correspond to current regional groupings (the group anticipated that this would result in 12 to 14 Districts (including two (or three) island Districts, a single Synod in Wales/Cymru and one or two in Scotland and Shetland)).
- 8 The Council then agreed to direct the Task Group to begin detailed work as outlined in the report to reduce the number of Districts (resolution 24A/2). This report outlines how the detailed work will take place and what is to be reported to the Conference in the summer.

Comments arising from Council and CLF discussion

- 9 The Task Group has noted that there were some concerns arising from the Council discussion in January, which include the following:
 - Questions of representation to a much smaller Connexional Council and how the voice of some parts of the Connexion might not be heard.
 - A recognition that the reduction was mainly in England (possibly to as few as eight English Districts)
 - A number of concerns about the impact of geographically larger districts
 - Practicalities – distance to be covered
 - Sense of identity (and therefore the joy found in community) in a district being lost
 - Those on the periphery feeling isolated
 - Wellbeing of the Chair with huge responsibilities
 - The need to avoid greater complexity in structures between District and Circuit
 - A desire for greater detail about
 - Finance – how will savings be achieved in the way ahead for the work of re-shaping Districts
 - Support for Chairs/ shape of leadership teams in Districts
 - Hesitation from Districts that have undergone significant change in this century already (and note the number of stationing appointments in London and South-East)
 - May need to redraw lines more than simply bolt existing districts together
 - Whether this is radical enough.
- 10 Following this the Connexional Leaders' Forum then set aside a substantial portion of their online meeting in early March to reflect on the proposals the Council had agreed. Many of the points already raised by the Council were reiterated but amongst other points to note included the following:
 - Whilst accepting we have to change, there was a concern that the proposals will simply spread the same workload around a smaller group and therefore squash mission energy; it was suggested the new larger Districts could come in as an additional top layer for a defined period.
 - It was felt the explanation of how the change in district leadership would lead to both an improved connexional leadership as well as a local leadership had not been expressed clearly enough and this must be addressed; a new expression of the 'larger' District Chair's role is critical.
 - Overarching concerns that as a Church we had become so concerned with bureaucracy that we were suffocating the energy for the gospel that we so need.
 - Noting that having bigger areas will not address the lack of volunteers and what we need is to be clearer about those things that will no longer be done.
 - Concerns raised about the place of the various jurisdictions and how they often feel unsupported.
 - General agreement that nothing of what is being proposed will stop local churches closing and if any of the changes will be understood locally.
- 11 The Task Group will bear all of these points in mind as the work is taken forward.

Areas of work being taken forward

- 12 Based on what the Task Group has learned from regional conversations and District Mission plans, there are five areas to consider:

- i. The map – following the Council’s decision in January, the Task Group is now undertaking a mapping exercise that seeks to draw together the thinking arising from regional conversations. This will involve gathering information from District Policy Committees to ascertain if the region they have been having conversations in is the right one for future structures, and whether part of their District should be part of a different regional grouping.
- ii. Timeline – The Task Group is working on a timetable to present to the Conference for changes showing when the new district structure will finally be complete. Initial thinking is for this to be in place by 2027. The timeline will incorporate District Chair reinventions including a number that are coming in 2024.
- iii. Connexional Leadership– further work now has to be done on the changed nature of the role of the Chair in a larger District in order to offer clarity about their connexional facing strategic leadership with others (including the proposed Connexional Council). This work is being led by the Head of Ministries and will link back in with the work of Task Group.

This thinking will be done alongside the work on the make-up of the new Connexional Leaders Forum.

- iv. Structures within Districts - Although different models have emerged in different places, the task group reported to the Council that there were points of similarity and noted the importance of maintaining structures that enable the Church to function connexionally.

The Chair of the Task Group has carried out some research and consulted with a number of present or former Deputy or Assistant District Chairs. The present distinction between Deputy and Assistant Chairs within SO 426 largely depends on the method of recruitment: the former needing the endorsement of the Synod, the latter being an appointment by the Chair, albeit if it becomes public-facing then the approval of the District Policy Committee is required.

In future we will need to ensure that there are some broad and key functions for any role set out in Standing Orders, but also to allow for and ensure sufficient subsidiarity within different contexts for what might be required in those circumstances. Hopefully this would balance the need for and virtues of overall a connexional approach but also allow mission, focus and structure to be worked out in different contexts.

- v. Finance

The current assumption is that each of the new larger Districts will be funded for a full time Chair and a district allowance. The district allowances for Wales Cymru District would either reflect assistant roles or a second Chair Cymru and in the Scotland and the Shetland District the Shetland Superintendent. The uplift for the non-separated Chairs in the Channel Islands and Isle of Man would continue. A new allowance for each of the English Districts of between £30k and £60k (depending on the final number of Districts that are decided upon) would be introduced. This allowance would be to support leadership as each District sees fit (eg to fund Deputy Chair roles etc.).

The financial element also includes the ongoing contribution of the Connexional Team through the staff in the Learning Network which will need to flex to best support the new larger Districts. This work to be done with the Districts and the Team together.

The phasing of the reductions will be dependent on which existing Chairs move in to the new District Chair roles. Excluding Wales, Scotland and the Islands, based on the current position with re-inventions, there will be 12 existing Chairs in post by 2024/25 and 14 roles to be filled. This implies the savings could be delivered in full by 2024/25 as planned – however, further re-inventions could impact on this position.

Once the full effect of the savings is delivered (at any point from 2024/25 to 2026/27) the position will be as follows:

	Budget 2022/23	Proposed Budget
District Chair Costs	£1.264m	£0.942m

Reduction		£0.321m

- 13 The above will form the Task Group's report to the Conference in the summer and the Council is invited to make comment upon it.
- 14 The Council was directed by the Conference to receive reports on regional conversations and proposals on reconfiguration from the Task Group (resolution 30/11). The Task Group therefore proposes to proceed to develop a possible reconfiguration of Districts in consultation with regional groups, asking those groups to consider the shape of work in their region. The regional groups will be asked to work with the Task Group on proposals for the amalgamation or other reconfiguration of the Districts in the region to be implemented between 2024 and 2027.

*****RESOLUTION**

37/1. The Council receives the report.

Appendix

Members of the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning

Rachel Parkinson	District Chair
Stephen Lindridge	District Chair
Leslie Newton	District Chair
Helen Cameron	District Chair
Andrew de Ville	District Chair
Andrew Lunn	District Chair
Nigel Cowgill	District Chair
Carolyn Hothersall	Synod Secretary
Shelagh Morgan	Synod Secretary
Bala Gnanapragasam	Council member
Sandie Smith	Council member
Lorraine Mellor	Chair of the Task Group