

44. Oversight and Trusteeship

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Section A: Introduction

1. This report updates the Conference and asks for further direction on proposed reforms which have been discussed by the Conference over recent years. As in the 2021 Conference, this report seeks to hold together pieces of work which have been undertaken by different groups both in recognition of the overlap and interrelated effects between them and in order to see this whole piece of work as a response to the calling of the Church to live out its discipleship in worship and mission in the present age. This has been and continues to be a lengthy and complex process, but one which is vital if the Church is to respond effectively to the challenges of the mid-21st century.
2. For the Church, these challenges have been shaped by three considerations. The first has been the fact of the Church's numerical decline. As has been noted in many places, the numbers in the last decade were stark – between 2011 and 2019, the reported membership of the Connexion fell by a quarter. That headline figure was underscored by the difficulties that all parts of the Connexion experienced, in different ways, in sustaining effective structures, processes and activities with diminishing resources of people, energy, and money. The difficulties are, of course, self-perpetuating, as various demands to continue to do what we believe we need to continue to do reduce the resources available to engage in the outward-facing missional activities through which, not only might numerical decline be reversed, but the Church might also be renewed with a greater sense of fidelity to its calling. The proposals in this report and its predecessors, therefore, cannot be understood except in the context of a Church committed to the God for All strategy to be a growing, evangelistic, inclusive, and justice-seeking church.
3. The second consideration has been a recognition that working towards such a strategy might require forms and patterns of leadership which are different from those which the Church has inherited. The concept of 'leadership' is contested; academic work in recent decades has proliferated which is itself both a sign and a cause of the variety of ways in which the concept is understood. Nevertheless, as is explored in the section of this report on District Reviews, there has been a general consensus that the Connexion needs leaders who have a clear vocation to strategic and missional leadership, who work collegially with lay and ordained colleagues, and who are enabled to focus on Our Calling through being adequately supported and resourced. In working from this premise, those who were entrusted with bringing the recommendations in this report are also aware that connexional leadership in the Methodist Church is exercised by the Conference and the Council and Committees to which it gives particular responsibilities, within which through prayerful conferring the will of God is sought and decisions are made. A critical concern in all the work reported here is to enable all the bodies of the Church to become more effective in exercising leadership, usually by reducing some of the complexity that has developed over the decades.
4. Not all of the development of complexity has been the work of the Church. A key element in this work has been the need to respond to different statutory provisions and, more broadly, different societal expectations that have developed in recent decades. The decision of the 2021 Conference to raise the minimum number of members of a Local Church was designed in part to meet this challenge as in so many places local trustees complained of the difficulty of finding sufficient people and/or time and energy fully to comply with regulatory expectations. The key central proposal to reduce the number of connexional charity trustees and to make the Connexional Council rather than the Conference the Church's Trustee Body under the Charities Act arose from a recognition that the

expectations of charity trustees cannot easily or (when needed) swiftly be met by a body of 306 persons meeting once a year and changing every year.

5. This report is the latest in a series of reports to the Conference on this subject. It is not intended to be the last, in part because some of the work that the Conference directed has proved to be more complicated and time consuming than was imagined in 2021 and in part because the changes that are proposed in this report will inevitably require further consideration both by working parties and through the formal processes of consultation required for changes to be made to the Deed of Union and the Model Trusts. This report, therefore, proposes changes to the Conference from 2024, a replacement for the Council in 2024, an evolving revision of the committee structure from 2024 onwards, and a series of reconfigurations of Districts from 2024 to 2027. In this way, the Conference is asked to authorise changes that will be made with due care but which will be sufficiently radical to enable the Church to be more effective in living out Our Calling within the resources, opportunities and expectations of the mid-21st century.

Section B: *Our Calling* and Council objectives

The 2021 Conference resolved:

*30/2. The Conference adopted *Our Calling* as the primary strategic driver for the Church's work.*

30/3. The Conference affirmed the Methodist Council objectives as set out in paragraph 2.8.

6. The 2021 Conference report contained a full retelling of the journey of *Our Calling* and its ongoing importance in the life of the Methodist Church, reminding the Conference that in 2000 the Conference agreed that the calling of the Methodist Church is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. Giving clarity to the role of *Our Calling* in the life of the Church, the 2021 Conference adopted the statement as the primary strategic driver for the Church's work.
7. Work has therefore been undertaken in the past year to ensure the focus is in continuing to communicate the main *Our Calling* statement rather than only stressing the four 'areas' of *Our Calling* as had become practice in places. Ensuring that the statement has appeared on posters, in various print material, on the website, in email, and in many other places is just the tip of the iceberg in an ongoing focus on this driver. *Our Calling* will continue to be a main focus in our communications moving forward as well as remaining central to the process of prioritising work and the use of resources.
8. Since its inception in 2000, the use of *Our Calling* has been supported through resources provided connexionally. The Connexional Team continues to welcome feedback on ways of focusing on *Our Calling* that the wider Connexion would find useful.
9. Over the last year the Council has continued to focus on its priorities as it has carried out the work given to it by the Conference. The objectives have enabled clear reporting from the Connexional Team in the work it is charged to carry out by the Council itself.

Proclaiming the gospel through worship and promoting the ministry of the whole people of God.

Building a church for all people; an inclusive church, diverse, welcoming, and reaching out to the marginalised in society.

Being God's church in God's world; striving for justice and peace and resourcing work and programmes which transform individuals and communities; changes to embody the Kingdom of God.

Having an Evangelism and Growth strategy (**God for All**), equipping Methodists to be people confident in evangelism and church planting and pioneering.

Resourcing the Church; the use of God's gifts (people, money, and property) effectively; and to develop oversight and leadership functions appropriate to the Methodist Church for the stewardship of resources for the mission of the church at all levels.

Responding to the gospel in partnership in Britain and overseas and playing a part in the transformation of the world.

10. The Council will continue to use these objectives as it takes forward its responsibilities and any work the Conference chooses to give to it. As reported elsewhere in this Agenda¹, the Council has also sought this year to respond to Notice of Motion 112 (2021) which asked it to think about the cumulative impact of all work it was sending to the Conference.
11. If the Conference approves the work outlined in creating the Connexional Council and its main committees there will be work undertaken in the year ahead as to how the Council objectives dovetail into the new structure and the need for new work planning mechanisms.

***RESOLUTION

44/1. The Conference received sections A and B of the Report.

Section C: The Constitution of the Conference

The 2021 Conference resolved:

30/9. *The Conference directs that the Council appoints a group to undertake further work to review the constitution of the Conference and its ways of working, and to report with recommendations to the 2022 Conference.*

12. A requirement for a quinquennial review of the size of the Conference is laid upon the Church by SO 100(2). The Conference in 2020 linked that periodic review with the work to review the oversight and trusteeship arrangements of the Connexion and a working party was established to report to the Council in April 2021. The Council felt that the review of the numbers of the Conference did not go far enough. The 2021 Conference endorsed this, receiving by resolution 30/8 the report of the working party, but also by resolution 30/9 directing that further work be done.
13. As directed, the Council appointed a smaller task group (building on the work of the previous year) which brought the following report to the April 2022 Council. The Council agreed to recommend to the Conference the changes proposed below:
14. **The purpose of the Conference**
The primary purpose of the Conference is to engage in Christian conferring in order to discern the will of God and then to formulate and oversee ways in which the whole Connexion can respond to that will.²
15. **The Current Constitution of the Conference**
The current number of full voting members (306) of the Conference is determined in SO 100; clause 14 of the Deed of Union specifies that at least half of the 306 must be lay persons and SO 100 specifies that at least 14 of the 306 must be deacons (including the Warden). The composition of the Conference is further specified as follows:
 - a. Ex-officio members specifically named in clause 14 of the Deed of Union (the three-year

¹ Methodist Council report part 2 Section H.

² As adopted by the Conference of 2006. The full statement on the Purpose of the Methodist Conference is included at Annex A.

Presidency, the Secretary, the Chairs of District, the Warden of the MDO, the President and Secretary of the Irish Conference, two other persons appointed by each of the Irish Conference and the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, and two persons chosen from among the associate members appointed by other Churches);

- b. Conference-elected representatives (the number of them is set in SO 101 as nine);
 - c. Representatives of the Methodist Youth Assembly (under SOs 102 and 250 these are currently the Youth President and three others elected by the Assembly);
 - d. Ex-officio members specified in SO 101 (the Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice, the Record Secretary, the Journal Secretary, the Convener of the Memorials Committee, and the Chair of the Business Committee);
 - e. Ex-officio members specified in SO 102 (the Chairs of the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee, the Connexional Treasurer, the Connexional Secretaries (currently one), a commissioned forces chaplain, two persons serving overseas, six persons representing EDI interests and one representative of the Faith and Order Committee, of the Law and Polity Committee, of the Stationing Committee and of Methodist Women in Britain respectively);
 - f. Persons elected by the Synods (making up the remainder of the 306) – currently around 224 (73%).
16. SO 105 further specifies that district seats are to be allocated in proportion to the membership in each District except that:
- a. Each District in England and Wales is entitled to a minimum of four representatives;
 - b. Two island Districts (Channel Islands and the Isle of Man) are each entitled to two representatives; and
 - c. Scotland and Shetland share an allocation of six representatives.
- At present, three Districts (Cymru, Bolton and Rochdale, and Cumbria) have only the minimum of four elected members whilst the largest District (London) elects twenty representatives.
17. In addition to the full members, there are currently six ecumenical associate members and eighteen associate members representing partner churches overseas.

Considerations relating to the size of the Conference

18. The Methodist Conference should be sufficient in size to fulfil its responsibilities as a place of conferring, of oversight and as a governing body. How representative does the Conference need to be to exercise its role of ‘adopting formal policies and legislation’³? For example, would it be sufficient for the elected members of the Conference to be one presbyter and one lay person from each District (plus an appropriate number of deacons)? If so, the present requirements of the Deed of Union would require membership of the Conference to be somewhere between 160 and 180. Given the policies of the church on equality, diversity and inclusion and the need for the Districts to be, and to feel to be, properly represented the question remains as to what an appropriate number of representatives might be.
19. Currently ex officio members hold 27% of the seats in the Conference. Because more ex-officio seats are held by presbyters than by lay people, and because the Chairs of District must be presbyters, just over 60% of the presbyters in the Conference are elected by the District Synods whereas over 80% of both deacons and lay members are Synod-elected. If there is a wish to reduce the size of the Conference, there is a significant challenge around managing the balances between ministers and lay people and between ex-officio and elected members. It seems clear that the smaller the Conference becomes, the more difficult it is to ensure that the Districts make up a reasonable part of the voting membership of the Conference. This report does not

³ Review of the Conference, 2006, paragraph 4

recommend a change to the current position of retaining a 50% balance of lay and ordained persons within the membership of the Conference.

20. What number below the present membership of 306 is the appropriate size of the Conference, and what should be the criteria for making that decision? To what degree would the Conference be less representative if the largest Districts had only the same number of representatives as the smallest? It is believed that the original intention at Methodist Union in 1932 was that there should be around one member of the Conference for 1000 members of the Church (although this has rarely been achieved in practice). That approach would give a Conference of around 170 members at present. On that model most Districts could probably have three (one presbyter and two lay) elected representatives (plus the Chair) with perhaps ten seats at most being distributed on the basis of membership in the Districts.
21. In 2021 the Conference adopted the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity (JDS) Strategy, helping move the Church to work in ways which reflect the inclusive nature of God's love. A tension exists when trying to make a body smaller and yet retain or increase its ability to be representative of the diversity of the Church. Standing Order 417(2) requires members of District Synods, when electing representatives to the Conference, to 'have regard for the composition of the membership of the District as a whole with regard to age, sex and ethnic origin.' In most Districts this Standing Order is read or printed, but unless the list of those standing for election is genuinely diverse, it may have little practical impact. Further steps are needed to enable Districts to ensure that the representatives they elect are diverse. The inclusion of representatives of the Youth Assembly (3Generate) and of people representing the interests of equality, diversity and inclusion helps, but diversity amongst district-elected representatives is, from observation, somewhat patchy. The smaller the Conference becomes, and consequently the smaller the number elected by each Synod, the more challenging it will be for Districts to achieve the objective set in SO 417(2). The membership of the Conference is not the only way for diversity to be ensured within the life of its proceedings. Increasingly care is taken to ensure diversity in those who present business, contribute to worship, attend as speakers etc. There is further scope for this to be developed, including in terms of groups who volunteer at the Conference and the staff members that attend from the Connexional Team. Questions remain as to whether a decrease in representatives from particular groups, eg Youth Assembly and Concerns for EDI, will reduce the participation of a diversity of people attending the Conference. It is to be hoped that the embedding of the JDS strategy in the life of the Church will have a long-term impact of increasing the diversity of people participating in the Conference and the confidence of those who do attend to take an active role in its business.
22. It should be noted that the discussion above does not cover associate (non-voting) members of the Conference. There are currently six ecumenical associate members, this allows the Conference to offer hospitality to and receive perspectives from a range of Christian Churches. If the Conference agrees to an overall decrease in numbers, it would seem appropriate that there be a reduction in this group to four associate members. There are also eighteen non-voting representatives of partner Churches in other countries. Whilst work continues on a major consultation with all our partner churches about how we demonstrate our relationship in practical ways – such as attendance at the Conference - it seems appropriate that the number of associate members in this category be reduced to twelve as this is proportionate to the overall reduction in the size of the Conference recommended by this report. This would be in addition to the two full members of the Conference who attend as partner church representatives.
23. Whilst not the only consideration when discerning the appropriate constitution of the Conference membership, the cost of the Conference is a factor that needs to be considered. This cost is both financial and in terms of our impact on the environment. A reduction in the number of members of the Conference will lead to a reduction in these costs, in terms of accommodation, food, travel

and paperwork for each member.

24. For this year, having taken into account fixed costs, which are not dependent on the number of representatives (though a smaller Conference may also have an impact on costs of venues required), the average cost per representative is £1,216.50. The return to the Hilton in 2023 will involve a higher per person cost.
25. If the Conference was made up of 220 full representatives the saving for 2022 would be £133,760. This is a significant saving against the connexional budget. Reducing the number of associate members by eight would save a further £9,732 (not taking into account any travel costs into the UK). A small reduction in the number of volunteers required at the Conference would also offer savings against the cost of a Conference in its current constitution. The overall cost of the Conference is approximately £600,000 this year, so the approximate cost saving of £145,000+ is not insignificant.
26. The work on the constitution of the Conference has not taken place in isolation from that on Oversight and Trusteeship. If, as proposed, the Conference's role as a trustee body is transferred to the new Connexional Council, then there should be a concomitant reduction in some of the business the Conference is required to do. This can benefit the Conference in allowing a reduction in working hours and/or an increase in the capacity of the Conference to confer on significant issues and to meet its purpose of discerning the will of God. An increase in *en bloc* business, the possibility of online workshops prior to the Conference meeting and a change in the way that Notices of Motion are presented (see section 9), might also allow for the Conference to meet over a shorter time period.
27. The work being undertaken regarding the number of Districts may well result in a reduction to the number of Chairs attending the Conference. This report proposes that any reduction in the number of Chairs should not impact on the overall number of representatives to the Conference. Any reduction in the number of Chairs would allow a reduction in the ex-officio element of the Conference membership and a re- or improved balancing of the lay/ordained representation from the Synods.

Proposed model for the constitution of the Conference from 2024

28. Based on the current distribution of Districts, this represents a small increase (2%) in the ratio between ex-officio categories and district representatives. This should change to a decrease if at any point the number of Chairs of District attending the Conference reduces.

*Indicates a change to Clause 14 of the Deed of Union and would therefore require Special Resolutions should there be any proposed amendments to that category.

Role/Category	Current Number	Revised Number
Presidency*	6	6
Secretary*	1	1
Chairs of District*	30	30
Warden of the Diaconal Order*	1	1
Irish Methodist Church Reps*	4	4
Global Relationships*	2	2
UMC Reps	2	2
Conference Elected	9	3
Connexional Council	0	tba

Youth Assembly	4	2
Assistant Secretary	1	1
COLCP	1	1
Record Secretary	1	1
Journal Secretary	1	1
Memorials Cttee Convenor	1	1
Chair of Rep Session Business Committee	1	1
Methodist Council Chair	1	0
SRC Chair	1	0
Connexional Council Chair	0	1
Forces Chaplain	1	1
Connexional Treasurer	1	1
Connexional Secretary	1	1
Mission Partners (serving)	2	1
EDI representatives	6	3
Secretary of Faith and Order	1	1
Law and Polity	1	1
Stationing Committee	1	0
MWIB	1	0
Total Ex-Officio	82 (27%)	67
Synods	224	153
Totals	306	220

Ecumenical Reps Assoc	6	4
Global Relationships Assoc	18	12

Notes to the proposed model

- a. It may be possible to retain or reduce the ratio of ex-officio categories to Synod-appointed representatives; however, a number of these categories represent those things that the Conference has previously deemed to be priorities within its life and the life of the Church. Therefore the model above is conservative in its approach, whilst reducing or removing categories of representation which the Church will need to ensure are included in our life in other ways.
- b. The calculation includes the current number of District Chairs. Not to include all District Chairs would require a change to the Deed of Union but the proposals for the restructuring of the Districts would, if adopted by the Conference, reduce this number by approximately half by 2027.
- c. The proposed removal of the SRC and Methodist Council (see Section D below) and their being replaced by a Connexional Council, reduces the ex-officio category by 1. However, the proposal that all members of the Connexional Council be members of the Conference has not been factored into this calculation; both the size of the new Connexional Council and the number of its members who would otherwise be members of the Conference are not yet known. The total number of 'additional' seats is unlikely to be greater than the reduction in the number of District Chairs (above) and the balance of lay/ordained will need then to be maintained through the Synod allocations.
- d. A reduction in EDI, Youth Assembly and Conference Elected, UMC and voting World Church Representatives reflects the overall reduction in the size of the Conference membership. The prescription in the Deed relating to the make-up of the Conference-elected constituency (cl15(5)) means that the number cannot be less than three (as there must be a deacon and equal numbers

of presbyters and lay people) without a change to the Deed.

- e. A suggested reduction in EDI representatives does not represent a reduction in the Conference's commitment to matters of justice, dignity and solidarity which are being implemented in the life of the Church through the JDS Strategy. The embedding of that strategy requires the Districts to pay attention to the diversity of the representatives each sends to the Conference.
- f. Removal of the Chair of the Stationing Committee does not prevent that role-holder from attending the Conference should they have business to present.
- g. Methodist Women in Britain has a presence at the Conference through fringe events and through reps from the Districts who happen to be members of MWIB – as an organisation they are not required to report to the Conference.
- h. Further work could be done on the roles of Record Secretary, Convener of the Memorials Committee, Journal Secretary, and Chair of the Representative Session Business Committee, particularly in terms of whether they can be found within the body of the membership of the Conference, without having separate ex-officio categories. The impact of removing one or more of these categories would be marginal but not insignificant in terms of cost but would have a positive impact on the ex-officio/elected ratio within the membership of the Conference.
- i. A number of the larger Synods find it difficult to appoint their required number of representatives. It seems important that the island Districts retain their current allocation of two representatives, Scotland and Shetland Districts their combined allocation of six and that no other District have fewer than four representatives. The remaining allocation should be calculated by district membership, with no District having more than eleven representatives, not including their District Chair.
- j. A shorter Conference, with some online participation between the annual meetings, may enable a broader representation of representatives of working age.

Considerations and ways of workings

- 29. The number of members and the time allowed for the Conference need to ensure that it retain the sense of being a significant 'occasion' – the Election of the President and Vice President, the Reception into Full Connexion and the significant acts of worship may be diminished by a greater reduction in numbers than that proposed above. If the Connexional Council comes into being as the trustee body of the Church, then the role of the celebratory events at the Conference can take a greater focus, as the quantity of business might be reduced. Reducing some of the regulatory trustee business that would now be dealt with in detail by the Connexional Council (with a more general report concerning it being made to the Conference), will also allow for greater conferring on particular matters, even if the number of days meeting is reduced.
- 30. The length of sessions might be reduced (and therefore the number of days needed for the Conference to meet) and greater participation of members might be enabled if:
 - i. The Connexional Council processes work that currently has to be done by the Conference as trustee body;
 - ii. There is an increase in the number of *en bloc* items;
 - iii. Non-emergency Notices of Motion (NoMs) are submitted to a deadline (eg three weeks prior to the Conference meeting). This would allow:
 - a. advice to be given to proposers and seconders about the most appropriate wording to

- b. achieve their aim (reducing workload for Conference officers during the Conference itself);
 - b. relevant bodies time to undertake initial research to enable Conference to be fully informed in debate;
 - c. impact assessments to be done regarding the financial and capacity costs of accepting a NoM;
 - d. the NoMs to be circulated (electronically) to members of the Conference for consideration in advance of the Conference meeting;
 - e. the relevant Business Committee to prioritise and group NoMs in a way that makes most sense within the business of the Conference.
- iv. Those who will be members of the Conference by dint of office or election are invited to participate in conferring groups on particular themes (eg Missions, Ministries, Resourcing), meeting online during the year leading up to the Conference to which they are elected/appointed. This would allow a 'green paper' approach to pieces of work and greater participation at an earlier stage. This would be for work to be brought for the Conference to which they were elected/appointed. These groups would not be established for decision-making and this proposal is not intended to change the arrangements for an extraordinary meeting of the Conference as prescribed by clause 33(b) the Deed of Union.
31. If the Conference is smaller than at present and able to work in some or all of the ways outlined in i – iv above, it seems it would be possible for it to reduce the number of days for business. This should enable a greater diversity of participation and a reduction in costs. Recognising that a great deal of work needs to be done by a number of people during the Conference and that much of this has to be done in between the public sessions eg meetings of Conference sub-committees, preparation of papers, rehearsals for worship, it is not recommended that the current structure of the timetable be radically altered.
32. It is recommended that from 2024, the Representative Session of the Conference will meet from the afternoon of Saturday until after lunch on the following Wednesday.
33. It is the recommendation of this report that the Presbyteral Session remain the same length as at the moment – its members are there as part of their ministerial role (the majority do not need time off from other activities) and any cost savings of shortening the hours are marginal as even if the business were contained within a day, most people would still require overnight accommodation. To reduce to one day would mean that the only elements that could be included in the timetable would be the Service of Thanksgiving, the Pastoral Address and the business of the closed session. The opportunities for presbyters to engage together in depth about mission and ministry would be lost.

How we confer

34. In terms of how the Conference does its business whilst meeting in person, it is clear that some people feel more comfortable than others when faced with speaking at a podium in front of a large group of people. The Conference has used group work well in recent years to facilitate increased participation. This is to be encouraged, as also might be the use of a 'roving microphone' following informal 'buzz' conversations. Whilst only based on anecdotal observations, this more informal approach has enabled a wider diversity of participation when occasionally used in the past.
35. The language of 'debate' is not helpful when trying to establish the Conference as a space for Christian conferring. Whilst at times it is clear there are differences of opinion within the Conference over particular matters, a shift to language that uses words such as conversation, and avoids a 'for and against' tone may help the Conference in its work of discernment and engagement.

***RESOLUTIONS

44/2. The Conference received section C of the Report.

44/3. The Conference resolved that, from the Conference of 2024, the total voting membership of the Conference shall be 225. The Conference directed the Methodist Council, in collaboration with the Justice, Dignity and Solidarity Committee, to determine the distribution of seats and directs the Law and Polity Committee to bring draft Standing Orders to the 2023 Conference. The Conference further directed that the proportion of members of the Conference elected by the Synods shall not be less than 70%.

44/4. The Conference adopted the ways of working set out in this Report, with effect from the 2024 Conference.

44/5. WITHDRAWN

Section D: The Connexional Council

The 2021 Conference resolved:

30/6. *The Conference directed the Law and Polity Committee and the Strategy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee and as appropriate with others:*

- a) *to consider the functions, powers and responsibilities that should be given to the Connexional Council to enable it to become the connexional trustee body whilst ensuring that the Conference remains as the governing body of the Methodist Church in Great Britain;*
- b) *to consider which functions, powers and responsibilities should be given to the Connexional Council in order to replace and abolish the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee, yet also to consider whether any of the present functions, powers and responsibilities of those bodies should be given instead, as may be necessary or appropriate, to the Conference or other Connexional Committee or body; and to prepare and bring to the Conference of 2022 the special and other resolutions to give effect to a) and b) above, together with the necessary amendments including to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders.*

36. This resolution asked two things of those charged with taking forward this part of the work: firstly, to consider the proposed Connexional Council's role as the connexional trustee body whilst ensuring that the Conference remain the governing body of the Methodist Church, and secondly to consider the functions that are currently exercised by the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC), and the question of who should discharge those functions in future. In all this work, the group responsible would want to note its debt to the late John Hicks QC, a member of the group until his death in March this year and the first author of the changes to the Deed of Union here proposed. Mr Hicks had considered the latter part of the task that needed undertaking in detail, and there now exists a schedule of references to the Council and the SRC on which further work will be done to bring draft Model Trust and Standing Order amendments to the Conference of 2023.

37. The group proposes to work in that way, firstly, in order to see through the changes that are needed to the Deed of Union to bring the Connexional Council into being, and, secondly, because it became apparent during this year that the functions of the proposed Council and those of the revised Connexional Committees were sufficiently interlinked to suggest that it would be necessary to work out the changes as a whole rather than preparing or bringing them piecemeal to the Conference. The intention now is that all the interlinked provisions will be presented, and the requirements of CPD for their approval fulfilled, so as to enable the new arrangements replacing the Methodist Council and SRC and the related new Committee structures to come into effect on 1 September 2024. Accordingly, the Deed of Union amendments (requiring a two year process) will be offered for approval by the Conference in 2022 and 2023; the related Model Trust amendments (also requiring a two year process) will be offered for approval by the Conference in 2023 and 2024; and the Standing Order amendments (although formally only requiring a single year process) will be presented in draft

in 2023 to allow opportunity for consideration and necessary amendment before being formally submitted for approval in 2024.

38. The proposed amendments to the Deed of Union contained in this report have been considered by Counsel, Professor Mark Hill QC, whose opinion was that ‘the Church has acted wisely and timeously in advancing the proposed amendments’. The Charity Commission has been informed of the proposed changes and, if adopted, will formally be notified of them. However, the advice of external solicitors and of the Law and Polity Committee is that it is not necessary to seek the Charity Commission’s permission to make changes which are, as confirmed by Counsel’s opinion, in line with the provisions and intention of the Charities Act 2011.
39. The Methodist Church in Great Britain, however, is not only a charity, a nongovernmental organisation or a public institution with a task in society. As has been emphasised in previous Conference Reports on Oversight and Trusteeship, it is first and foremost part of the body of Christ, responding to the gospel of God’s love in Christ and inviting, equipping and supporting people in a life of freely chosen discipleship. The governance model and the structures of the Church, therefore, are designed not only to comply with statutory requirements but to facilitate engagement in mission and to witness to the nature of the Church as a people called by God to be agents of God’s mission in God’s world.
40. These principles have continued to inform the group considering the functions, powers and responsibilities of the proposed Connexional Council within the framework proposed at the 2021 Conference. This framework requires a balance, on the one hand, between the Conference remaining as the governing body of the Methodist Church and therefore not derogating from that, and, on the other hand, a transferring to the Connexional Council of the general control and management of the administration of the Church at the connexional level (thereby enabling it to become the connexional trustee body) and, additionally, the possibility of the Conference from time to time delegating to the Council such other powers and responsibilities as may help to advance the mission of the Church.⁴
41. Within the wider concern to ensure the appropriate balance, there has been a particular question as to the constitution of the Council and the number of members that it should have. A key benefit of a smaller trustee body will be its ability to make decisions nimbly and sometimes rapidly, a requirement that points to a smaller number of members with whom information can be shared and conversations held swiftly and securely. However, if sometimes the Council were to act on behalf of the Conference between Conferences (under SO 211(1): see further below), or, more generally to ensure that different perspectives are considered and that the Connexional Council is seen to exercise representative leadership of the Connexion,⁵ a slightly larger Council and trustee body might be suggested. Broader questions of the trust that members of the Church will need to place in the new body also tend to a slightly larger size than that which might sometimes be expected by the requirements of charity trusteeship.
42. The 2020 Conference was advised that the SRC believed the Connexional Council (at that stage termed an ‘Executive Council’) should comprise ‘no more than 25 and possibly as few as 12 people’⁶. Recognising the balancing considerations involved, those who have worked on these proposals on behalf of the SRC, the Law and Polity Committee and the Faith and Order Committee, together with the members of the Resolution 30/14 Coordinating Group, now recommend that that range be refined to between 18 and 22 persons (to be reflected in the draft Standing Orders to be brought to the 2023 Conference).

⁴ See pp.406-415 of the 2021 Agenda, especially, regarding the proposed balance involved, paragraphs 4.10, 4.13 and 4.27.

⁵ See Agenda Item 45: Oversight, Trusteeship and Leadership

⁶ 2020 Agenda p231

43. The creation of the Connexional Council necessitates changes to the Deed of Union which must be made by special resolution under SO 126. The advice of the Law and Polity Committee (SO 126(1)(b) and (d)) is that the resolutions should be submitted to the Synods (and, as is required, also formally to the Law and Polity Committee) for approval or disapproval. The proposed changes to the Deed are set out at the end of this section of the report. If, after consultation, the 2023 Conference confirms the amendments to the Deed, it will then also be asked to adopt changes to the Model Trusts and Standing Orders (on the timetable indicated above).
44. As explained, there is still work to be done on the detail of the amended Model Trusts and Standing Orders which will set out the purposes, functions and constitution of the Connexional Council, the broad outlines of which are set out below. The Conference will note that there is still necessary work required by Resolution 30/6 of the 2021 Conference and resolution 44/19 below would, if adopted, direct a process for the completion of that work by the proposed Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group referred to later in this report.⁷

Primary Purpose:

45. The Connexional Council will be the Trustee Body of the Methodist Church in Britain, that is to say, it will hold the responsibilities as Trustees for the work of the Methodist Church as a Connexion. The Church, of course, comprises Districts, Circuits, Local Churches and numerous other bodies which are and will continue to be separate charities, whether or not they are excepted from registration with the Charity Commission.
46. The Council will be accountable to the Conference but the Conference cannot fetter the trustees in discharging their duties as charity trustees.
47. The Connexional Council will be charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to indicate what changes are necessary or what steps should be taken to make the work of the Church more effective.
48. In many ways, the Connexional Council will be the successor body to the Methodist Council. SO 211(2) presently requires the Council to give spiritual leadership to the Church. Whilst the Church will continue to look for spiritual leadership between meetings of the Conference, as a smaller body with increased charity trustee responsibility, the Connexional Council will need to discharge this responsibility in partnership with other bodies under the authority of the Conference. Part of the ongoing work which the Conference is asked to direct will be to establish what that means (eg, in its relationship with a reformed Connexional Leaders' Forum).
49. The Connexional Council will exercise its responsibilities under the authority and oversight of the Conference which will remain the governing body of the Methodist Church. Accordingly, the Connexional Council will report annually to the Conference. The Council will generally report on all areas of its responsibilities, but in particular will bring to the notice of the Conference matters to which it believes the Conference ought to give urgent attention.
50. The Connexional Council will take forward the vision, strategies, decisions and directions set by the Conference. All this will be done to enable the Church to fulfil its charitable objectives and calling to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission.

⁷ This will also continue to be subject where necessary to Resolution 30/5 of the 2021 Conference, whereby the Conference directed that the Law and Polity Committee's Report to the 2021 Conference (received in response to Resolution 25/2 of the 2020 Conference) be taken into account in the work undertaken to carry forward the recommendations in Part 4 of the Oversight & Trusteeship report to the 2020 Conference.

51. Between the closing of any Conference and the opening of the next succeeding Conference, the expectation (subject to confirmation once the detailed drafting of the interconnecting Standing Order provisions has been completed) will be that the Council will be empowered to act on behalf of the Conference in particular ways (which will be delineated in the Standing Orders), provided that such actions are not contrary to the Deed of Union or Standing Orders or any specific resolution of the Conference (cf SO 211(1)).
52. The Connexional Council will consult with and receive advice from the Connexional Leaders' Forum (see below) and other bodies, some of which will also have authority to act on behalf of the Conference.
53. The Methodist Church in Britain is an unincorporated charity. The SRC is currently seeking advice about the benefits of incorporation, whilst also considering the preliminary advice of the Law and Polity Committee on the issue as received by the 2021 Conference⁸. A further report will be made to the 2023 Conference with a recommendation. It is not envisaged that incorporation need involve any change to the Deed of Union and could be the decision of a later Conference.

Functions:

54. The Connexional Council will exercise general control and management of the connexional administration of the Methodist Church and report annually to the Charity Commission on the fulfilment of the Church's charitable objectives.
55. The Connexional Council will ensure that its activities and those of the Methodist Church in its connexional activities are subject to appropriate risk assessment and audit.
56. The Connexional Council will be the managing trustee body of all connexional property (subject to any existing restrictions for connexional properties not presently held on the model trusts, and pending the amendment of such arrangements where possible to enable the Connexional Council to become the relevant trustee body). The experience of the Methodist Council over the last year has highlighted the complexity of the trust arrangements that currently exist in relation to connexional property. A major piece of work will now be set in motion to simplify the present complex trust arrangements under which connexional property is held on a range of trusts and by different trustee bodies.
57. The Connexional Council will be the managing trustee body of all connexional funds and have responsibility for the consolidated accounts.
58. The Connexional Council will be responsible for the scrutiny and presentation for approval to the Conference of the financial statements and the budget for the central services of the Connexion together with the proposed allocation of district contributions.
59. The Connexional Council will be the employing body for lay people in the Connexional Team and will make recommendations and nominations to the Conference for ministers to serve in the Connexional Team.
60. The Connexional Council will have responsibility for the direction of the work of the Connexional Team and ensure that there is adequate supervision in place for the Secretary of the Conference and other senior members of the Team. The Council will receive regular reports from the Connexional Secretary on the work of the Team and monitor the Team's effectiveness in working towards the Conference's and the Council's objectives.

⁸ 2021 Agenda pp.410-411.

61. The Connexional Council will ensure the implementation of the decisions of the Conference and where appropriate will scrutinise in detail and offer comment on reports from those bodies that are expected to report to the Conference.
62. The Connexional Council will be responsible for the Methodist Church's connexional compliance with legal requirements, and, so far as it is within the Council's power, the wider Methodist Church's compliance with legal requirements.
63. The Connexional Council will formulate and analyse for impact and implications connexional policy options for presentation to the Conference.

Constitution and ways of working:

64. The Connexional Council will be appointed annually by the Conference. In appointing the Council, the Conference will be alert both to the need for continuity and to changes necessary to ensure that the Council is able to exercise representative leadership; normal lengths of service will be prescribed in the Standing Orders for those members of the Council who are not *ex officio*. The length of service for those members of the Council who are not *ex officio* or members by virtue of being Chairs or Deputy Chairs of the three main committees will usually be for a term of four years (but with a 'rolling programme' to ensure a significant degree of trustee continuity).
65. The membership of the Connexional Council will comprise 18 to 22 persons:
 - A Chair nominated by the proposed Nominations Committee from the wide membership of the Church for a certain term (usually of four years)
 - Ex officio: the current President and Vice-President
 - Ex officio: the Secretary of the Conference
 - The Chair or Deputy Chair of the Mission Committee
 - The Chair or Deputy Chair of the Ministries Committee
 - The Chair or Deputy Chair of the Resourcing Committee
 - Up to 15 other persons nominated by the proposed Nominations Committee (see below) for their experience, expertise and representative roles with the necessary skills required on such a trustee body.

The Assistant Secretary of the Conference, the Connexional Secretary and the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice will attend and be able to speak (but without a vote and therefore not included as Trustees). Other members of the Senior Management Group and other senior members of the Church (eg, other members of the Presidency) will attend as required.
66. The Connexional Council should generally meet six times a year for regular business and additionally as required. The Standing Orders will enable some but not all of those meetings to be held online and the arrangement of meetings will be such as to enable the participation of those who are not ministers or employed by the Church.
67. The Introduction of the Connexional Council will require changes to the Deed of Union as set out here:

DEED OF UNION AMENDMENTS

1 Particular Expressions. In this Deed, unless the context otherwise requires

(xA) 'the Connexional Council' means the body, so named, constituted under clause 37A;

~~(xA)~~ **(xB) 'the Convocation' means the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order, as constituted by Standing Orders;**

18 General Responsibilities. (a) The government and discipline of the Methodist Church ~~and the~~

management and administration of its affairs shall be vested in the Conference, and the Conference shall have and may exercise and shall perform all the powers, authorities, rights and duties necessary or desirable in its discretion **to fulfil its functions as the governing body of the Methodist Church, but not in such a way as to prevent or inhibit the members of the Connexional Council from or in performing their duties as its trustees.** ~~for such government, discipline, management and administration; and without prejudice to and not so as to limit or restrict in any way the general powers, authorities, rights and duties conferred or imposed by this clause or any powers, authorities, rights or duties confirmed or imposed by any other clause of this Deed upon the Conference it is hereby expressly declared that until the Conference otherwise resolves the~~

(b) Without prejudice to the generality of sub-clause (a) the Conference shall in particular have final authority over:

- (i) doctrine, including its powers under section 3(2) of the 1976 Act;**
- (ii) legislation, in accordance with clause 19, provided that Standing Orders may confer on the Connexional Council the power to amend, supplement or revoke the legislation of the Conference, pending the next meeting of the Conference, if and only if that becomes necessary in order to meet legal requirements or to avoid infringement of the Methodist constitution;**
- (iii) connexional mission and policy;**
- (iv) connexional polity;**
- (v) the formation, admission and discipline of ministers, officers and members;**
- (vi) the stationing of ministers and probationers, in accordance with clause 20, subject to the powers of the President under clause 29;**
- (vii) the connexional budget and allocation of district contributions, to the extent and in the manner determined by Standing Orders.**

(c) The Conference shall have and may also exercise and shall perform the particular powers, authorities, rights and duties specified in clauses 19, 20 and 21 below.

21 Other Particular Powers. The Conference shall have power at its discretion, **but not so as to prevent or inhibit the members of the Connexional Council from or in performing their duties as the trustees of the Methodist Church:**

- (i) to continue or found or authorise the founding of connexional funds or institutions for the promulgation of the Gospel at home and abroad, for assistance to Circuits or Local Churches or for the benefit of retired and superannuated ministers or the ~~widows, widowers or children~~ **spouses, civil partners or dependants** of deceased ministers or for other objects and purposes of or in connection with the Methodist Church and to direct the application and management thereof and to approve any scheme for the amalgamation of any such funds or institutions, whether founded before or after the date of this Deed, and whether belonging to or connected with any of the said Churches or denominations existing at the date of union or to the Methodist Church and for the transfer in connection with any such amalgamation of any of such funds from the existing trustees or other persons having the legal control thereof to the trustees of any other of such funds or institutions;
- ~~(ii) to continue or establish such printing or publishing offices carried on or to be carried on by or on behalf of or in connection with the Methodist Church (hereinafter referred to as 'Book Rooms') as the Conference thinks fit;~~
- ~~(iii) to manage all matters connected with the Book Rooms and publications, connexional property, missions, colleges and schools of the Methodist Church;~~
- (iv) to elect committees for the management of the various connexional institutions; provided that the election of any such committee is not in contravention of any provision of any trust deed relating to the relevant institution;
- (v) to appoint boards and committees for the despatch of connexional business or for the exercise of any of the powers or duties of the Conference during or in the interval between its sittings, in such numbers and with such terms of reference, membership, powers and duties as the Conference thinks fit;
- (vi) to appoint such treasurers, secretaries, stewards, editors and other officers of connexional committees, funds or institutions as the Conference thinks fit and to specify their powers, duties

- and terms of office;
- (vii) to appoint such representatives or delegates as the Conference thinks fit to act for and represent the Conference;
- (viii) to delegate to any officer of the Conference or to any board, committee, officer, representative or delegate appointed in exercise of the powers conferred by this clause all or any of the powers of the Conference including, if the Conference thinks fit, power to sub-delegate any power of the Conference so delegated.

Section 9A. The Connexional Council

37A Constitution. (a) *There shall at all times be a Connexional Council, constituted as follows:*

- (i) the President and Vice-President of the Conference;*
- (ii) the Secretary of the Conference;*
- (iii) other members of the council as prescribed by Standing Orders, which shall include a chair of the council.*

(b) The members of the council under head (a)(iii) shall be members of the Methodist Church with relevant skills and experience to oversee its connexional administration and shall be appointed by the Conference. Provision shall be made by Standing Orders for their appointment, normal period of service and possible variations in that period for good cause.

37B Responsibilities. *The members of the Connexional Council shall, without derogation from the position, authority and powers of the Conference as governing body, have the general control and management of the connexional administration of the Methodist Church, and shall accordingly be its trustees.*

37C Particular Powers. (a) *The provisions of sub-clauses (b) and (c) of this clause are without prejudice to the generality of clause 37B.*

(b) The Connexional Council shall have exclusive authority over:

- (i) the direction and management of the persons stationed, appointed or employed, whole time or part time, to carry out connexional duties as a 'team', or by some other title, under Standing Orders;*
- (ii) all matters relating to or arising out of the employment of persons by connexional bodies;*
- (iii) compliance with legal requirements affecting the conduct of connexional bodies, including requirements under charity law or regulation or the law of trusts or as to data protection, safeguarding children, vulnerable adults and others, or health and safety;*
- (iv) recommendation to the Conference of legislation or guidance affecting Districts, Circuits or Local Churches to be adopted with respect to the subject-matter of head (ii) or (iii) above.*

(c) The Connexional Council shall, except on subjects assigned for this purpose by Standing Order to other bodies, formulate and analyse connexional policy options for presentation to the Conference with the council's appraisal and recommendations.

(d) The Connexional Council shall have such further powers, responsibilities and functions as may from time to time be delegated to it by the Conference in Standing Orders or by other means.

A RENEWED CONNEXIONAL LEADERSHIP FORUM

68. The Methodist Church's exercise of oversight and trusteeship are dependent on and informed by its processes of conferring. It is through the careful and prayerful consideration by those who offer insights and represent different parts of the Church's life that discernment is sought and decisions are made. Such conferring enables those who hold responsibility on behalf of the Church to hold

before themselves always the truth that it is God's work in which they are engaged, God's mission in which they seek to participate, and God's will that they hope to do.

69. In order that time and space can be found for that reflection, the Strategy and Resources Committee proposes that the Connexional Leaders' Forum be reviewed and redesigned. It is possible that a new name for the body will help to indicate its enhanced role within the structure. Whilst there is still work to be done on the detail both of the membership of the Forum and the range and formality of its responsibility, the need for effective spiritual leadership of the Connexion and the vision of a renewed form of leadership from District Chairs working collegially with others lead the SRC to believe that the Connexional Leaders' Forum (alongside other bodies such as the Faith and Order Committee) can and would provide reflection on the issues that face the Connexion and help to inform the Council and the Conference's decision-making.
70. The CLF will comprise people who are appointed to particular leadership roles. Detailed work is still to be done on its ways of working, as well as on the theological, ecumenical and ecclesial implications of this way of working. The Conference is asked to direct that this work continue in order that the new structure has a place of conferring, of generating ideas, of reflecting on new proposals and of theological thinking with which the Connexional Council could consult and share concerns and plans for the future and which could support the work of the Presidency and the SMG.

***RESOLUTIONS

44/6. The Conference received Section D of the Report.

Special Resolution

44/7. The Conference amended paragraphs 1, 18 and 21 and adopted a new Section 9A comprising paragraphs 37A, 37B and 37C of the Deed of Union as set out in this report, and, in accordance with Standing Orders 122(3) and 126(1)(d), directed that

- a) consultation on this resolution shall be with the Synods and the Law and Polity Committee who may approve or disapprove; and that**
- b) this resolution shall be submitted for confirmation at the Conference of 2023 together with a report of the opinions of the bodies consulted, and such amendments as are confirmed shall take effect from a date specified by that Conference.**

Section E: Connexional Committees

The 2021 Conference resolved:

30/7. The Conference directed the Strategy and Resources Committee in consultation with the Faith and Order Committee to continue its work of reviewing the constitution, function and inter-relationship of all connexional committees and to bring a full report with proposed changes to the Standing Orders to the 2022 Conference.

71. The direction to the SRC was in response to a report indicating that work was in progress on the committee structure that is needed by the Connexion. The 2021 report included a diagram of reporting lines but stressed that that was in no way the final proposal. Despite having done some further detailed work on this matter, the SRC does not believe that it is yet time for the Conference to make final decisions about which committees are needed and what the reporting lines of those committees should be. The Faith and Order Committee also draws attention to questions about how the Conference's oversight is expressed by different bodies within the new proposed structure, and where particular responsibilities will lie, and notes that there is further exploration of these needed before final proposals are drawn up. The SRC therefore offers to the Conference a series of outline proposals on which the Conference can direct further work to be done and Standing Orders drafted by the proposed Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group (referred to later in this report).

72. Both the 2020 and 2021 reports proposed that the work of the Council should be supported by three major committees with responsibility for three major areas of the Connexion's life which the SRC now proposes should be named Mission, Ministries, and Resourcing. Details about the main functions of each are listed below. Beyond that, the SRC notes that there are at present at least four other areas that will require standing committees of the Conference:
- The Law and Polity Committee which will continue broadly to exercise the functions set out in SO 338;
 - The Faith and Order Committee which will continue broadly to exercise the functions set out in SO 330;
 - The Safeguarding Committee which will continue broadly to exercise the functions set out in SO 232 (although the SRC notes the possibility that either the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse or the review of Part 11 might require changes to this SO);
 - The Conference Business Committee (SO 136, noting that there is also a Presbyteral Session Business Committee, SO 150). The SRC recognises that in altering the constitution of the Conference, implementing the recommendations brought by those considering the impact of Conference decisions, and working through the relationship that is proposed between the Connexional Council and the Conference, careful work needs to be done to ensure that there is a robust process by which the business of the Conference is planned (both to ensure the constitutionality of the Conference's work and to be mindful of the impact of possible Conference decisions on Circuits and Districts) and proposals for the ordering of this area need to be brought to the 2023 Conference by the proposed Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group.
73. The Conference also has before it the report from the Faith and Order Committee on oversight and trusteeship and will note that there are still questions to be explored about how oversight needs to be exercised by the Conference in the light of the creation of the Connexional Council. The Conference is therefore asked to direct that the proposed Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group, consulting with the Faith and Order and Law and Polity Committees, give attention to these matters as the proposals for the committee structure are further developed and completed.
74. One of the hopes that has been expressed throughout this work is that the Church should move to a process of appointment which is transparent and ensures that those who are asked to take on roles in the life of the church are appropriately qualified and provide a representational balance and appropriate diversity. To that end, the SRC reiterates the proposal included in the 2020 report⁹ that there be a nominations committee (details of which are included below).

Reporting Lines

75. One key area of discussion over the last year has been around reporting lines. It has not necessarily been the case that the body which appoints a committee is the body to which that committee reports (eg, the Law and Polity Committee is appointed by the Council but reports to the Conference). Nevertheless, the SRC now proposes that the Mission Committee, Ministries Committee and Resourcing Committee be appointed by and report primarily to the Council and that the other four committees be appointed by and report primarily to the Conference but that a mechanism for allowing certain items or times for working groups or committees to report directly to the Conference is essential and is being further explored. So also subgroups attached to the Committees of the Council have the freedom, under certain circumstances to report directly to the Council or Conference; the Council could also set up groups that report directly to it.
76. The comments of the Faith and Order Committee on oversight make clear that there is further work to be done on those matters which must remain exclusively the responsibility of the Conference. The SRC has already identified a number of areas, particularly relating to the ministry of individuals, where reports will be made to the Conference but further work is needed to explore the way in

⁹ *Agenda* p231

which other bodies express the oversight of the Conference and whether and when it is appropriate for these bodies not to report directly to the Conference.

77. The SRC proposes that the seven committees it has identified should be the only committees of the Conference or Connexional Council which are governed by the Standing Orders and that all other bodies be considered, as far as possible, working groups, task forces, subgroups etc, which would operate under Terms of Reference adopted by the Council (and subject, if called for by the Conference or if a subcommittee is expected to have a continuing life, to approval by the Conference), but not included in the Standing Orders. However, further work is needed to review those bodies with which the Conference currently shares its oversight (eg the Conference Diaconal Committee and the Ministerial Candidates' and Probationers' Oversight Committee) to determine the appropriate pattern for the expression of this oversight in the new structure. The functions of each of the main committees, therefore, need to be set out clearly in the Standing Orders so that appropriate groups can be brought into being to fulfil the functions entrusted by the Conference or Connexional Council to those committees on their behalf. The SRC also believes that most bodies created by the main committees of the Connexional Council should be created for a set period of time, after which their existence should be subject to review. This, the SRC believes, will allow fluidity, flexibility and easy changes when necessary. Again, the SRC envisages that an exception to this rule would be that those bodies (including the newly formed Nominations Committee) which are responsible for bringing recommendations about the ministry of individuals over whom the Conference has oversight will need Standing Orders to ensure that the processes by which they operate are sufficiently transparent and appropriately robust.
78. In its work on the three main committees of the Connexional Council, the SRC has been mindful of the need for continuity in a time of transition and therefore much of what is outlined here is drawn from the existing Standing Orders. As further work is done, it is likely that some revisions to these terms of reference will be needed, particularly in order to ensure that there is clarity about where responsibilities lie and to recognise that the areas of work are interlinked. The Conference is asked at this point to affirm the main principles in this section of the report to enable that further work to be done.

79. **The Mission Committee**

The SRC proposes the purpose of this committee as:

The Committee is charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church as it relates to Mission, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to indicate what changes are necessary or what steps should be taken to make the work of the Church more effective, and to report annually to the Connexional Council, bringing to the notice of the Connexional Council matters to which it believes the Council ought to give urgent attention.

The Mission Committee will:

- have responsibility to promote and support the mission of the Methodist Church in Britain locally and globally, working with others, towards a world transformed by the love of God, sharing the love of God and enabling the church to be part of the world-wide family;
- explore the challenges and opportunities faced by the Church for mission in Britain in the multi-ethnic, multi-faith and multi-cultural context of society;
- be responsible for relations with the world-wide church, the global Methodist family, and overseas partner churches;
- consider the challenges faced in building a more just, sustainable and inclusive society and world in the perspective of the reign of God;
- endeavour to build the confidence of British Methodists as disciples of Jesus Christ to rediscover a passion in mission and evangelism;
- promote good relations with the ecumenical family in Britain, Europe and the world.

The Mission Committee will be responsible to the Connexional Council for:

- Global Relationships including exercising on behalf of the Conference the process of selection, deployment and support of mission partners;
- the strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity;
- Heritage and the Art Collection;
- children, youth and families (including schools);
- 3Generate;
- the 'Methodist Family' in Britain and determining how the other parts of the Methodist family should relate to the institutions of the Methodist Church in Britain;
- ecumenical Relations (formal and informal) including the Anglican Methodist Covenant;
- publications and communications (including *Singing the Faith Plus*);
- education, advocacy and campaigns for justice, peace and integrity of creation;
- evangelism and growth.

80. **The Ministries Committee**

The SRC proposes the purpose of this committee as:

The Committee is charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church as it relates to Ministries, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to indicate what changes are necessary or what steps should be taken to make the work of the Church more effective, to review the formational and support needs of the Church's ministers and to report annually to the Connexional Council, bringing to the notice of the Connexional Council matters to which it believes the Council ought to give urgent attention.

The Ministries Committee will:

- enable the Church to develop and maintain strategic vision for the use of ordained, commissioned, accredited and informal ministries and offices throughout the Connexion;
- develop and support the processes relating to the policy of stationing, oversight, supervision, accountability and professional development of these ministries and offices of the Church;
- bring together all aspects of stationing, selection of ministerial candidates and training of ministers and the links to the recognised training centres;
- oversee the local preachers training programme and other lay ministry training programmes;
- oversee the Church's policies relating to the exercise of chaplaincy on behalf of the Church.

Stationing will continue to be the responsibility of the Conference. The Ministries Committee will be responsible for overarching stationing policy and will bring together various related groupings so that there is consistency of approach and a reduction in the number of groups with responsibilities in this area.

The Ministries Committee will be responsible to the Connexional Council for the policies and administration of processes relating to:

- stationing;
- requests to serve in different kinds of appointments;
- candidates and probationers' oversight;
- ministers of other Conferences and Churches;
- local preachers and other authorised lay ministries;
- supervision;
- class leaders;
- chaplaincy (including Forces Board and Schools);
- candidates' selection;
- the appointment, terms of reference and protocols of Stationing Matching Groups.

81. **The Resourcing Committee**

The SRC proposes the purpose of this committee as:

The Committee is charged with responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church as it relates to Resourcing, to study its work and witness throughout the Connexion, to indicate what changes are necessary or what steps should be taken to make the work of the Church more effective, and to report annually to the Connexional Council, bringing to the notice of the Connexional Council matters to which it believes the Council ought to give urgent attention.

The Resourcing Committee will:

- advise the Council in its responsibility for the strategic use of the Church's resources of funds, property and people in keeping with the calling of the Church;
- ensure the Church fulfils the requirements of Charity law, good governance and statutory expectations of the Church as a charity and exists as a model employer;
- scrutinise and recommend the annual accounts and prepare the annual report of the Church as a charity;
- prepare the annual budget for the Connexion and the Methodist Church Fund;
- hold responsibility for assessing the impact and implications of the new policies, programmes and priorities set by the Church on its resources (in the widest sense);
- oversee the investments management of the Church and use of reserves;
- oversee and administer the Methodist Mission in Britain Fund and the Connexional Priority Fund.

The Resourcing Committee will be responsible to the Connexional Council for:

- property, including conservation and listed buildings, giving guidance and support to managing trustees;
- budgets, investments and financial policies;
- stipends and allowances;
- HR matters, pay and grading;
- relating to and engaging with the JACEI;
- Statutory Reporting;
- Ministerial Grants;
- relationships with the Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes;
- relationships with the Central Finance Board.

82. The SRC notes that whilst much of this work will include ensuring that there is adequate auditing and assessment of risk, the management of risk is the responsibility of all bodies in the life of the Church and will need to be included in the brief of other committees also.

Next Steps

83. In line with a process agreed in 2021, the Conference is asked this year to adopt the Standing Orders establishing the Mission Committee and to appoint its members.

84. The SRC proposes that *pro tem* the Ministries Committee continues to operate under Section 32A of the Standing Orders.

85. Further work is needed for Standing Orders for the Resourcing Committee to be brought to the Conference. There needs to be clarity about how the responsibilities of the Resourcing Committee for matters to do with the administration and management of the charity dovetail with those of the Connexional Council. In order that the work might proceed, the Conference is asked to direct the Council to appoint a Chair for the Resourcing Committee who can work with the chairs of committees in the present structure whose business relates to this area to finalize proposals for future ways of working.

86. Further review of the Committees, the subgroups and working groups will follow the Conference's decision in respect of the Connexional Council; a timetable for the reorganisation of the committees will then be developed to ensure that the changes are timely and carefully managed.

87. The 2021 Conference was offered a diagram of a proposed committee structure on which consultation with those currently convening and chairing committees was to be held. That consultation is still in train and the SRC recognises the need for a period of transition during which some committees will continue to exist as over a period of time new and simpler arrangements are brought into being. The consultation will include conversation on how *pro tem* appointments should be made and reports received as this reorganisation moves gradually to completion under the oversight of the proposed Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group. The Faith and Order Committee also draws attention to questions about how the Conference's oversight is expressed by different bodies within the new proposed structure, and where particular responsibilities will lie, and notes that there is further exploration of these needed before final proposals are drawn up.

The Nominations Committee

88. Throughout its history, the Methodist Church has owed a great deal to those who have made up its connexional councils, boards and committees, both lay people who have given their time voluntarily and ministers who have undertaken roles in addition to their circuit or other responsibilities. The Methodist Church continues to be dependent on such people who freely give of their time, energy and skill. They might (as befits a smaller church) be fewer in number than in previous arrangements but the commitment asked of them will be no less (and indeed might be greater than before). Often, those people found their way into the committee structure of the Church as representative of a particular constituency (eg, a District or a community of office-holders). In addition to that traditional consideration, the Methodist Church of the mid-21st century will need people who reflect the diversity of the Connexion and who are able to offer particular skills or experience. It follows that with a different set even of implied criteria different processes of selection might be needed to ensure that the Connexional Council and Committees function effectively whilst retaining the trust of the whole of the Methodist Church.
89. The deep consideration that has been given to the structure of the Connexional Council and its three main Committees has not omitted to consider how these groups will be populated. A move to smaller structures raises questions about the responsibility (and indeed the power) entrusted to a select group of people making it vital that the process of nominating and appointing individuals must be transparent, open, fair, alert to issues of diversity, and effective in finding the right people with the skills, experience, and time.
90. Whilst there are some seats on the new bodies that will still be ex-officio (particularly relating to the desire to have the Chairs or Deputy Chairs of the three main Committees within the Connexional Council) there will rightly be a number of seats on each of the new bodies which will need filling from the wider Connexion. Historically roles have been filled by calling on other bodies (formally or informally) to nominate a representative and/or by those bodies identifying successors; these nominations have been accepted by the Conference when supported by reasoned statements. This process might have served us well in the past but now needs to be reviewed in the light of the expectations of the Charity Commission and our own JDS strategy.

Recommended Practice 5.7 of the Charity Governance Code 2017 includes the following section:

5.7 Overseeing appointments

5.7.1 There is a formal, rigorous and transparent procedure to appoint new trustees to the board, which includes advertising vacancies widely.

5.7.2 The search for new trustees is carried out, and appointments or nominations for election are made, on merit against objective criteria and considering the benefits of diversity on the board. Regular skills audits inform the search process.

5.7.3 The charity considers using a nominations committee to lead the board appointment process and to make recommendations to the board.

5.7.4 Trustees are appointed for an agreed length of time, subject to any applicable constitutional or statutory provisions relating to election and re-election. If a trustee has served for more than nine

years, their reappointment is: subject to a particularly rigorous review and takes into account the need for progressive refreshing of the board explained in the trustees' annual report.

5.7.5 If a charity's governing document provides for one or more trustees to be nominated and elected by a wider membership, or elected by a wider membership after nomination or recommendation by the board, the charity supports the members to play an informed role in these processes.¹⁰

There is much to be commended by the approach outlined in this Code.

91. Moving into the future what is required is an assurance that the Methodist persons recruited to serve on these new bodies have the right skillset to be able to carry out the critical task being given to them. The responsibilities of Trustees are now so all encompassing it is essential that a wide skillset, with expertise such as finance, investment management, legal, HR and charity governance are in the mix.
92. The other main concern in the membership of these new bodies is how diversity is found in those who are serving. There must be an intentional commitment to the new structures seeking to be open and inclusive of all those within our membership. Drawing on the commitments in the JDS strategy the process that seeks applicants for these roles must include clear and openly communicated role descriptions with appropriate opportunities for exploration around these roles to increase confidence in those who may be interested. As part of those explorations the requirements of the role, training opportunities and a clear outline of the time being asked should be shared.
93. All this implies that those involved in any selection processes must themselves have been appropriately trained to ensure that they are able to discern fairly and with knowledge of the expectations both of the particular role and the wider needs of the Church.
94. The Conference is therefore asked to authorise the creation of a Nomination Committee. The Nomination Committee will have three main responsibilities:
 - To scrutinise and to sign off the (volunteer) role descriptors for a member of the Connexional Council or one of the committees in order that a seat could be advertised.
 - To agree the process by which recruitment for a particular role should be conducted, including consideration of targeted advertising, 'taster' opportunities, mentoring and shadowing as appropriate and in line with the JDS strategy.
 - To bring nominations with reasoned statements to the Conference or Connexional Council as required in each case.
95. It would be inconsistent to establish a committee the principal aim of which is to develop better patterns of recruitment without that committee being itself carefully recruited. The Conference is therefore asked to direct the Secretary of the Conference to work with the co-chairs of the JDS Committee, the Chair of the SRC, the Youth President and two other persons whom the Conference is asked to appoint, to oversee a robust open recruitment process for an interim Nominations Committee and to bring nominations to the Council. The Conference is also asked to direct the Council to appoint the interim Nominations Committee so that it might bring nominations for membership of the main committees to the 2023 Conference. Furthermore, the Conference is asked to direct further work on the constitution and terms of reference of the Nominations Committee and for draft Standing Orders for a Nominations Committee to be brought to the 2023 Conference.
96. Once the initial membership of all the bodies is finalised the Nominations Committee should be able to turn its attention to other Committees of the Conference as required and also creating a pool of individuals who would be ready to be considered for future vacancies. This work could involve maintaining an appropriate skills register for those that wish to be considered for roles in the future.

¹⁰ <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en>

97. One further task for the Nominations Committee would be to work with the Chairs of the Council and Committees to ensure that every three years a review of the incumbent members is carried out in order to ensure their continuing suitability for the role in order to ensure that the committees are able to function as effectively and responsively as possible.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

44/8. The Conference received Section E of the Report.

44/9. The Conference directed the Secretary of the Conference to work with the co-chairs of the JDS Committee, the Chair of the SRC, the Youth President and two other persons to oversee a robust open recruitment process for an interim Nominations Committee and to bring nominations to the Council in October 2022.

44/10. The Conference directed the Council to appoint an interim Nominations Committee to serve until the 2023 Conference.

Further resolutions relating to Section E are at the end of the report.

Section F: District Reviews

The 2021 Conference resolved:

- 30/10. *The Conference directed the Council to review SO 426, in consultation with the Law and Polity Committee, and to consider whether revisions are required in the light of this work.*
- 30/11. *The Conference in 2021 directed that the Council appoints a successor body to the District Review Monitoring Group to receive reports on regional conversations and to bring proposals under SO 401(2) on the reconfiguration of Districts to the Council. (Agenda item 30 Oversight & Trusteeship, Resolution 30/11).*
- 30/12. *The Conference directed that Districts are not permitted to advertise for the appointment of a District Chair until a full process of reflection with others has been completed and reported to the District Review Monitoring Group*

98. The successor body required by 30/11 was appointed by the Council and named the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning. Its terms of reference were agreed by the Council in October 2021 (MC/21/71):

- a. *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).*
- b. *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.*

99. The membership of the Task Group (RDSPTG) is listed in Appendix 1 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).
100. The Task Group has met four times at the time of writing with a further meeting planned up to the beginning of May. Updates on each the regional conversations have been shared at Task Group meetings.

Context and vision

101. The work of the RDSPTG has been debated in the Connexional Leaders' Forum and the Council. Over the course of these debates it became clear that the underlying reasons for the proposals to reconfigure the district structure of the Church had not been accepted by many of those who were being asked to consider changes. The group has therefore worked with others in the Council and the Chairs' Meeting to try to communicate the need for the other changes proposed in this area of work to be accompanied by a different arrangement of the Districts. It might be helpful to the Conference briefly to rehearse that reasoning here.
102. The vision of reshaping and reconfiguring of Districts sits at the heart of the work on oversight and trusteeship as we seek to unlock renewed focus and energy in every part of the Church. The aim is both to develop clearer, more focused spiritual and missional leadership for the Connexion as a whole, and to release more effective local spiritual, pastoral and missional leadership.
103. The proposals in this section, therefore, include a recommendation that the number of District Chairs be reduced, providing a smaller, focused connexional leadership, but also that they be supported by and work with other leaders in the District, the number and roles of whom can be determined by the District's needs and priorities. This, the RDSPTG believes, has the potential to create fresh space and energy for more imaginative, contextual and effective support for mission and ministry in Local Churches and Circuits.
104. Other considerations which have been drivers of this part of the work, such as the need to reduce the connexional budget, remain important (and the proposals here would, if adopted, deliver savings of £300,000), but the RDSPTG is persuaded that the reforms are beneficial in and of themselves and essential to the vision of a Church better able to respond to *Our Calling*.

Reports to the Council

105. The RDSPTG has continued throughout the year to receive updates from the conversations taking place in each stationing region. Ahead of the January 2022 Methodist Council a broad picture of a possible future structure was emerging, which led the Secretary of the Conference to share a proposal with the Council in January 2022 (MC/22/24A). This update shared that:
- a. "...we have moved towards a place where it is commonly envisaged that a smaller number of Connexional Leaders (i.e., 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).*
 - b. 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."

106. The report noted that this may be the way towards the lighter and more affordable structure at which 'Reaffirming Our Calling' aims, but also noted that there is a considerable amount of work needing to be done before a proposal can be taken to the Conference along these lines and noted some of the issues that had been raised.
107. 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)).
108. The Council then agreed to direct the RDSPTG to begin detailed work as outlined in the report to reduce the number of Districts (resolution 24A/2).
109. A further report from the RDSPTG was made to the Council in April outlining work to be done and what information would be shared with the Conference. This update notified the Council that the Secretary of the Conference was writing to each District Policy Committee to confirm whether it agreed that the regional group that it has been having conversations in, is the right one for future structural arrangements. At the time of writing, responses to the Secretary's letter are still being received; the Conference will be updated on those responses when it meets.

Comments received from consultations

110. The RDSPTG has endeavoured to work consensually throughout the process, and therefore has been in consultation with a range of stakeholders including:
 - The Methodist Council in its meetings in January 2022 and April 2022
 - The Connexional Leaders' Forum at its meeting in March 2022
 - District Chairs and Synod Secretaries (who have been sent minutes of the Task Group's meetings)
 - A number of the District MissionersThe Task Group (on behalf of the Council) has also consulted the Law and Polity Committee as required by resolution 30/10.
111. Three key themes emerged from the conversations in the Council and the CLF: leadership, mission, and finance. A snapshot of the comments received are listed in Appendix 3 below alongside responses from the Task Group. Having considered these issues the Council agreed to the Task Group's proposal in MC/22/24A. Further comments have since been received from District Policy Committees and the Task Group continues to engage with issues raised.

Mapping a connexional framework

112. In considering how to map a connexional framework the RDSPTG has borne in mind the comments received from the consultations listed above as well other comments arising from updates from the regional conversations and meetings of the Task Group. The key factors that need to be considered have been identified as:

Statistics

113. The Task Group considered statistics showing the numbers of churches per District from 2002-2022, as well as numbers of members per District from 2002-2020.

The statistics can be found in Appendix 2 below, but the headlines are:

- Over the past 20 years 2,228 churches have closed, which is a reduction of approximately 35%.
- Between 2002-2020 membership reduced by 157,203, a reduction of approximately 49%
- It is also worth noting that the last time the configuration of Districts was assessed by the number of members was in 1957 when the number of home districts was reduced to 34, on the basis of roughly 30,000 members per separated Chair. Applying this approach to current membership levels would result in approximately five Districts, which is significantly less than the 30 we currently have, and is less than the number of Districts being proposed.

The Task Group has also considered projected numbers of circuits, churches, ministers and members in the proposed framework. These numbers are also included in Appendix 2.

Structures within Districts

114. The RDSPTG has explored how a Connexion of larger Districts might most effectively marshal its resources and exercise missional leadership, with each of the new Districts having a single Chair, some additional leadership supported by Connexional funding, and other leadership funded from within the new District. Regional groups are exploring different models for how that might work.
115. Each regional conversation has considered collaborative ways of working and possible leadership structures for the future. It is important to note that the conversations have moved at different speeds. In some places a possible new leadership structure has already been identified whilst others are still exploring ways the Districts can work collaboratively. The Task Group has therefore recognised that reconfiguration of the structure will need to be incremental (and proposals for a timetable are included later in this report).
116. One factor which the Task Group has recognised as crucial within each District the relational aspect of District leadership working alongside and building relationships with Superintendents.

Role of a District Chair in new structure

117. The 2021 Conference (resolution 30/10) directed the Council to review SO 426, recognising both that over the last two decades (eg, in the Wales, South East and Shetland Districts) the roles of Assistant and Deputy Chairs has developed (and that those developments are not all reflected in the Standing Orders) and that the reconfiguration of Districts is likely to see the evolution of different forms of leadership alongside that of the Chair, as is already evident. For example, the East Midlands Stationing Region undertook work on the different patterns of deputies and assistants already apparent in the four districts as they developed the model to be implemented in Nottingham and Derby from 1 September this year.
118. In bringing to the Council in January the recommendation to move to fewer and larger Districts, the Task Group was mindful of two needs. One is the importance of the connexional dimension of the role of the District Chair (as identified in the 2006 report, 'What is a District Chair?').¹¹ As outlined above, the task group sees the new structure as a way to enable the gifts of leadership which Chairs bring to be used with others in the Connexion to offer vision and strategic direction as the Church as a whole lives out 'Our Calling'. The other is the need for Districts themselves to respond contextually to the missional imperative; it has been clear from the conversations in regional groupings that there are different ways in which Districts might organise their internal lives and that therefore the Connexion needs to find ways for different models of collegial leadership to evolve in different places.
119. Aside from the arrangements for the Shetland District, the roles of Deputies and Assistants are set

¹¹ *What is a District Chair?*, Conference 2006, paras 30, 32, 50

out in SO 426. In recognising that future arrangements might require different options, the task group has been alert to the need (following the JDS strategy) to move to the consistent practice that Districts Synods should appoint these postholders through an appropriate recruitment method; another principle which the task group feels should be clearly expressed is that presbyters share in leadership throughout the Church with deacons and lay people. The Standing Order currently prescribes that a deputy Chair be a presbyter stationed in the District who is appointed by the Synod whilst an assistant is someone appointed by the Chair (albeit, if public facing, needing the approval of the District Policy Committee).

120. This is, clearly, work in progress. The Law and Polity Committee has considered the suggestion that all appointments should be made by the Synod and has begun amending the Standing Order to reflect this. This will not be presented until next year, given that the current role of assistant needs further consideration (perhaps to become 'assistant to a deputy Chair'), as also the provisions for any senior diaconal and lay roles in a District. The Faith and Order Committee is giving consideration to the questions of oversight which arise from these proposals. The Task Group also believes that consideration needs to be given to the possibilities of presbyters being stationed to these roles (as currently is the case for, eg, the South East District Assistant Chairs).
121. The Task Group therefore recognises that there is still work to be done in this area. Inevitably, as different models emerge, so do questions about nomenclature. Is 'Assistant' the most helpful title for a senior role in a District? Should the consideration be given to other terms that have been used in other contexts (eg District Superintendent, Mission Area Superintendent, Senior Deacon, District Steward or Secretary) for roles that share the pastoral, missional or administrative responsibilities of the Chair?
122. The Task Group is also aware that the understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Chair are currently expressed with reference to Conference reports received in the middle of the first decade of this century ('What is a District Chair?', 'The Nature of Oversight', 'The Pastoral Role of the District Chair') and the competencies agreed by the Ministries Committee in the last few years. The Task Group has begun to review the competencies and welcomes the proposal to be brought to the Conference by the Faith and Order Committee that that work be done by that committee in collaboration with the Ministries Committee.

Moving towards a new configuration

123. Resolution 30/12 of the 2021 Conference recognised the relationship between the stationing of Chairs and the reconfiguration of Districts and therefore sought to limit the number of Chairs whose appointments might need to be altered significantly in the wake of reorganisation. The RDSPTG, has also noted, however, that the appointment of interim Chairs is costly, labour-intensive and can increase uncertainty. The Conference is therefore asked to note, in appendix 4, the appointment and reinvitation dates alongside the outcomes of regional conversations. All presbyters, Chairs included, are aware that they are stationed annually and those who have accepted reinvitations are aware that the role in which they currently serve might change.
124. Based on the conversations and responses from DPCs this is what the emerging map looks like with new Districts based on current stationing regions:

Name of New District	Names of Current Districts	Number of members (2020)
North West	Lancashire	5705
	Bolton and Rochdale	3856
	Manchester and Stockport	5985

	Liverpool	4052
	Cumbria	2560
Isle of Man	Isle of Man	797
West Midlands	Birmingham	6929
	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	6234
	Chester and Stoke	6376
East Midlands	Northampton	8409
	Nottingham and Derby	6731
	Lincolnshire	3507
	East Anglia	5332
South West	Plymouth and Exeter	5969
	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4762
	Bristol	6692
	Southampton	7785
Channel Islands	Channel Islands	894
Wales Cymru	Wales	5681
	Cymru	808
Yorkshire	Sheffield	5441
	Yorkshire North and East	7311
	Yorkshire West	9184
North East	Darlington	4235
	Newcastle	5861
South East	Beds, Essex & Herts	6699
	London	15739
	South East	8633
Scotland	Scotland	1690
Shetland	Shetland	167

An indicative geographical map is shown at Appendix 5.

125. The proposed new framework shows Districts that are very closely correlated with stationing regions. Having considered the various regional groups that operate in the life of the Methodist Church in Britain, the Task Group strongly recommends that the next phase of this work brings stationing, Learning Network, and Safeguarding regions together into the emerging framework.

Finance

126. In approaching the task of reducing the spend from the Connexional Central Services budget on a range of work covered by the Oversight and Trusteeship reports it was never the intention that the reduction would be found simply by reducing the number of District Chairs but that there should also be changes to the Conference and to the Council (and its committees).
127. 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 allowance for Scotland and the Shetland District would support the Lerwick and Walls 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. Each District would get the same amount which would be divided evenly among the number of Districts. This allowance would be to support leadership as each District sees fit (eg to fund Deputy Chair or other leadership/support roles etc).
128. 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 support the new larger Districts. The Senior Managers of the Team will work with Districts to explore how, within budgetary constraints, the new Districts can be best resourced by members of the Connexional Team.
129. The phasing of the reductions will be dependent on which existing Chairs move into the new District Chair roles. Excluding Wales, Scotland and the Islands, based on the current position with re-invitations, 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-invitations or delays in reconfiguration could impact on this position.
130. 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

131. What is not contained in these figures is the current trend of the increase in the contributions to the District Advance Funds which has seen an increase by 20% in the past year and an average increase of 6% per year over the last five years. It is assumed this will continue to rise with the ongoing sale of property throughout the Connexion. This funding is available to Districts to spend as they see fit to support mission and ministry. There should also be economies of scale which will be harnessed as work is pooled together across former smaller Districts.
132. In thinking to the future, the core that runs through any reconfiguration is not how to spread around existing work throughout a wider geographic area but how work is curtailed to fit with the resource available. It also will be important for the Connexional Team to align itself to the new Districts to provide support with compliance matters and the Task Group recommends that the Team be shaped accordingly.

Timeline

133. The following timeline is provisional and depends on the final outcome of decisions for regional groupings and the processes that would need to follow. It is anticipated that 2027 is the date by which all of the changes will be completed, although some regions are ready for change now.
134. The RDSPTG has been mindful not only that its work was to be consensual but also that the process

for the changes in district composition under SO 401 requires that all Districts and Circuits involved are formally consulted on the proposed changes. Therefore, the timetable for discussion is:

October 2022 or January 2023	The Council drafts recommendations relating to the East Midlands, South West and North West regions in collaboration with their respective Districts
November to April 2023	Recommendations are voted on at Synods and Circuit Meetings in those Districts
April-May 2023	The Council makes substantive resolutions to the Conference
June 2023	The Conference considers and if agreed approves changes from September 2024 and directs transitional arrangements (which might or might not be provisional depending on the votes from Synods and Circuit meetings)
October 2023	The Council drafts recommendations relating to the West Midlands region in collaboration with its Districts
November 2023 to March/April 2024	Recommendations are voted on at Synods and Circuit Meetings in West Midlands
April 2024	The Council makes substantive resolutions to the Conference
June 2024	The Conference considers and if agreed approves changes from September 2025 for the West Midlands and directs transitional arrangements (which might or might not be provisional depending on the votes from Synods and Circuit meetings) and if necessary confirms (or not) changes from September 2024 for the East Midlands, South West and North West
October 2024	The Council drafts recommendations relating to and in collaboration with other Districts for changes in 2026 (and so on...)
June 2027	The Conference considers and if agreed approves the new district structures from 1 September 2027 or 2028

*****RESOLUTIONS**

44/11. DECLINED

44/12. WITHDRAWN

44/13. WITHDRAWN

44/14. WITHDRAWN

Additional Report: Report on Regional Conversations about District Reviews

Introduction

The Methodist Council meeting in January 2022 received a report of the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning and adopted a resolution directing that group to do further work to bring proposals for a much smaller number of Districts. In making that decision, the Council was aware of the conversations in regional groupings, generally based on stationing regions. At its subsequent meeting, the Task Group for Regional and District Structure Planning decided to consult each District with three questions:

1. Does your District see its future as being part of a larger unit based on the stationing region of which you are a part?
2. Does the District wish to consider a future as part of another Stationing region/ new district (and if so, which)?
3. Does the District believe that the mission of the Church is now best served by one or more Circuits being part of a different District (and if so, which Circuits and which District(s))?

Any District that is yet to make a response is welcome to do so; this report includes all those replies received at the time of writing. The table below summarises the answers that were received (noting the points which most immediately answer the three questions) and the current position on regional conversations that will inform the future District map. Those questions were asked in the wake of the Council's direction to the Task Group to move towards a plan for a smaller number of Districts and were designed to help the Task Group to see what likely outcomes were being discussed and what further conversations might need to be supported. A number of Districts raised broader questions about the process and the thinking behind it; and the full responses from the Districts will be made available to those whom the Conference entrusts with developing the proposals further.

It will be noted that the focus of these conversations is currently on the English Districts; the Task Group has been mindful of the particular situation of those Districts which exist in different jurisdictions and is not at this stage proposing any arrangement which merges any English District with one outside England.

Summary of District Responses

North West

Conversations in the North West began not with the Stationing region but with the Learning Network region. Subsequently, the **Chester and Stoke District** determined that its future did not lie with the North West and therefore is now working with the other West Midlands Districts (in which, with Wales and Cymru it forms a stationing region).

The Isle of Man District responded that it sees its future as a separate district, partly because of the complexity of being in a different jurisdiction and partly because it believed that there would be a detrimental environmental impact in being part of a larger district. Nevertheless, the District wishes actively to work with the NW region to consider where to benefit from pooled resources and joint working.

The Lancashire District reported that it sees its future as being part of a larger unit based on the North West stationing region rather than any other region and does not believe that the mission of the Church is now best served by any Circuits being part of a different District.

The **Manchester and Stockport District** sees itself as part of North-West England, fitting in with our stationing region. As far as Circuits, there are some questions to be explored about the southern edge of District and the District would value the freedom to make decisions about boundaries easily within a regional District, with due local consultation, and maybe without reference to the Conference.

The Liverpool District reported that it sees its future as being part of a larger unit based on the North West stationing region rather than any other region and does not believe that the mission of the Church is now best served by any Circuits being part of a different District.

The Cumbria District affirmed a commitment to exploring a larger District for the Northwest, on condition that, as an ecumenical county, Cumbria can remain a single sub-unit within it. Some in the north of the county feel links are better with the Northeast, but those in the south of Cumbria more naturally link with the Northwest (reflecting for example the areas covered by different NHS Trusts), so which region the Circuits link to is not an easily answered or perfectly answerable question. On balance, the District probably needs to

remain connected to the Northwest with the present Circuits within the Cumbria District remaining within the present boundaries of the District, given that they are co-terminus with the county of Cumbria, and, even more importantly, with the ecumenical county of Cumbria in which there operates an active and far reaching Covenanted Partnership in Extended Area.

West Midlands

In the West Midlands, conversations have been in train between Birmingham and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury but there needs to be a rethink following the introduction of Chester and Stoke to the picture. The Conference will receive a separate proposal about Wales and Cymru.

The **Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District** does see its future as being part of a larger unit based on the stationing region of which it is a part though it still between positive and neutral towards that larger unit being a full merger with Birmingham..

Part of the District is in Wales which is something of an anomaly but there are no current plans for those Circuits to join Wales Synod Cymru (though such a move would not be resisted by the District).

East Midlands

Three of the East Midlands Districts are moving towards becoming a larger unit with a single Chair for two Districts (Northampton and Nottingham & Derby) from September 2022 and three (with Lincolnshire) from September 2023. East Anglia (EA) has been part of conversations; a next stage of discussion needs to identify whether Bedfordshire, Essex & Hertfordshire (BEH) should be included in new East Midlands District, as the Learning Region now includes all five districts. Alternatively, if BEH is not part of this region's future, should East Anglia see its future with BEH.

The **Northampton District** is very positive about the conversations in the East Midlands and do not think any circuit moves are helpful at present. However, there might be questions about the High Wycombe and Amersham Circuits at some point in the future.

The **Nottingham and Derby District** sees its future as being part of a larger unit based on the stationing region of which you are a part and is committed to the current process but have some concerns around which of the present districts involved in our conversations will form a viable larger unit. At present, the District does not see any value in moving and circuit into another District, but is aware that the effects of the pandemic on viability and mission plans of some circuits have yet to be fully considered.

The **East Anglia District** Policy Committee has reached a consensus that for relational and strategic reasons it needs to look south to the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District particularly if the Conference *requires* EA to be part of a larger entity. The DPC therefore concludes that the possibility of two or three larger units formed from the current five Districts in the Eastern Learning Region should be explored. Such an arrangement does *not preclude* the possibility of shared working across the five Districts where that is strategic and in the interests of critical mass and whether there might still be a mixed economy for various streams of work. However, there are also concerns about any larger unit being form when some feel that the District is already *too* big and uncertainty about the rationale for any new arrangement.

South West

The conversations in the South West were based on the stationing region which includes the Channel Islands District.

The **Plymouth and Exeter (P&E) District** is pleased to be part of the South West conversations and sees its future as part of a larger entity but not one as large as the current stationing region which it thinks is too big for effective communication and engagement and reasonable travel expectations. Therefore, the DPC proposes a District comprising the current P&E plus Cornwall & IoS and parts of Southampton and possibly of Bristol (which are in the Bath & Wells Anglican Diocese).

The **Cornwall and Isles of Scilly District** see its future as being part of a larger unit based on the stationing region. There is a particular willingness to join with Plymouth & Exeter, as we share many different functions with them already but would not want that to be a staging post to a wider amalgamation and on balance supports a wider grouping. The District is concerned that in a large geographical area, deputy chairs should be able to exercise pastoral care at a local level and ask that serious consideration be given to Deputies being non-separated with 50% circuit commitment.

The **Bristol District** asked if a range of options might be presented for wider consultation than is currently taking place as a simple binary response to the questions posed is inadequate to reflect the range of opinions or possible options for re-structuring and wondered about external consultancy to help the Connexion look objectively at alternative options rather than trying to reform from within. The District feels that the current stationing region works well, in relation to its current set of objectives but there is some hesitation about whether this is the right geographical area to fulfil all the current objectives of a District as laid out in Standing Orders. Wider conversation with ecumenical partners would be helpful as would exploration of an alternative option might be around a fairer distribution nationally, whether that be based on population or membership. An alternative might be to look at the areas used by the Government to divide the country. No entire Circuit felt the desire at this time to move geographically in an alternative direction. However, it was noted that there may be individual churches within Circuits for whom it might be more beneficial for them to move into an adjacent District.

The **Southampton District** remains concerned about the proposed direction of travel in re-configuring Districts as it is still challenging to see what the benefits will be for the mission of the Church and could well fragment the Church if there is not a connexional focus on such changes. There will be financial implications for the Districts as costs will increase, even if there is a reduction in central budgets, and such increases will be difficult to communicate to the wider membership in Circuits and Local Churches if there is no sense of what is being gained. The DPC members are keen to ensure that whatever structure is introduced, both in the SW Region or across the Connexion, that the Chairs' pastoral responsibilities, for both ordained and lay members, are adequately resourced and maintained.

The District sees the future of the Southampton District as continuing to be in conversation with the South-West Stationing Region and does not wish to consider a future as part of another stationing Region. However, two or three Circuits might eventually look more towards the London/South-East Region or an Oxford/Northampton Region and therefore the District asks if an observer from Southampton could be present at discussions those regions are having.

Yorkshire

The three districts in the Yorkshire region noted that there was a significant restructuring exercise five years ago.

The **Sheffield District** is fully aware that ongoing review is always appropriate and is not averse to re-shaping per se but does not feel that now is the time to do so. It remains unconvinced that the objectives outlined in your communication will be achieved by the proposed reconfigurations and considers that they could in fact be detrimental to the missional objectives of the districts in their current form and to relationships which are key to the local work. The team would prefer to see the valuable work that is already being done across district boundaries in the region develop and evolve naturally in ways that are helpful and supportive to the work of each district.

The **Yorkshire North and East District** is not persuaded that there is sufficient evidence as to how the proposed reconfiguration would achieve the stated aims of more effective governance, more responsive mission, and better use of resources. The Team agreed to postpone further conversation until more detailed proposals are received.

The **Yorkshire West District** recognises that declining membership, and church closures, mean that the Connexion needs to reconfigure Districts, but argues that simply joining existing bodies does not consider the geographical and cultural links that need to be recognised. There is a worry that some of the proposed districts are large and unworkable and will create an unrealistic workload for chairs and district officers. In relation to particular circuits, some in the north of the District may have more in common with the Cumbria and/or Darlington Districts than with the Yorkshire Districts; the District also suggests that there may be a place for some new circuits linked by work and culture rather than by geography.

North East

Districts in the north east of England share a stationing region with Scotland and Shetland. In 2016 the **Scotland District** and the **Shetland District** moved to sharing a Chair and report that the current ways of working have proved beneficial and that they see their future in the continued development of sharing and wait to see what changes take place to those Districts we currently relate to in the North of England in relation to regional stationing, regional probationers' support, regional complaints team. Neither District wishes to consider a future as part of another stationing region nor do they think that the mission of the Church is now best served by one or more Circuits being part of a different District.

The **Darlington District** reported that it saw some positive reasons for change and noted that the present Learning Network region is Newcastle and Darlington. It also noted that there is some correspondence between that and the URC Synod and the Baptist Union region although there are more Methodist churches. However, there was also a feeling that the timing is wrong and that the focus should be on God for All to which Darlington and Newcastle have different approaches. The District believes that merging Districts is fraught with problems and that things work better from the bottom up rather than imposed from the top down.

Whilst there are obvious links with Newcastle District and parts of North Cumbria – a possible conversation with North Cumbria – South Cumbria has more links with Lancashire and there could be problems with the ecumenical set up in Cumbria. In terms of particular circuits, the District believes that some changes could be made with the Circuits in North Yorkshire but that border issues need to be looked at in the future once the district process has settled down.

The **Newcastle upon Tyne District** recognises its healthy and fruitful collaboration with the Darlington District in some shared resources and committees, and it is grateful for the working partnership which efficiently achieves parts of our mutual mission and ministry. However, the pandemic has exacerbated the ongoing challenges of our changing context, requiring greater District investment of time and relationship to the local churches and

circuits. To change our structures at this time would be substantially detrimental to the support for pressured Superintendents and Circuit Stewards in their mission and ministry to fulfil *Our Calling*, and particularly the work invested in the God for All strategy, which is showing early signs of fruitfulness. The District also wishes to note their significant concern for the wellbeing of the District Officers who are already working beyond acceptable capacities, should the Conference choose this direction of travel to regionalise the Districts.

South East

The **South East** stationing region comprises the **London District, the South East (SE) District and the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire (BEH) District**. The Chairs consider that the current southeast stationing region is far too large in terms of geography, Methodist membership and ministerial complement to constitute a single district. Based on current figures, a district comprising the current southeast stationing region would have a combined Methodist membership of 31,071 and a ministerial complement (including Authorised Presbyters) of 250. This represents 18.9% of the current total Methodist membership and not far short of 20% of the current total number of circuit ministerial appointments.

The present London District, Southeast District and Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District result from a reconfiguration of Districts nearly 20 years ago; the Chairs believe that the strategic reasons for that reconfiguration remain just as valid now and should not be overlooked and that the case for a London District remains compelling. Therefore, there need to be conversations between the South-East District and South-West region and BEH and the East Midlands region (where the BEH DPC has observer status).

The **Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District** DPC considers that creating a regional district based on the present stationing region (comprising the London and Southeast Districts together with this district) would be a regressive development with a negative impact on the mission of circuits and local churches in each of the Districts concerned but the DPC recognises the potential benefits of being part of a larger District. With regard to particular circuits, the DPC considers that there are logical reasons for the 12 circuits in this District to remain together within whatever new structure is eventually established as the circuit boundaries are mostly aligned with the county boundaries or other unitary authorities.

The **South East District** already feels itself to be large – taking in parts of Berkshire, north Hampshire, non-London Surrey, Sussex and non-London Kent, as well as Malta and Gibraltar. We also recognise that our geography means that we are surrounded on 2 sides by the Channel, and by the Thames and Medway rivers. This means logically that we either disappear, remain the same, or could expand westwards (which would mean engaging with Circuits in the eastern part of the Southampton District). There would be some logic to this as the eastern side of Hampshire, Basingstoke and Reading, for example do have strong commuting links towards London. However, whilst there could be modest changes, given the significant size of the District already, and might not lead to economies of scale. Linking to London would be more feasible than to Southampton, given that SE is better connected to London. There is a sound logic for remaining in the present South-East stationing region. The only other option would be the South-West stationing region and, with the exception of the eastern side of the Southampton District, our synergy is with the London and BEH Districts for stationing.

With regard to particular Circuits, it is on the edges of the District where the possibilities emerge. There could be a missional case for Reading and Basingstoke being in the same District given the significance of the Thames Valley corridor. Equally, the East Solent and Downs Circuit is our neighbour alongside our western border with Hampshire, and includes the only church in Surrey and West Sussex not in the South-East District.

The **London District** expresses its strong preference to continue as the London District in its current form and with its present boundaries. Despite wishing to retain this status the

District is keen to explore with neighbouring Districts how they can work together on mutually beneficial areas of mission and service.

***RESOLUTION

44/11A. The Conference received the Report.

Section G: The Local Church

135. The 2021 Conference adopted resolution 30/12A which enacted the proposals before it relating to the Local Church, substantially completing the Oversight and Trusteeship work on Local Churches. The revised Standing Orders facilitate arrangements for the formation of new Local Churches, and for their cessation or merger where minimum membership numbers fall below 12. Work preparing guidelines and template resolutions for placing on the Methodist Church website, including concerning arrangements for multi-site churches, has continued.
136. The Oversight and Trusteeship Report to the Conference of 2021 indicated that the emergence of creative examples would continue to be monitored for emerging developments and any requirements for further clarity or evolution, although it also recognised that at present CPD requires at least one physically located Local Church within a Circuit.¹² Conversations regarding online church arrangements have continued, with perhaps greater or lesser awareness of the present considerations within CPD or more broadly, suggesting that it would be timely to consider the matter further. There are three areas (at least) to consider:
- i) In terms of CPD, Clause 1(xv) of the Deed of Union, Standing Order 003(vii) (and the footnote to SO 600) all indicate that a 'Local Church' involves a body of members "connected with and attending one particular place of worship". (The provisions in SOs 605A, 612 and 942(1) allow for multi-site options rather than removing the need for a 'place of worship' as such, albeit an argument might be made that, provided that there is at least one place of worship in any multi-aspect or amalgamated arrangement, then one or more of the associated congregations might not need to meet in a fixed place of worship or might meet online.) Thus, at present an entirely online church is not possible, and to enable it to be possible a change in the provisions of CPD would be required.
 - ii) Importantly and first, there are various matters of faith and order to consider. The Methodist Church's ecclesiology and understanding of church life together mean that we might expect to meet face to face at least some of the time, including for baptisms or confirmation. (Additionally, although the Conference of 2021 agreed a period of discernment in which some or all of the worshippers may gather together to share in Holy Communion through electronic means, we will not know until the end of the three-year discernment period whether this would become a further issue regarding meeting wholly online.) Thus some matters of faith and order require consideration if an entirely online arrangement were to be authorised.
 - iii) There are also wider questions about the registration or requirements in some circumstances for there to be a named physical location, apart from thinking it through from internal Methodist Church or TMCP perspectives and processes. Wider registration issues might not be as significant as the issues of faith and order, nor might they necessarily be prohibitive where provision of a correspondence address alone might be sufficient, for example, for a financial institution to permit a church to hold a bank account. Nonetheless, it is important that possible implications are considered and more fully understood in respect of online churches. For example, the Places of Worship Registration or related legislation deserves further consideration, for whilst a new church might not necessarily be required to be

¹² 2021 Agenda, p.434, paragraph 8.7 g).

registered, doing so might sometimes provide beneficial evidence for exemption from some taxation or charging regimes that might still apply depending on the type of online life engaged in. Charity Law considerations also apply to every Methodist church (regardless of whether a particular church has sufficient turnover to require individual registration with the Charity Commission). A charity will generally need to have at least a public correspondence address (not just a PO Box). Whilst this does not therefore require a physical place of worship, consideration before using a personal or perhaps manse address for official correspondence, which might then become more available in the public domain, would be sensible. Indeed, given the need for at least a correspondence address, the idea of an 'entirely' or 'wholly' online church is in practice not completely possible. Thus the implications of a physical worship or even a correspondence address, and greater clarity and awareness regarding the relative benefits or irrelevance of these issues, would be helpful.

137. Immediate consideration of the above factors suggests that something of a middle type of approach might be best, ie, one that expects (and perhaps explicitly continues to require) members of a church (and therefore Circuit) to meet at least sometimes physically (possibly for particular purposes), even if generally it chooses to do so online. (Communications with some of those involved in these developments suggest that some acknowledge that sometimes meeting physically will be both necessary and beneficial, whereas others speak in terms of being 'entirely online'.) If a middle approach is pursued, good use could be made of SO 942(2), whereby an online church might occasionally use (and in effect share) another Local Church's chapel. (Alternatively, both churches could form a scheme under SO 942(1) to become two congregations as part of a single Local Church; but this option might be less attractive to those who wish to break new ground in what they might perceive or desire to be less encumbered ways, meaning that they might prefer to stand alone as a 'Local Church' in their own right, and thus might potentially prefer to use SO 942(2) over SO 942(1)).
138. Further reflection about how best to approach these issues is therefore required, including whether an entirely (or close to being entirely) online church might be possible or appropriate, and in consequence whether any amendments to CPD or additional Standing Order provisions might be needed. Accordingly, the Conference is asked to direct that further work be done and a report brought to the 2023 Conference.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

44/15. The Conference received section G of the Report

44/16. The Conference directed the Faith and Order and Law and Polity committees to consider the issues involved in establishing and operating an online church, and to report to the Conference of 2023 together with any recommendations for any necessary amendments to the Deed of Union and Standing Orders.

Section H: Discernment Panel

The 2021 Conference resolved:

30/13. The Conference directs the Ministries Committee to develop a constitution and ways of working for a discernment panel for adoption by the Council

139. Whilst the Ministries Committee gave consideration to this resolution, there has been broader discussion and a recognition that other pieces of work already in train are connected to this resolution. The work can be considered under three headings: Competencies for Leadership; Discernment for future Leaders; Nominations process for Leadership bodies.

Competencies for Leadership

140. The Ministries Committee has spent considerable time on the competencies for all stages of ordained ministry and these were being further expanded to ensure inclusions on the principles outlined in the JDS Strategy. Work reported elsewhere in this Agenda, indeed in this report, focuses on the work that has begun to be done to define the leadership role of a Deputy District Chair. The developing work on the size and shape of the Districts, as well as the composition of bodies such as the Connexional Council and the Connexional Leaders' Forum have all led to the need to explore further the connexional leadership role of those who may be Chairs in reconfigured Districts and work, as reported earlier, will be undertaken by the Faith and Order Committee in collaboration with the Ministries Committee.

Discernment for future Leaders

141. The 2020 Conference (under resolution 25/5) directed work to be undertaken on discernment processes for senior posts. The 2021 Conference broadened this to indicate that a Discernment Panel was required. The Ministries Committee had begun work on the discernment panel specifically named in resolution 30/13, but remains concerned to ensure that any panel is consonant with the review of the candidating process and other current pieces of work (including thinking around vocations). In view of that, the Committee has paused before undertaking much more work. It is also recognised that there is a need to ensure that other processes of discernment, eg the nomination of District Chairs, are taken into account.

Nomination Process for Senior Bodies

142. The work on the discernment of vocation to and capacity for senior leadership in the life of the Church cannot be divorced from the discernment of vocation to serve within, for example, the Connexional Council and the Connexional Leaders' Forum. The Conference might also want to consider that there are roles which it elects currently which have no advance processes in place to ensure that the most diverse and most skilled group are being offered for election. A pre-process for preparation and exploration for significant roles in the life of the Church would give opportunity to discern suitability and vocation for the nature, time commitment and focus required for these roles.
143. The Conference is therefore asked to direct that further work be done in this area, to consider how vocations for leadership in the Church can be appropriately fostered and supported and coordinated with processes of appointment.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 44/17. The Conference received Section H of the report and directs the Ministries Committee to continue its work on processes of discernment for senior roles and to report to the 2023 Conference.**

Section I: Conclusion

144. The recommendations in this report will, if adopted, help to reshape the Methodist Church in Britain dramatically for the middle of the 21st century. By 2027, the Methodist Church in Britain would have:
- a smaller Conference meeting for a shorter period but with more opportunities for conferring when not gathered in person;
 - a Connexional Council with frequent meetings and the ability make decisions swiftly with clearly defined Trustee responsibilities and appropriate authority to act as necessary on behalf of the Conference;
 - a Connexional Leaders' Forum, in which District Chairs and the Warden have a key role but where there is also a balancing lay presence and which is able to reflect on the key issues of the day and to advise the Connexional Council appropriately;

- 12 to 14 Districts, generally of significant size geographically and with a critical mass of members and funds sufficient to sustain the life of the District by the sharing of resources across the larger geographical area;
- a range of mission-focused ways of working within Districts and District Leadership Teams comprising gifted, well-equipped and well-supported lay and ordained people whose vocation to leadership has been carefully discerned;
- streamlined committees supporting the Conference and the Council, providing the Church with clear but nuanced lines of reporting, opportunities for appropriate delegation, and flexibility in a context of continued change;
- a dispersed element of the Connexional Team strategically deployed to work with the Districts alongside members of the District teams and volunteers in a structure which is consistent across the Connexion and across areas of work;
- opportunities for ministers and others to explore vocation to senior leadership and to be supported formationally in that exploration, with processes of discernment which are open and inclusive;
- multi-site churches and churches which blend physical gatherings and online life, using the resources of freed property to live out Our Calling in their mission and operating confidently in terms of their statutory obligations.

145. In some ways, progress towards these goals has been slower than was hoped over the last year. The work has been time-consuming and careful, the 2021 Conference having in effect set up different conversations between the committees of the Church to ensure that appropriate conferring took place. The work now needs clear coordination and more focused work where identified and still required, so the Conference is asked to direct the completion of the work it requested in 2021 and the further work which this report has identified (save where this is being given by the preceding resolutions in this report to other bodies) to a new body, the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group. This group should be convened by the Secretary of the Conference and include the Connexional Secretary, two representatives of each of the SRC, the L&P Committee, and the F&O Committee, a District Chair, and two lay people each a member of their respective DPC. The group should be given authority to delegate parts of its task to other committees or subtask groups or, given the complexity and urgency of the task, to appoint an executive (from within the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group) to work with the Secretary of the Conference to ensure that the work required by this and the 2021 Conference is completed and reported to the Conference of 2023.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

44/18. The Conference received Section I of the report.

44/19. The Conference delegated to the Council the appointment of an Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group to undertake the work referred to in the following resolutions, consulting and delegating as appropriate to progress the work as far as possible, including by bringing enabling or amending provisions in CPD.

44/20. The Conference directed the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group to complete the outstanding work in connection with the following resolutions of the Conference of 2021:

- 30/6 (establishing a Connexional Council as a connexional trustee body, and in replacement of the Methodist Council and the Strategy and Resources Committee);**
- 30/7 (revision of Connexional Committees, including in connection with the question of oversight set out in resolution 44/21, below);**
- 30/10 (review of SO 426 and provisions for senior District roles, taking note of the Faith and Order Committee's work regarding the nature of a District Chair).**

44/21. The Conference directed the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group, in consultation with the Faith and Order and Law and Polity committees, to:

- a) review the Connexional Leadership Forum's membership, responsibilities, and ways of working as raised in paragraphs 69 and 70 of section D of this report; and
- b) consider the questions of the oversight exercised by the Conference which are raised in section E of this report, and to review further proposals relating to the committee structure in the light of their consideration.

44/22.The Conference directed the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group to draft a constitution and terms of reference for the Nominations Committee and to work with the Law and Polity Committee to bring draft Standing Orders to the 2023 Conference.

44/23.The Conference directed the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group to monitor, receive and consider all the reports from those working on the resolutions passed by the Conference in connection with this report to ensure that future proposals are comprehensive and coherent, and to bring a full report with recommendations to the 2023 Conference.

Appendix 1 – Membership of the Task Group for Regional & 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

Appendix 2 – Statistics

Number of Members per District (2002-2020)

District No. (2022)	District Name (2022)	No. of members (2020)	District No. (2002)	District Name (2002)	No. of members (2002)
1	Synod Cymru	808	1	London North East	13589
2	Wales	5681	2	London North West	14532
5	Birmingham	6929	3	London South West	16118
6	Bolton & Rochdale	3856	4	London South East	11788
7	Bristol	6692	5	Birmingham	13300
9	Cumbria	2560	6	Bolton & Rochdale	8191
10	Channel Islands	894	7	Bristol	12898
11	Chester & Stoke	6376	8	South Wales	8699
12	Cornwall	4762	9	Cumbria	5118
13	Darlington	4235	10	Channel Islands	1891
14	East Anglia	5332	11	Chester & Stoke	11916
15	Isle of Man	797	12	Cornwall	8851
17	Lincolnshire	3507	13	Darlington	9712
18	Liverpool	4052	14	East Anglia	8937
19	Manchester	5985	15	Isle of Man	1416
20	Newcastle	5861	16	Leeds	10307
21	Lancashire	5705	17	Lincoln & Grimsby	7646
22	Nottingham & Derby	6731	18	Liverpool	10718
23	Northampton	8409	19	Manchester & Stockport	12355
24	Plymouth & Exeter	5969	20	Newcastle upon Tyne	12014
25	Sheffield	5441	21	North Lancashire	10225
26	Southampton	7785	22	Nottingham & Derby	11910
27	Yorkshire West	9184	23	Northampton	13042
28	Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury	6234	24	Plymouth & Exeter	12003
29	Yorkshire North & East	7311	25	Sheffield	11241
31	Scotland	1690	26	Southampton	15645

32	Shetland	167	27	West Yorkshire	9986
34	Beds, Essex, Herts	6699	28	Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury	13221
35	London	15739	29	York and Hull	11870
36	South East	8633	30	Cymru	2974
			31	Scotland	5324
			32	Shetland	335
			33	North Wales	3455
	Total	164024		Total	321227

Numbers of Churches per District (2002-2022)

District No. (2022)	District Name (2022)	No. of Churches 2022	No. of Churches 2002
1	Synod Cymru	56	133
2	Wales	156	250
5	Birmingham	133	188
6	Bolton & Rochdale	90	123
7	Bristol	176	273
9	Cumbria	86	152
10	Channel Islands	21	30
11	Chester & Stoke	136	231
12	Cornwall	162	272
13	Darlington	104	196
14	East Anglia	200	301
15	Isle of Man	29	37
17	Lincolnshire	126	235
18	Liverpool	94	136
19	Manchester	126	186
20	Newcastle	130	202
21	Lancashire	105	170
22	Nottingham & Derby	181	273
23	Northampton	216	322

24	Plymouth & Exeter	162	270
25	Sheffield	140	252
26	Southampton	157	263
27	Yorkshire West	210	306
28	Wolverhampton & Shrewsbury	186	281
29	Yorkshire North & East	202	324
31	Scotland	38	51
32	Shetland	10	21
34	Beds, Essex, Herts	157	225
35	London	221	259
36	South East	179	255
	Total	3989	6217

Present projected numbers for proposed framework

New Districts	No. of Circuits 2022	No. of churches 2022	No. of ministers (District Deployment) (2021)	No. of members (2020)
Channel Islands	2	21	12	894
East Midlands	59	723	266	23979
Isle of Man	1	29	8	797
North East	22	234	113	10096
North West	51	501	219	22158
Scotland and Shetland	7	48	25	1857
South East	63	557	280	31071
South West	53	657	252	25208
Wales Synod Cymru	16	212	73	6489
West Midlands	32	455	175	19539
Yorkshire	36	552	240	21936
Total	342	3989	1663	164024

Membership figures are from the last Conference report on membership in 2020. The number of ministers is the District Deployment figure as listed in the Minutes of Conference 2021. The numbers of circuits and churches have been generated from the Connexional Database (and recognising that various multi-site Local Church or merged Circuit schemes are presently being considered).

Appendix 3 – Comments from consultations

Comments	Response
Leadership	
It was felt the explanation of how the change in District leadership would lead to a 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	The District Chair role remains crucial for Connexional leadership. A smaller, enhanced CLF can be a much more effective body – embracing the breadth and diversity of the Connexion, and hopefully meeting more frequently. It is hoped that new structures will allow compliance tasks to be completed by others.
A desire for greater detail about support for Chairs/ shape of leadership teams in Districts	A number of models are emerging from the conversations as to how leadership can be exercised differently to provide support for Chairs. Further information about the leadership role of Chairs in the new framework is shared in the report.
Mission	
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 came in an as additional top layer for a defined period	The work the Council is doing on impact measurement is extremely important to ensure that workloads do not increase. The Task Group is hesitant about creating an additional layer of governance which could also create more work.
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	Energy for the gospel is of paramount importance and it is hoped that the proposals will enable this in the future. At the same time we also have to ask ourselves how long can we continue to fund and find people to do the number of roles that our structures presently require.
General agreement that nothing of what is being proposed will stop local churches closing and if any of the changes will be understood locally.	Re-structuring will not solve immediate issues of local churches closing, but as stated above our present structures require many roles which are increasingly harder to fill. Effective communication at a local level is vital and must continue as the regional conversations continue to progress.
Finance	
A desire for greater detail about Finance – how will savings be achieved in the way ahead for the work of re-shaping Districts	Further information is provided below about reduction to the budget of District Chair costs. Alongside this it is important that workloads reduce and the impact assessment work is critical to this.
Other comments	
Questions of representation to a much smaller Connexional Council and how the voice of some parts of the Connexion might not be heard.	Representation has been a key consideration in the Task Group's discussions, District Chairs will continue to be responsible for representing the range of voices from their Districts.

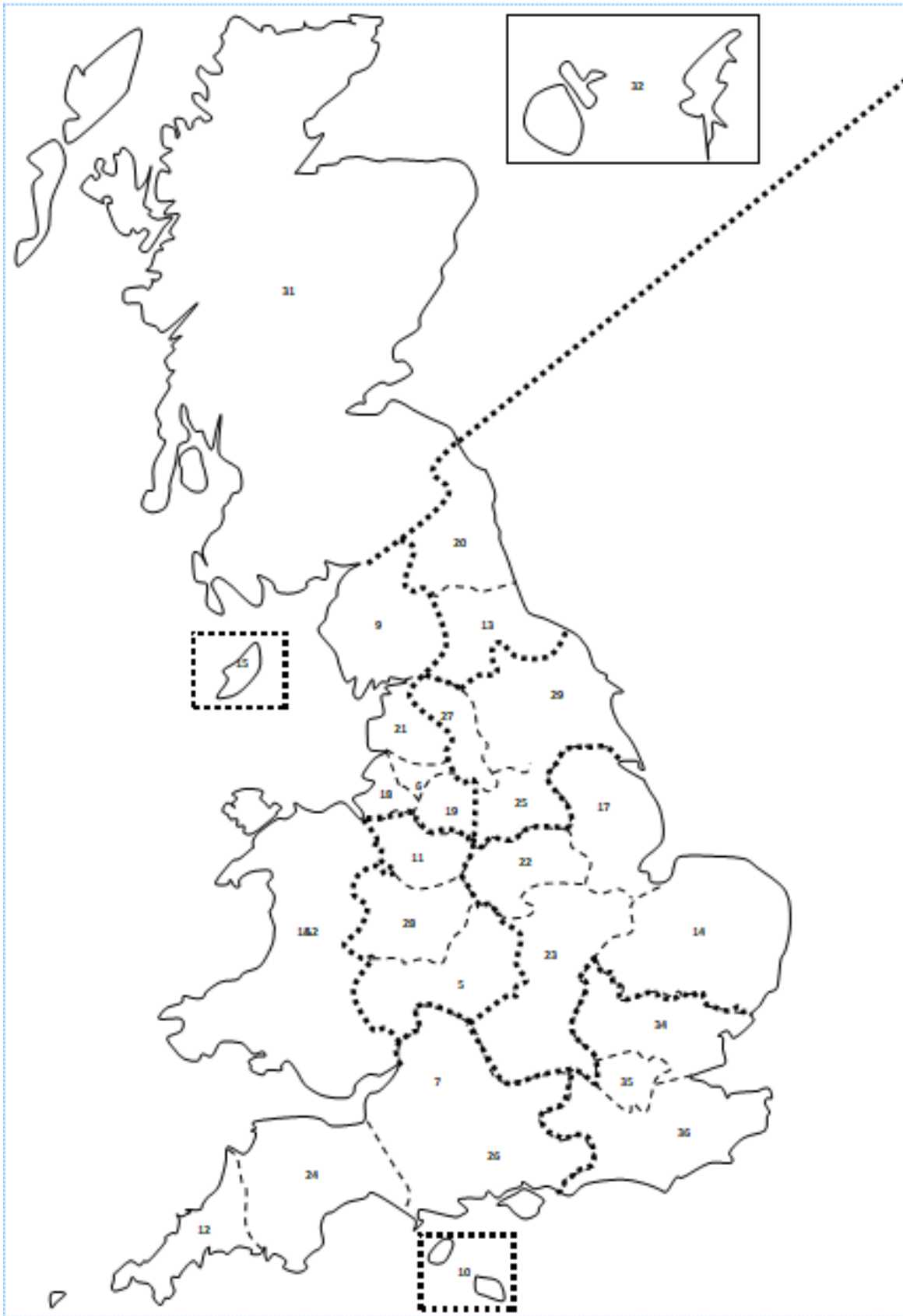
<p>A recognition that the reduction was mainly in England (possibly to as few as seven or eight English Districts)</p>	<p>The Task Group has heard the particular importance of some geographical areas such as Wales, Scotland and the Islands, which necessitates that reduction will take place largely in English Districts.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>Technology and online meetings can help with some of the challenges about larger distances. It is acknowledged that the sense of identity in a District will be lost although changes also bring new opportunities for joy in new communities. It will be important going forward for District internal structures to be shaped to consider those on the periphery and to avoid isolation as much as possible. It is hoped that new models of leadership will allow the Chair to share out some responsibilities and ensure they are supported. The Task Group is keen to avoid greater complexity and Districts will be able to organise internally as they so desire.</p>
<p>Hesitation from Districts that have undergone significant change in this century already (and note the number of stationing appointments in London and South-East)</p>	<p>The Task Group is aware of change fatigue for those that have undergone recent change. However, as a Connexional church the challenges facing us are significant and affect us all, particularly when considering how District Chairs are to be funded at a Connexional level.</p>
<p>May need to redraw lines more than simply bolt existing districts together</p>	<p>Each District Policy Committee has been asked if any boundaries need to change. The Task Group has been keen to encourage existing ways of collaborative working between Districts, and encourage willingness to change boundaries where it makes most sense for the mission of the Circuits.</p>
<p>Whether this is radical enough?</p>	<p>Some members of the church would like to see radical change whereas others are more hesitant. More radical change may be harder to implement as some at a local level are unaware of reasons why the work of the Task Group is taking place.</p>
<p>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</p>	<p>This is critical and the impact work that the Council has been doing must address this and be factored in to future changes.</p>
<p>Concerns raised about the place of the various jurisdictions and how they often feel unsupported</p>	<p>The islands have been a key consideration of the Task Group and the outcome of the conversations reflect the importance of various jurisdictions.</p>

Appendix 4 – Stationing Region Conversations

Stationing Region	Districts involved in conversation	Chairs' Appointment/Reinvitation update
North West	Lancashire	New appointment for 2022-2024
	Bolton and Rochdale	New appointment for 2022-2024.
	Manchester and Stockport	Current invitation ends 2026.
	Liverpool	Current invitation ends 2023.
	Cumbria	Current invitation ends 2025.
Isle of Man	Isle of Man	Current invitation ends 2027.
West Midlands	Birmingham	Appointment agreed from 2022-2025.
	Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury	Current invitation ends 2025.
	Chester and Stoke	Outcome of conversations resulted in Chester and Stoke moving from North West to West Midlands regional conversations. Current invitation ends 2025.
East Midlands	Northampton	Current invitation ends 2023. Reinvitation process underway.
	Nottingham and Derby	At the time of writing awaiting reasoned statement from the Syond.
	Lincolnshire	Current appointment ends 2025.
	East Anglia	Current invitation ends 2024.
South West	Plymouth and Exeter	Appointment agreed from 2022-2024.
	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	New appointment for 2022-24.
	Bristol	Current invitation ends 2024.
	Southampton	Current invitation ends 2024.
Channel Islands	Channel Islands	Current invitation ends 2026.
Wales Synod Cymru	Wales	Current invitation ends 2024. New appointment for 6 years from 2022.

	Cymru	Current invitation ends 2024.
Yorkshire	Sheffield	Current invitation ends 2025.
	Yorkshire North and East	Reinvitation for five years from 2023.
	Yorkshire West	Current invitation ends 2025.
North East	Darlington	Current invitation ends 2024.
	Newcastle	Current invitation ends 2026
South East	Beds, Essex & Herts	Current invitation ends 2027
	London	Current invitations for the two Chairs end in 2023 and 2025.
	South East	Current invitation ends 2025.
Scotland and Shetland	Scotland Shetland	Current invitation ends 2025.

Appendix 5 – Indicative map



Annex A

The Purpose of the Methodist Conference (as adopted by the Conference of 2006)

1. Methodism began as a movement of people connected with John Wesley (“the Connexion”) which was structured for mission and discipleship, and which eventually became a Church. The origins of the Methodist Conference lie in a series of meetings which John Wesley held with his Preachers, Helpers and Assistants as the movement developed. In these meetings they sought to discern the movements of the Spirit and the promptings of grace, and to shape and regulate ways of responding to them in worship and mission. The means of doing this was through a process of “Christian Conferring” which Wesley also saw operating when people gathered together in a Class Meeting or Band to help each other in their Christian experience and to support each other in their discipleship; and when the Travelling Preachers visited and met with the Class Leaders to oversee and support them in their task. In the Class Meeting and Band the basic questions for this Christian Conferring can be expressed in modern terms as “Where is God in our experience? What is God doing? What is God calling or prompting us to do?”. In the first Conference which Wesley held with the Preachers in 1744 this type of question was applied to the task of the Preachers and so took the form “What to teach? How to teach? What to do?”, or, in other words, the content, methodology and strategic organisation of mission.
2. As a result, the Conference primarily exists to exercise oversight in the broadest sense of the term. It seeks to focus, renew and nurture the whole connexion’s worship of God and participation in God’s mission. In doing so it seeks to ensure that the whole Connexion remains true to its calling and to its experience and place in an apostolic succession of faithful response and witness to the Gospel. In this its teaching role is still of paramount importance, both in formulating what is to be taught and ensuring that it is shared with all the Methodist people. The Conference therefore stands at the heart of the Connexion, connecting it with its past and its future, linking it with external bodies and joining together its constituent parts.
3. As noted above, one way in which the Conference exercises that general oversight is in formulating and overseeing strategies for responding to God’s will throughout the whole Connexion. In doing this, the Conference is being the governing body of the Methodist Church under God. This is the role ascribed to it in such foundational documents as The Deed of Union (first adopted in 1932 and amended from time to time by subsequent Conferences) and The Methodist Church Act 1976, and involves responsibility for the “government, discipline, management and administration”¹³ of the Church’s affairs.
4. The Conference Review Group believes that this aspect of being the governing body of the Methodist Church under God is extremely important. Much of the activity of the Conference consists of the exercise of governance or formal authority. The Conference does this directly through adopting formal policies and legislation. It also does it indirectly by setting the parameters and structures of accountability and support for other bodies to exercise authority in its name in particular places or areas of work. Similarly with regard to management, the role of the Conference is to set a framework of clear policies and purposes, authorising and permitting others to exercise management directly, and seeking to ensure that they do so under the guidance of the Spirit and in an attitude of stewardship. The direct exercise of management is the duty of those other individuals and groups. It is their responsibility to formulate specific and detailed strategies for enacting the Conference’s policies and fulfilling its purposes; for setting particular objectives concerning the implementation of those strategies; for deploying human, material and technological resources to achieve those objectives; and for monitoring and assessing the performance of individuals and groups in meeting the objectives.
5. Another way in which the Conference expresses oversight is in the collective exercise of leadership. This involves harvesting the insights of its members, inspiring them to be imaginative and empowering them to share their ideas and develop new vision. It then involves the Conference in providing a model for the rest of the Connexion of articulating vision, of initiating action and encouraging people to follow, and of exercising power (not least with regard to the management of resources) with authority, justice and love.
6. All of these aspects of oversight involve waiting on God. For this to happen there has to be space in

¹³ Deed of Union Clause 18

the overall timetable for there to be times of spontaneous prayer, praise and contemplation as well as formal prayer and structured worship. But waiting on God also occurs through Christian Conferring. This involves people taking spiritual, theological and practical counsel together and engaging in processes of intentional, prayerful and thoughtful dialogue that lead to collective decision-making. Some of this occurs informally through people meeting each other over meals and at fringe and other events around the sessions of the Conference. Much of it occurs in the formal business of the Conference itself as people seek to discern the will and activity of God through paying attention to each other's insights and experience. The Conference should primarily be looking for the inspiration of the Spirit, and in the light of that to lift the spirits of its members and provide inspiration for the whole Connexion.

7. The Review Group therefore recommends that the Conference affirm that the primary purpose of the Conference is to engage in Christian Conferring in order to discern the will of God and then to formulate and oversee ways in which the whole Connexion can respond to that will. This purpose should inform and influence everything that the Conference does.