

Minutes of the Assembly Executive, November 2021

The General Secretary

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
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**The United Reformed Church
Minutes of Assembly Executive meeting
held at High Leigh, Hoddesdon,
22-24 November 2021**

Monday 22 November 2021

Session one

The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, was in the Chair.

21/16

The meeting opened at 14:00 with worship led by the Chaplain, the Revd Helen Everard.

The General Secretary welcomed everyone and identified new members.

21/17

The minutes of the Mission Council meeting of March 2021 were approved.
There were no matters arising.

21/18

Paper A1

Standing Orders

The General Secretary introduced the paper, and the Assembly Clerk moved amendments 3.2 and 3.16:

3.2 Meetings should only be recorded by the official host, only when necessary, and always in compliance with both safeguarding and data privacy policies.

3.16 (correction of typographical errors)

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

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The Clerk moved Resolution 3:

- 3. Assembly Executive resolves to add the Rules of Procedure 1.3: unless they resolve to use the Standing Orders of the 2018 General Assembly.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

The Clerk moved the amended Resolution 1:

- 1. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Assembly Executive agrees the revised Standing Orders as set out in the amended paper A1 of Assembly Executive November 2021 with immediate effect.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

The Clerk moved Resolution 2:

- 2. Assembly Executive reminds committees, synods, and District Councils of rule 1.3 of the Rules of Procedure: The Standing Orders...shall apply to all meetings of the Assembly and the Assembly Executive and, in so far as they are applicable, to meetings of synods, District Councils and their committees, unless they resolve to use the Standing Orders of the 2018 General Assembly.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

During consideration of the resolutions, considerable discussion took place regarding the requirement (at 12.13) for a two-thirds majority when a vote is taken. Mr Alan Yates suggested a threshold of more than two thirds and suggested increasing from 67% to 80%. The Clerk undertook to take up this issue with the Business Committee.

The meeting adjourned at 15:30.

Session two

Assembly Executive resumed at 16:30.

21/19

Paper H2

RMHS Sub-Committee

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Paul Whittle, presented paper H2 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the new Terms of Reference for the Retired Minister's Housing Society Sub-Committee of the Ministries Committee.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper H4

The safer election of Elders

Mr Whittle presented paper H4, and moved the Resolution:

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Assembly Executive strongly recommends local churches to use the process for the Safer Election of Elders.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

In discussion Assembly Executive *agreed* to recommended that the Ministries Committee consult with the Assembly's Safeguarding staff and the Clerk to clarify the text of 4.1.4 c) with respect to the definition of a *relevant* DBS/PVG and noting which are the appropriate URC policy documents.

21/20

Paper I4

Mission Committee – Conversion Therapy

The Convenor of the Mission Committee, Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, presented paper I4 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive resolves:

- a) to support and adopt the definition of conversion therapy set out in the 'Memorandum of Understanding on Conversion Therapy in the UK'
- b) that the practice of conversion therapy is unethical and potentially harmful
- c) to call on all church members and ministers to refuse to offer or participate in offering conversion therapy in any form
- d) that no conversion therapy can take place in the name of the United Reformed Church
- e) to express support for proposals to ban conversion therapy, and urge that current proposals be strengthened to ensure greater protection for potential subjects of conversion therapy.

Miss Victoria Turner proposed an amendment that:

in clause b) the word 'potentially' be removed. Seconded by Mr Reuben Watt.

The amendment *fell*.

The Revd Geoff Felton proposed an amendment that:

the words 'in any form' be removed from clause c)

Seconded by the Revd Graham Hoslett.

The amendment *fell*.

Following discussion, the Resolution was put.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

21/21

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

The Revd Paul Robinson and Dr Sam Richards presented paper B1

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21/22

Paper N2

Church Life Review

The General Secretary presented an initial update from the Church Life Review Group, and responded to a number of questions and comments. The Moderator noted that Assembly Executive would have further opportunity to address the Church Life Review in a later session.

The Chaplain led the meeting in worship, and Assembly Executive adjourned at 20:50.

Tuesday 23 November 2021

Session three

Assembly Executive resumed at 09:15.

Opening worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Helen Everard.

21/23

Paper G3

M&M Fund Budget 2022

The Convenor of the Finance Committee, Mr Ian Hardie, presented paper G3 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the M&M Fund budget for 2022 as set out in the Appendix to paper G3 for November 2021 Assembly Executive.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper G1

Pension Update

Mr Hardie presented paper G1 and offered responses to a number of questions, among which was Mr Hardie's personal suggestion that a policy of dealing with cases of financial hardship among retired ministers might be more appropriately addressed by the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee.

Paper G2

Pension Deficit Funding

Mr Hardie presented paper G2 and moved the Resolution:

Assembly Executive, acting on behalf of General Assembly:

- expresses its deep gratitude to all the synods and synod trusts which have, according to their means and where appropriate with the approval of their synod meetings, committed to contributing to the new Ministers' Pension Support Restricted Fund
- approves the recommendation of the directors of the URC Trust Ltd to contribute from its general reserves to this restricted fund £500,000 in 2023 and £500,000 in 2024
- approves the intention of the directors of the URC Trust should there continue to be a deficit in the Ministers' Pension Fund at the 2024 valuation to contribute to the restricted fund from its general reserves £500,000 in 2025, £600,000 in 2026 and £600,000 in 2027 or such smaller amounts as are agreed at the time

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- approves the intention of the directors of the URC Trust should there continue to be a deficit in the Ministers' Pension Fund at the 2027 valuation to contribute to the restricted fund from its general reserves £600,000 in 2028, £600,000 in 2029 and £600,000 in 2030 or such smaller amounts as are agreed at the time
- authorises the URC Trust to amend the guarantee it gives the Ministers' Pension Trust to cover up to £24 million of contributions due under the Schedule of Contributions or in respect of any "Section 75" debts arising from future cessation of participation in the scheme by other scheme employers.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

21/24

Assembly Executive viewed a video on inclusive and expansive language.

The meeting adjourned at 10:50

Session four

21/25

Paper I3 **Pioneering and Fresh Expressions Enabling Group**

Assembly Executive met in groups to discuss Paper I3, following which Ms Sarah Lane Cawte outlined something of the current work of the Pioneering and Fresh Expressions Enabling Group, and Assembly Executive reflected upon the paper.

The meeting adjourned at 12:50

21/26

Session five

The meeting resumed at 16:00

The General Secretary moved the En bloc Resolutions:

- A2 Business Committee: Updating the Rules of Procedure
- B1 Childrens' and Youth Work Committee: Update
- D1 Discipleship Development Fund
- F1 Faith and Order Committee: Report
- H3 Plan for Partnership Revisions
- H5 Active Ministers Policy
- H6 Ministries Committee: House for Duty
- I1 Walking the Way Steering Group: Update
- P1 Law and Polity Advisory Group: National and Provincial Synods and Trust Companies
- I2 Mission Committee: Update

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

21/27

Paper H1 **Confidentiality Policy**

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Paul Whittle, presented Paper H1, and the Resolution:

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Resolution H1: Assembly Executive adopts the URC Confidentiality Policy.

Mr Whittle noted that policies were continually being updated, and undertook to ensure that a number of adjustments already required will be incorporated into the policy.

Some unease was expressed by a number of members about the first paragraph of 5.5. It was agreed to consult with the Legal Adviser and return to the matter later in the meeting.

21/28

Paper J1

Nominations Committee

The Convenor of the Nominations Committee, Mrs Helen Lidgett, presented paper J1 and the Resolutions, and responded to questions about the process of nominating and appointing members of the Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel and the Disciplinary Investigation Panel.

The Resolutions were put simultaneously:

- 1) Assembly Executive notes the changes set out in Section 1 of the report to the list of Nominations agreed at the July 2021 meeting of General Assembly.**
- 2) Assembly Executive notes and approves the changes set out in Section 2 of the report to the list of Nominations agreed at the July 2021 meeting of General Assembly.**
- 3) Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 3 of the report.**
- 4) Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 4 of the report.**

Assembly Executive agreed

The General Secretary noted that matters raised in discussion regarding the processes for recruitment, nomination and appointment suggested that some serious thought needs to be given to those processes and called upon the Nominations Committee to review them.

Resolutions J2 were moved:

- 1. Assembly Executive notes the changes set out in Section 1 of the report to the published list of Nominations.**
- 2. Assembly Executive notes and approves the changes set out in Section 2 of the report to the published list of Nominations.**
- 3. Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 3 of the report.**
- 4. Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 4 of the report.**

Assembly Executive agreed.

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Paper R1

MIND

The General Secretary presented paper R1, expressed thanks to the Revd Sarah Moore for extensive work on the drafting for this paper, and moved the Resolution:

1. **Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive rescinds resolution 40 2021.**
2. **Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive adopts the 'Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and Church Related Community Workers' ('Disciplinary Process') detailed in Paper R1 of the General Assembly Book of Reports 2021 as amended in the document accompanying this resolution.**
3. **Acting on behalf of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive rescinds resolution 42 (a) and (b) 2021.**
4. **Instructs the General Secretary to make any necessary consequent changes to lettering/number necessary in the light of these changes.**
 - a) **The provisions of the new Disciplinary Process concerning appointments to the Assembly Standing Panels for Discipline, the Disciplinary Investigation and Commission Panels, the Appeal Commissions List and the posts of Assembly Representative for Discipline, Secretary to Assembly Commissions for Discipline and to Disciplinary Appeal Commissions are to come into force at the close of this session of the Assembly Executive meeting at High Leigh on 22-24 November 2021.**
 - b) **The Assembly Executive thanks those who had indicated a willingness to serve on Synod Standing Panels for Discipline and asks synods to release them from this commitment.**

It was noted that the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary have deemed that changed circumstances justify this Resolution under 7.6.4 of the Standing Orders.

The Resolution was put, and Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Session six

21/30

Paper N2

Church Life Review

Assembly Executive met in groups before convening in plenary session.

The Resolutions were put for discussion:

1. **Assembly Executive welcomes the initial report of the Church Life Review Group, and affirms its direction of travel.**
2. **Assembly Executive affirms the proposal to engage in partnership with Theos to undertake research into the identity, hopes, dreams and expectations of local congregations within the United Reformed Church.**

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3. **Assembly Executive affirms the proposal to work with Moore Kingston Smith to analyse income, expenditure and capital across the family of the General Assembly and the synods. It encourages all parts of the United Reformed Church to engage positively in this process.**
4. **Assembly Executive requests the General Secretariat to engage in a quick and thoughtful review of present structures and bring proposals to General Assembly 2022 for any immediate rationalisation that might be possible.**

Mr Rueben Watt proposed an amendment that the words 'and thoughtful' be added after 'quick' in Resolution 4. This was seconded by the Revd Paul Robinson

The amendment was *carried*.

The Resolutions were put simultaneously.

Assembly Executive *agreed*

Worship was led by the Chaplain, and the meeting adjourned at 20:55.

Wednesday 25 November 2021

Session seven

21/31

The Session was opened in worship led by the Chaplain.

The Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee, Mr Alan Yates, reported with sadness that the Revd Samantha White has given notice that she will be demitting office as Principal of Westminster College. Mr Yates expressed appreciation for her service to the college, and sought Assembly Executive's prayers for the governors and staff.

The General Secretary reported that Ms Francis Brienien will be leaving her post as Deputy General Secretary (Mission) in spring 2022. He noted that in the midst of a review making a permanent appointment would not be appropriate. A suitable solution is being sought by the General Secretariat, who sought Assembly Executive's approval to make appropriate interim arrangements, to be agreed by the Assembly Officers. No formal resolution was put, but Assembly Executive clearly indicated its approval.

21/32

Paper N1

Jubilee Planning Group

Mr Andy Jackson and Dr Sam Richards presented Paper N1, which was discussed informally.

21/33

Paper H1 (from 21/26)

Confidentiality Policy

The Revd Paul Whittle, having consulted with the Legal Adviser, proposed the following amendments:

2.1: Add to the end of para "(hereafter termed as workers)"

5.3: Add at the beginning, under the heading:

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“Elders, church members and volunteers will operate this policy in line with the Data Privacy Notices of their church.”

- 5.5: First sentence, amend end of sentence after ‘open prayers’ to read “unless express consent and permission has been given by the individual or is a legitimate interest as outlined in the Data Privacy Notices of the local church.”**

Following brief discussion, the amendments were put. Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Mr Whittle moved the amended Resolution H1. Assembly Executive *agreed*.

The session closed at 10:40, and the meeting was concluded with the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by the Chaplain.