

Report from the Strategy and Resources Committee

The Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) has several matters to report to the Council and a number of recommendations, most of which are in accompanying papers in the agenda.

1. The Committee received a report from the Connexional Secretary on discussions with the Warden of the Methodist Diaconal Order about accommodation for the Order at Methodist Church House (MCH). A mutually satisfactory solution had been agreed.
2. Regarding redevelopment and maintenance at MCH, the Committee was pleased to hear that the tender for the work had been received which was within the resources already available in the Long Term Renewals Fund to the MCH Management Committee and that there was no need for the SRC to arrange any further funding as directed by the Council in January 2015 (Resolution 4/3).
3. The Committee was informed that The Church of Scotland would be joining the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) for a trial period of one year from March 2015. One member of its staff would be part of the JPIT team.
4. The results of a Connexional Team Staff Satisfaction Survey were reported to the Committee. These showed a very positive response from those working for the Council. The general conclusion was that the Methodist Council (on behalf of the Methodist Church) is a good employer and that the staff are on the whole well satisfied.
5. The Committee received a report from the Network Committee. The Committee noted the planned expenditure for maintenance at the Queen's Foundation and Cliff College and that the property in Somerset Road (near the Queen's Foundation) had been purchased and that plans for its renovation and redevelopment were in hand. Income is being generated from The Wesley (MIC) and from the Guy Chester Centre. Through the MIC trading company a portfolio of property projects is being developed.
6. The Committee agreed to make recommendations to the Council concerning the Review of the CPF Levy Policy in respect of replacement projects (see paper MC/15/48).
7. The Committee received a report on the review of the Council's Pay Scales and Grading process. It recommended the report and the proposed changes to the Council. It agreed that it was appropriate for the pay scales and grading review to include a review of the Lay Employees Pension Scheme in respect of the employer's commitment in relation to future service (see paper MC/15/41).
8. The Committee received a report on the Valuation of the Pension and Assurance Scheme for Lay Employees of the Methodist Church (PASLEMC). The SRC made a recommendation to the Council (see paper MC/15/31).
9. A report was received about the Management Charges levied on ring fenced funds for which the Council is responsible and which are managed by the Team. It agreed a new, more equitable methodology for such charges, the resulting income still going to the MCF.

10. The Committee received the 2015-18 three year draft budget. The Finance Sub-committee (FSC) had previously spent considerable time discussing this and had recommended it to the SRC. After discussion the SRC endorsed the budget and made recommendations to the Council (see paper MC/15/42).
11. The Committee received a report about developing a strategy for World Church Relationships as regards partners, programmes and finance and recommended that further discussion was necessary including at the Council (see paper MC/15/44).
12. The Committee received an interim report from the Head of the Mission and Advocacy cluster on the organisation of the cluster.
13. The SRC wishes to report to the Council on its ongoing oversight of the Connexional Team as required in SO 213(5A).

At each meeting of the SRC the main agenda items naturally have involved much routine work by the Team which is either directly from a particular cluster or in support of a connexional body. The standard of such work is consistently good and the Team is open to challenge and advice from the SRC.

There is always an agenda item for a report from the Senior Leadership Group (SLG) and the opportunity for any problems to be discussed or issues raised where advice is sought. In recent months the SRC has been asked how best to proceed in recruiting for the Fresh Expressions post, how to develop increased diversity within the Team, how to initiate and carry out a staff satisfaction survey and for support for managing the Mission and Advocacy cluster when there was no cluster head for several months.

In the development of the annual budgets there is always a challenging meeting between the senior finance staff, the heads of clusters and the members of the Finance Sub-Committee. This is an opportunity where the performance, commitment and understanding of the team (not only the finance staff) can be assessed in depth.

At each meeting of the SRC there is an agenda item where only the voting members are present ie not the members of the SLG. Here is the opportunity for confidential matters of concern to be raised. Since this was introduced over one year ago there has been no matter of concern raised about the performance of the Team.

The SRC therefore reports to the Council that the Team is performing well and carrying out the work expected of it by the Connexion.

14. The Committee considered the use of the money in the Connexional Priority Fund (CPF) available in excess of the reserve level, taking note of the discussion at the Council in January 2015. The planned budget expenditure over the 3 years under this heading is £5M.
 - a) The SRC recommends that £3M is allocated for grants for use in districts, circuits and local churches. These should be for projects to engage in mission, discipleship and church growth or for the support of local ministry (lay or ordained) where there is a genuine missional need for current work to be developed in order to see church growth. The SRC recommends that applications are made to the Connexional Grants Committee (CGC) for these grants. It is expected that the CGC will interpret its Mission and Ministry criteria flexibly so that local projects will be considered whose potential impact is larger than

local. It is also expected that applications may include property projects (including environmental friendly projects) if they fulfil the missional imperative.

- b) The SRC recommends that up to £0.5M is allocated to the ONE Programme depending upon the outcome of a current review of that programme.
- c) The SRC recommends that up to £1M is allocated for the development of a Professional Property Advisory Service for the Connexion. This will entail further work by the SRC.
- d) The SRC recommends that up to £0.5M is allocated for developing mission projects. This will depend upon the outcome of current work such as that on Fellowship Groups before decisions can be made.

As can be seen, items b) to d) are dependent on further work and will be considered over the next 2-3 years by the SRC. It may be therefore that further funding becomes available for item a) during this period.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

29/1. The Council receives the report.

29/2. The Council accepts the recommendations in paragraph 14.

Costs and practical arrangements for Ministers from overseas serving within the Methodist Church

1. Background

The Methodist Church has long benefited from ministers from partner churches overseas coming to share their gifts and graces by serving it in an authorised capacity. The SRC received a paper outlining some of the legal and financial practicalities behind this process.

The Methodist Church is an A-rated sponsor under the Home Office Points Based System which enables individuals to be sponsored from overseas under Tier 2 (Minister of Religion) and Tier 5 (Religious Worker) and Tier 5 (Charity Worker). The sponsorship licence is primarily used for bringing Ministers from partner churches to serve the British Church under the Transfer process.

2. Financial Implications

In accordance with the current policy, the visa fees for the entry and first renewal are paid from connexional funds for a minister coming to Britain from overseas; the visa fees would also be covered for a spouse and two children. This will cover a five year appointment. Over the last five years the cost to the Methodist Church Fund (MCF) has increased from £10,700 to £42,700 per annum. The trend is for a continuing increase of around 20% per annum, plus additional requirements relating to English language, immunisation certificates, NHS access etc. These amounts are reflected in the draft budget being proposed to the Council.

If the minister continues in the appointment beyond the five year period, the costs are not met from connexional funds. The individual minister would be expected to cover the costs of these visa fees for themselves and his/her family. It is made clear to the minister beforehand that they are liable for the costs, so expectations can be managed. There are occasions where the District or Circuit offer to fund the visa fees. This could be seen as inequitable to both the individual minister and also the receiving Circuit, and could have an influence on stationing if a Circuit or District has to anticipate a visa fee bill in addition to the normal change of appointment costs.

The SRC was made aware that there are various policies and arrangements in place relating to the cost of ministers, their families and their possessions eventually returning home. The different status of ministers who have been Authorised to Serve (under SO 733), Recognised and Regarded (under SO 732) or received into Full Connexion (under SO 731) also affects the arrangements – something often not acknowledged by ministers or circuits.

The SRC discussed the subject at some length and agreed to recommend that the Council should instruct the Ministries Committee to initiate work on the important policy matters that should determine these arrangements in the future.

3. Recommendations to the Council

The Committee noted the request for an increase in budget relating to ongoing incremental increases in immigration fees.

The Committee passed the following Resolutions:

- 15/1. The Committee recommended an increase of 20% to be applied incrementally over the next 3 years in the Central Services budget for immigration fees and that the increase shall be 20% of the 2013/14 immigration expenditure figure.**
- 15/2. The Committee endorsed the existing policy that no connexional funds will be used to fund the renewal of their visa fees if they continue in an appointment beyond the initial 5-year period. (The minister is responsible for them, but it is noted that circuits and districts may choose to contribute.)**
- 15/3. The Committee confirmed that it considers it reasonable to expect the minister to fund the costs of returning to their home country following completion of his/her appointment.**

The Committee had an extensive conversation about a number of issues relating to Ministers from overseas serving the Methodist Church. In consequence it made the following additional Resolution for presentation to the Council

- 15/4. The Committee recommends to the Council that the Ministries Committee oversee a review of the practices and policies relating to Ministers of Religion coming to Britain from overseas for whom the Methodist Church is sponsor under the Home Office Points Based System, with the aim of formulating a coherent and comprehensive policy relating to such ministers serving in the British Connexion.**

To this end the review should include the following issues:

- a) Visa fees and their renewal; initial settlement costs; costs relating to extending and changing appointments; costs relating to returning to a sending Conference.
- b) An assessment of the impact of receiving ministers on sending Conferences and receiving circuits.
- c) The expectations of ministers and circuits.
- d) The significance of receiving ministers in relationship to the development of other personnel exchange programmes overseen by the World Church Relations Team.
- e) Reflection on the need to hold together the numbers of incoming ministers, the needs of the Church and the consequential budgetary implications.

The Ministries Committee should report, with recommendations as necessary, to the Council as soon as possible, but not later than January 2017.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 29/3. The Council directs the Ministries Committee to oversee a review of the practices and policies relating to Ministers of Religion coming to Britain from overseas for whom the Methodist Church is sponsor under the Home Office Points Based System, with the aim of formulating a coherent and comprehensive policy relating to such ministers serving in the British Connexion.**