Reshaping Yorkshire Districts

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Helen Cameron Assistant Secretary of the Conference asc@methodistchurch.org.uk
Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	For decision
Resolutions	78/1. The Council recommends to the Conference that following a full consultation of the Circuits of the four Yorkshire Districts and voting in the District Synods required by SO 401(2) that the four Yorkshire Districts should be reconfigured to three. 78/2. The Council recommends to the Conference that the names of the three Yorkshire Districts should be: • Yorkshire North & East (the former York & Hull District + Pateley Bridge + Nidd Valley circuits) • Yorkshire West (the former West Yorkshire District + Leeds (South & West) + Leeds (North & East) + Aire & Calder + Wharfedale & Aireborough circuits) • Sheffield 78/3. The Council recommends that shared and federated working between the Districts will continue to be reviewed and expanded as appropriate. 78/4. The Council recognises that other boundaries between the District and Districts bordering on the three Yorkshire Districts may need to be reviewed at a later stage.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	Reporting to the Methodist Council the outcomes of the Circuit and District consultations of the 4 Yorkshire Districts.
Main Points	The 4 Districts should reduce to 3 New names for the Districts are proposed
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	Previous Report to the Methodist Council, MC/16/88
Consultations	With the Circuits and Synods of the Leeds District, the York & Hull District, the West Yorkshire District and Sheffield District.

Introduction

Following permission from the Methodist Council in April 2016 the consultation process with the Circuits and Districts of the four Yorkshire Districts (Leeds, Sheffield, West Yorkshire, and York and Hull) concerning a possible reshaping from four Districts to three has taken place. The Steering Group, working with the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, undertook a consultation process with all of the Circuits of the four Districts in June and July 2016. The considerable feedback from the Circuits was taken into account and a report produced which was presented to the four District Synods on 10 September 2016 and is detailed below. A scrutiny group, on behalf of the Council, (Professor David Matthews and the Revd Cathy Gale) verified that the views expressed in the feedback from individuals and Circuits was fully represented in the final report before it was presented to the Synods on 10 September 10 2016.

Report on the Consultation on Reshaping the Yorkshire Districts presented to the District Synods on 10 September

Background

In approaching this task the Steering Group took account of documents that had been produced over a period of approximately ten years. These documents recorded a variety of discussions and reflections that had previously been undertaken by Synods, District Policy Committees and various groups and officers across the Districts with regard to the shape of the Yorkshire Districts and the most effective ways of working across the Region. These included the feedback obtained during the "Regrouping for Mission" and "Larger than Circuit" initiatives.

Note was also taken of papers written by two of the current District Chairs on reorganisation and federated working which had been considered by District Policy Committees during 2015/16.

The Steering Group took particular account of the experience of the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network within the Yorkshire Plus Region and the current sharing of resources and expertise across the region in safeguarding, finance and administration. It also considered how the experience of "Regrouping for Mission" could be applied specifically to the existing Yorkshire Districts structure, reflecting on the challenging journeys which had already been undertaken by many Circuits in the region.

It should also be noted that the non-appointment of a District Chair to the Leeds District in August 2015 was a further catalyst for this piece of work. It was recognised within that District that, for a number of reasons, its viability was in question and the four Districts were therefore encouraged by connexional officers to continue the ongoing reflection regarding the future of the Yorkshire Districts. The appointment of a Chair to the Leeds District for one year only has necessitated a speedy approach to this piece of work but given all that has been said above it is simply the culmination of many years of reflection.

Summary of work done by Steering Group

Standing Order (400A) gives the primary purpose for the District as '*to advance the mission of the Church in the region, by providing opportunities for Circuits to work together and support together and support each other, by offering them resources of finance, personnel and expertise which may not be available locally and by enabling them to engage with the wider society of the region as a whole and address its concerns'.*

From the beginning, the Steering Group agreed that the special relationship which exists in Yorkshire means that it is natural for the Methodist Church in Yorkshire to work closely together. However, it was noted that working together as one Yorkshire District would lose many of the advantages of localism which were welcomed as part of the 'Larger than Circuit' review, and that this radical suggestion had not been supported by any District in the feedback from the Larger than Circuit consultation.

A number of scenarios were considered:

a) Proposals for one Chair and co-Chairs were reviewed and rejected as not providing the most useful model for Yorkshire Methodism. As indicated above, such a scenario had not received any support in the Larger than Circuit consultations. However, the existing District Chairs had met with the Chairs of the London District in December 2013 to hear about their ways of working and give careful thought to whether this might work in Yorkshire. The consensus of opinion after this meeting had been that creating one large Yorkshire District with a team of Co-Chairs was not a scenario that could be seen to work, given the diversity of contexts embraced within the county and the geography involved. The Steering Group therefore felt that this option should not be given further consideration at this stage.

b) Maintaining the status quo. This option was considered, despite the fact that the Leeds District had already placed its future in question. In reflecting upon this option, the Steering Group considered that in order for a District to be viable and have sufficient resources there needs to be a critical mass of somewhere between eight to twelve circuits, recognising that circuits differ greatly in size. The declining numbers in many Districts and the struggles to find individuals willing to fulfil district roles, led us to believe that maintaining the status quo would not display careful stewardship of the resources available to us across the four Districts.

c) Reordering to reduce the number of Districts in Yorkshire As a consequence of the above reflections, it was considered that reducing from four to three Districts would enable a more efficient and effective use of resources and therefore provide better support for circuits and local churches as they seek to engage in mission in their local contexts. Careful consideration was given to existing cross district boundary relationships, ecumenical relationships, local authority areas and strategic links in relation to rural and urban ministry.

d) Should change be implemented in 2017 or deferred to 2018? Whilst recognising that bringing about change in 2017 would undoubtedly feel rushed to some within the Districts, the fact that conversations had been ongoing for some years prompted the Steering Group to recommend that any agreed change should be implemented at the earliest opportunity to avoid the need for further temporary changes of leadership within the Leeds District. Also, deferring changes to the later date might result in changes taking place when two of three District Chairs were new or relatively new in post.

Reordering the Districts could also enhance some natural links for the mission of the Districts, such as those between Leeds/Huddersfield/Bradford, and ecumenical working in the Ripon sector of the West Yorkshire & the Dales Diocese which includes the Pateley Bridge circuit. It was also recognised that the level of shared and federated work which currently exists should continue and as necessary be expanded. Such federated working currently includes stationing, joint lay employee appointments, candidating processes, and training courses being offered at strategic venues across the region and open to all rather than being district-centred.

Timeline

March 2016 The initial report from the Steering Group which had been produced after some consultation with the Leeds District Leadership Team was circulated to members of the four DPCs. Attached were maps showing current and proposed District boundaries, statistics regarding membership and ministry within the Districts and the paper on federated working written by the Revd Dr Roger Walton. DPCs were asked to comment and feedback was assessed prior to a report to the March meeting of the Four Yorkshire Districts.

April 2016 Leeds Synod had an initial discussion of the proposals. The work of the Steering Group was reported to the West Yorkshire Synod; and to the Sheffield Synod where the opportunity for questions and discussion offered but not taken up.

April 2016 Advice was received from the Assistant Secretary of the Conference as to how the process needed to continue in order to achieve the proposed deadline:

- Invite all circuits to consider the proposals in June/July 2016
- Prepare a report on the feedback
- Submit the report to a Scrutiny Group of the Methodist Council

- Circulate finalised report to Representative Synods which would vote on the proposals in September 2016
- Assistant Secretary of the Conference to make recommendation to the October Council based on the feedback from the Synods

The feedback from the consultation is available from the Conference Office.

Tables showing membership & ministry numbers (2015 returns)

District	Members	Circuits	Circuit Ministers
Sheffield	6947	8	38.95
W Yorks	6098	9	43.5
Leeds	5979	6	40.5
York & Hull	7769	13	48

If reconfigured as proposed

District	Members	Circuits	Circuit Ministers
Sheffield	6947	8	38.95
Yorkshire West	10922	13	77
Yorkshire N & E	8924	15	55

The voting figures from the District Synods were as follows:

To note:

1.The Leeds Synod did not undertake a count in relation to Recommendations 2, 3, & 4
2. The West Yorkshire Synod engaged in considerable conversation about the proposed new names for the 3 Districts. The Minute of the Synod indicates as follows;

"Recommendation 2 – that the new Districts be known as Yorkshire North & East, Yorkshire West, Sheffield

There was discussion about the names and following the voting suggestions were made to be passed to the Steering Group/Methodist Council.

Voting: For 5 Against 62 Abstentions 16

Suggestion: That the word North be removed from **any** District name/description as parts of North Yorkshire are in the proposed boundaries of Yorkshire West. (62 For, 3 Against, 18 Abstentions)

A suggested name of Leeds & Pennine was voted upon and the vote was not carried (17 For, 44 Against, 22 Abstentions)

Acceptance of Yorkshire West as the name – 61 For, 9 Against, 13 Abstentions".

RECOMMENDATION 1	**F**	**A**	**Ab**	**(concerning the reduction from 4 to 3 Districts)**
LEEDS	74	2	3	
SHEFFIELD	83	2	3	
WEST YORKSHIRE	72	5	6	
YORK & HULL	117	5	3	

RECOMMENDATION 2	**F**	**A**	**Ab**	**(concerning the names of the new Districts)**
LEEDS		0		79 present and voting
SHEFFIELD	85	2	1	
WEST YORKSHIRE	5	62	16	
YORK & HULL	121	0	4	

RECOMMENDATION 3	**F**	**A**	**Ab**	**(concerning ways of working together)**
LEEDS		0		79 present and voting
SHEFFIELD	88	0	0	
WEST YORKSHIRE	83	0	0	
YORK & HULL	124	1	0	

RECOMMENDATION 4	**F**	**A**	**Ab**	**(concerning future reviews)**
LEEDS		0		79 present and voting
SHEFFIELD	87	0	1	
WEST YORKSHIRE	70	3	10	
YORK & HULL	120	2	3	

*****RESOLUTIONS**

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78/2. The Council recommends to the Conference that the names of the three Yorkshire Districts should be:

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- **Sheffield**

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