

District Reviews

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| Status of Paper | Final |
| Action Required | Decision |
| Resolutions | 103/1. The Council receives the report. 103/2. The Council appoints the District Review Monitoring Group as detailed in Appendix 3 (to be tabled). |

Summary of Content

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| Subject and Aims | To present the Council with a proposal for how the work on District Reviews is to take place and to ask the Council to appoint the task group that will bring recommendations to the 2021 Conference. |
| Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function) | Methodist Conference 2020 – 25. Oversight & Trusteeship |

District Reviews

1. Having considered Agenda item 25 on Oversight and Trusteeship, the Methodist Conference in 2020 resolved that:

Resolution 25/6 - *The Conference directs the Secretary of the Conference to ensure that each District reviews its mission plan, committee structure and ways of working and considers its findings alongside other Districts in a regional grouping.*

Resolution 25/6a - *The Conference directs that within the process of reviewing mission plans, committee structures and ways of working at District Level, equality and diversity will be taken into consideration, and that any persons responsible for appointing new members to those committees will undertake Unconscious Bias related training.*

Resolution 25/7 - *The Conference directs the Council to appoint a task group to receive reports from regional groups and to report to the 2021 Conference with proposals for change from 2022 onwards.*

2. Furthermore, Standing Order 401(2) states that:

All proposals for the division or amalgamation of Districts or other changes in their composition shall be considered by the Methodist Council, which shall consult the Synods and Circuit Meetings involved, formulate a draft recommendation, obtain the resolutions of the Synods and Circuit Meetings on that draft and report those resolutions to the Conference with its own substantive recommendation.

3. This paper seeks to inform the Council of the proposed way this work will be addressed, and to request the Council to appoint the task group required by Resolution 25/7.
4. In preparing the report for the Conference, the intention behind these resolutions, which require Districts to converse with each other, was to determine the best structure and oversight to resources our circuits and fulfill *Our Calling*. A common refrain that we hear is that many places are struggling to find people to take on the roles that our present structures demand. The hope from this work is to end up with the most appropriate, flexible structure for the Church we are now and are likely to be in the years ahead.
5. Conversations on this subject are already underway in a number of Districts and these are listed in the Appendix below. It has been requested that guidelines or a framework is made available to assist Districts to undertake these reflections alongside others.
6. Therefore, a number of useful models are to be offered to assist Districts with this process. Some different models used in parts of our Connexion for mission planning or change management are listed in the Appendix below.
7. The issues to be covered in regional conversations are:
 - Knowing what we are doing well together
 - Analysing what we could be doing more of together (addressing particular areas of concern for the future)
 - Assessing the sustainability of the life of the District over the next period (taking into account finances, volunteers etc)
 - Identifying what 'groupings' with a region's conversations may be best taken forward.

8. Once such conversations have happened, a proposal will need to be made about the future by the regional group, to be shared with a connexional group who will offer feedback on what is proposed. This is to ensure that consideration has been given to the key issues, particularly about resource constraints. A process for how this takes place is offered below.

Processes for conversations and outcomes

9. We live in a time of constant change and the response to *Reaffirming Our Calling* will put us in a place where we are always open to doing things better. This will be true for our District structures as well as for other parts of our life, particularly as we recall the resolution passed by the Conference of 2016 that the district should undertake a review whenever a Chair's invitation or reinvitation was to be considered.
10. Having considered the above mentioned Conference resolutions, the following processes will now need to come into effect:
 - Three years before a reinvitation of a District Chair can be sought, on 1 September the Conference Office will remind the Synod that such reflections are required and preparations must take place for this to happen;
 - As the Conference has mandated that Districts must reflect with others about ways of working, no Districts will be allowed to re-advertise before the process is concluded;
 - The task group will ensure that conversations take place using the framework/guidelines mentioned above. This will involve the task group offering some feedback to the regional group on what is proposed;
 - The task group will then report on the outcome to the Council.

This effectively envisages that the task group whose creation was mandated by the Conference will need to have a continuing life or a successor body as the process of regular District reviews becomes embedded in our practice.

Task Group

11. The task group (as specified in resolution 25/7) will receive reports from regional groups and having considered them bring proposals to the 2021 Conference. Such proposals could include changes to District boundaries as well as District leadership structures, or timelines for further conversations. Terms of Reference are offered to the Council for how the task group is to operate:

Terms of Reference for Task Group for Regional Conversations (to be known as The District Review Monitoring Group)

- To ensure that all Districts engage in conversations alongside others about regional ways of working, and that the areas in paragraph 7 above have been considered.
- To offer regional groups guidance and frameworks for conversations to take place using best practice (arranging meetings to be supported by Connexional Team staff)
- To receive reports from regional groups on proposals for the future, and to offer feedback from a connexional viewpoint on what has been proposed.
- No later than March 2021, to report to the Council on the outcome of the conversations of regional groups making recommendations for the Conference of 2021 for change to take place in 2022.
- To present to the Council proposals for how a successor body will continue to oversee District regional conversations beyond 2021-22.

12. It is suggested that the group should seek to be representative but be of a small enough size to complete the work efficiently. It is suggested that the group be of no more than five people. A list of names and reasoned statements will be tabled at the Council.

Invitations requiring immediate attention

13. There is a number of District Chairs' invitations that end in 2022. It is therefore proposed that in those Districts a short term appointment is sought noting that changes to District boundaries and structures are possible in the future. In some cases this could be a two year appointment of an interim nature to manage and prepare the District for change. In other cases this could be a discernment process where a reinvitation could be sought after a couple of years. The Secretary of the Conference has written to all Districts inviting them to work with the Conference Office on the most appropriate timing for the discernment process given the work detailed in this paper.

***RESOLUTION

103/1. The Council receives the report.

103/2. The Council appoints the District Review Monitoring Group as detailed in Appendix 3 (to be tabled).

Appendix 1

Summary of 'regional grouping' conversations

| Name | Districts involved | Summary |
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| NW& Mann | Lancashire Bolton & Rochdale Manchester & Stkp Chester & Stoke Liverpool Isle of Man Cumbria | Ideas are emerging that are now being taken to each DPC to ascertain if there is a mandate for further work to start in late autumn. |
| West Midlands | Birmingham Wolves & Shrews | JH arranged the second meeting of reps to take forward thinking around what is possible. |
| East Midlands | Northampton Nottingham & Derby Lincolnshire | |
| South West | Plymouth & Exeter Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Bristol Southampton Channel Islands | DMS speaking to Chairs about a facilitated conversation about what may be the best way ahead for mission in these areas. |
| Wales | Wales Cymru | Conversation stalled following concerns about finances. Cymru looking at future options as a Circuit of the Wales Synod. JH & DMS part of meeting with Chairs in late August. |

Districts not yet involved in conversations we are aware of:

Darlington
Newcastle
Scotland & Shetland
London
South East
East Anglia
Sheffield
Yorkshire North & East
Yorkshire West
Beds, Essex & Herts

Appendix 2

Resources for mission planning and change management

- Ronald Heifetz: The Practice of Adaptive Leadership (Cambridge Leadership Association, 2009)
- Simon Sinek: Find Your Why (Penguin, 2017)
- Frederic Laloux: Reinventing Organisations (Nelson Parker, 2014)
- Diocese of Oxford: Parish Planning Tool
- Linda and Dean Anderson: Beyond Change Management (Pfeiffer, 2001)

Some classics:

- John C Maxwell: How Successful People Think: Change Your Thinking, Change Your Life (Center Street, 2009)
- John P Kotter: Leading Change (Harvard Business Review Press, 2012)

Some helpful assessment tools:

- Tony Morgan: The Unstuck Church (Thomas Nelson, 2017)
- Robert Warren: The Healthy Church's Handbook (Church House Publishing, 2012)

One model is the SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) model¹, which is offered as a more positive alternative to the SWOT model (which focuses on threats and can often produce a negative result. The SOAR model could be used in the following way, with the third column including some suggestions for how conversations might take place among Districts considering regional ways of working:

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| Strengths | What are our greatest strengths and assets? What works here? What do we do well? | What are the greatest strengths and assets of the Districts? What works here? What do we do well? |
| Opportunities | What are the opportunities? What are the best things out there for us? What can we do differently? | What are the opportunities for regional working? What different models are available to us? What can we do differently? |
| Aspirations | What do we aspire to be? What is our collective intention? What is our desired future? | What do we aspire to be as a Church? What is our collective intention (amongst the Districts) |

¹ Adapted from the Thin Book of SOAR: building strengths based strategy by Jackie Stavros and Gina Hinrichs, and as shared by AI essentials www.appreciatingpeople.co.uk

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| | | represented)? What is our desired future for how we fulfil <i>Our Calling</i> ? |
| Results | What are our resources? What are the measurable results? What do we need to get there? How will we know we've got there? | What are our resources in Districts and also across a regional setting? (Assets, finances, people) How we will know if we have achieved our aspirations? What do we need to get there? |