

The United Reformed Church

Minutes of Assembly Executive meeting

held at The Hayes, Swanwick

9-11 February 2024

Friday 9 February

Session one

The Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, was in the chair. She welcomed all those attending, especially new members and guests.

24/01

The meeting opened at 14:00 with worship led by the Chaplains, Miss Karen Campbell and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo.

Session two

24/02

Assembly Executive appointed a Facilitation Group comprising:

The Revd Kim Plumpton; Ms Nneoma Chima; the Revd Neil Thorogood; Mr Peter Knowles.

Minutes

The Assembly Clerk moved adoption of the minutes of November 2022 and November 2023.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Mr Alan Yates, on behalf of the Finance Committee, updated Assembly Executive on the progress on addressing the M&M fund deficit. He commended the Synods for their generosity in subsidising the M&M fund in 2023, and outlined something of the various consultations that had taken place since November 2023.

24/03

Paper H1

Ministries: URC Competency Process

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Mary Thomas, presented paper H1, and moved the resolution.

Assembly Executive adopts the URC Competency Process in place of the URC Capability Process.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper H2

Ministries: Special Category Ministry

The Convenor of Ministries presented paper H2, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive gives thanks for the Special Category Ministry Scheme and affirms the change in its emphasis.

Assembly Executive affirms that:

- a) the SCM programme in its current form is phased out**
- b) 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) be created to intentionally grow new Christian communities**
- c) such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.**

Following discussion, the Revd Fran Kissack moved that the resolution *be not put*.

Seconded by Mr Chris Atherton.

A vote was taken, and the proposal that the resolution *be not put* failed to achieve the required majority, and therefore *fell*.

At the suggestion of the General Secretary, the resolution was remitted to the Facilitation Group.

24/04

Church Life Review

The General Secretary reported on progress of the Church Life Review (CLR), and noted that the deadline for nominations and applications for people to serve on task groups is being extended.

He explained that, while much of the CLR's work will be seeking ways to 'free up' busy people, it cannot be achieved without the involvement of more people in the short term. 'A medium-term solution but a short-term problem'. He asked if it might be conceivable that some of the work needs 'professionalising' eg consultants etc, and asked how the meeting might respond to such a proposal.

The meeting spent some time in informal group discussion, and the following points were raised:

- Church House and Synod staff have the knowledge and expertise – would secondment to CLR task groups be feasible?
- Secondment from Synods and/or committees – are these people not busy enough already?
- A consultant would need to understand fully the structure and governance of the URC.
- If we employ consultants, they are likely to want to consult groups!
- If we were going to pay consultants, why not pay anyone on the groups?
- What would be the financial implications?
- Could the tasks be further subdivided without adding further complications?
- Does all the work have to be done at the same time? Could the tasks be staggered?

- What about 'headhunting' volunteers, rather than seeking applications and nominations?
- Could people volunteer to serve for a limited time?
- What are other denominations doing?

The General Secretary thanked Assembly Executive for its input.

Session three

24/05

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

The Convenor of the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Revd Paul Robinson, presented Paper B1. Assembly Executive met in small groups to discuss and reflect upon the paper.

The Chaplain, the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo, led Assembly in worship, and the session ended at 20:45.

Saturday 10 February

Session four

Assembly Executive resumed at 09:15.

Opening worship was led by the Chaplains, Miss Karen Campbell and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo.

24/06

Paper R1

Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group

The Secretary of the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group (CDAG), the Revd Adrian Bulley, introduced paper R1, and moved the resolution:

"Amend Section O Appendix K to read:

6: On receiving the material transmitted by the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, the Assembly Representative for Discipline will appoint an Investigation Team comprising a Human Resources specialist supported by a suitably qualified member of the United Reformed Church, with relevant subject experience, appointed by the Officers of General Assembly on recommendation from the General Secretariat. The Assembly Representative for Discipline will also appoint a member of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel to assist the accused minister to address the issues and, if required, before the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Disciplinary Appeal Commission. No panel member shall be appointed to assist the accused minister who is related to, belongs to the same local church as, or is otherwise closely concerned with the accused minister or the complainant, has any pastoral or personal involvement with the case or is liable to be a witness."

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper R3 Ministries Committee and Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group

The Revd Adrian Bulley presented paper R3, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the new Appendix C in the Ministerial Discipline Process as outlined below.

New Appendix C Assembly Mandated Matters

1. First stages

- 1. 1.1 Synods will, usually through their Moderators, make ministers aware of what is required. Ministers who are in any sort of difficulty meeting these requirements (eg illness of self or spouse, sabbatical, or extended leave) will inform their Moderator of these circumstances and discuss suitable ways to meet the Assembly requirements.**
- 2. 1.2 Ministers who undertake Assembly roles are still under the discipline of their Synods and it is for Synods to ensure that these ministers have fulfilled any Assembly mandated activities.**
- 3. 1.3 Where ministers have not engaged, or not engaged fruitfully, in Assembly mandated activities despite information and reminders given by their Synods, the Secretary for Ministries (or their duly appointed deputy) will write to the ministers concerned reminding them of their obligations.**

2. Moderator's Recorded Warning

- 2.1 Where a minister has not met these requirements in a timely manner a Moderator's Recorded Warning (Appendix D), issued in line with guidelines from the Ministries Committee, will be the first stage in the process. This recorded warning will include a reasonable deadline for the Assembly mandated activity to be completed.**

3. Referral to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline

- 1. 3.1 Where a minister has not fulfilled the Assembly mandated activity by the deadline specified in the Moderator's Recorded Warning the Secretary for Ministries will refer the matter to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline (ASPD). The referral will outline the various attempts made to encourage the minister to undertake the Assembly mandated activity and this referral will be copied to the minister with a deadline for the minister to respond to the Secretary of Ministries and the ASPD with any comments or mitigation.**
- 2. 3.2 A special ASPD will be set up, convened by the Assembly Representative for Discipline or their duly appointed deputy, to deal with all such cases.**
- 3. 3.3 The ASPD will consider the information from the Secretary of Ministries, any response from the minister, and safeguarding advice, and decide whether to issue an Agreed Caution (giving further time for the Assembly mandated activity to be completed) or refer the matter to the Assembly Commission for**

Discipline. If the ASPD refer the matter to the Assembly Commission for Discipline, it shall also consider whether to suspend the minister referring to Appendix J.

4. Referral to the Assembly Commission for Discipline

- 1. 4.1** If the matter is referred to the Assembly Commission for Discipline (ACD), the Commission Panel will be set up and proceed in the normal way, save that if several ministers are referred at the same time to the ACD it is preferable that the same Commission hear all the cases.
- 2. 4.2** Prehearing submissions in writing will include:
 - 4.2.1** The Secretary of Ministries' case against the Minister
 - 4.2.2** The Minister's response which might contain rebuttal or mitigation
 - 4.2.3** Advice from a Safeguarding officer.
- 3. 4.3** At the hearing the case against the Minister shall be presented by the Secretary for Ministries. The Minister may be assisted by a colleague, legal counsel or a Trade Union Representative.
- 4. 4.4** The Assembly Commission for Discipline will have the usual sanctions outlined in Appendix S at its disposal if matters are proved.

5. Appeals

Appeals proceed in the normal way, save that the Secretary of Ministries, rather than the Investigation team, will either be the appellant or respondent as the case may be.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/07

Paper S1

Safeguarding Committee

The Convenor of the Safeguarding Committee, the Revd Roger Jones, presented paper S1, and moved adoption of the resolution:

Assembly Executive approves the updated matrix of roles eligible for a disclosure and barring scheme checks.

Following discussion, the General Secretary suggested including a 'catch all' clause that would include roles not specified on the list, and that this be addressed by the Facilitation Group and presented to Assembly Executive in a later session.

Following further discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed* that the matter be revisited later.

Mr Peter Knowles, on behalf of the facilitation group, reported that the Facilitation Group had sought to retain the clarity of the original proposal while being respectful of the variety of ministries involved, and proposed that a new clause be added:

- d) **Assembly Executive affirms liminal ministries both lay and ordained, including but not limited to Chaplaincy, and requests Ministries and Mission Committees to consider how such ministries might be supported and developed, returning to Assembly Executive in February 2025 with a report and proposals.**

Assembly Executive *agreed* that clause d) be included in resolution H1, and continued to address paragraphs 2 and 3:

2. **13 new pioneering posts (one per synod) be created to intentionally grow new Christian communities.**
3. **Such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.**

In discussion it was suggested that the words 'to intentionally grow' be omitted. The clear mood of the meeting, however, was to retain them.

The substantive resolution now became:

Assembly Executive gives thanks for the Special Category Ministry Scheme and affirms the change in its emphasis.

Assembly Executive affirms that:

- a) **the SCM programme in its current form is phased out**
- b) **13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) be created intentionally to grow new Christian communities**
- c) **such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.**
- d) **Assembly Executive affirms liminal ministries both lay and ordained, including but not limited to Chaplaincy, and requests Ministries and Mission Committees to consider how such ministries might be supported and developed, returning to Assembly Executive in February 2025 with a report and proposals.**

Assembly executive *agreed*.

Session five

24/08

Paper A1

Business Committee

The Chief Operating Officer, Mrs Victoria James, on behalf of the Business Committee presented paper A1 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive:

- 1. Agrees the revised membership of the Resources committee. Such membership to be Convenor, Treasurer, Deputy Treasurer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Finance Officer plus 6 further members covering Finance (2), HR (1), Properties (1), Comms (1) and compliance/health and safety/ GDPR.**
- 2. Agrees to the Remuneration Committee continuing as a sub-committee of the Resources Committee.**
- 3. Adopts the Terms of Reference for the Resources Committee and the Remuneration Committee.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper A2

Business Committee

The Chief Operating Officer, Mrs Victoria James, on behalf of the Business Committee presented paper A2 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive:

- 1. Adopts the Modern Slavery Statement.**
- 2. Asks Synods and local churches to develop policies in response to this Statement and to implement appropriate supporting procedures.**
- 3. Notes the commitment from Church House to implement a Modern Slavery Policy and revise other policies in response to this statement while also implementing procedures to underpin the policy and overarching statement.**

An amendment was proposed to change 'develop' to 'adopt'. *Agreed*.

An amendment was proposed to change 'Church House' to 'General Assembly Staff and Office Holders'. *Agreed*.

The General Secretary undertook to provide a template policy document for Synods and local churches.

The substantive resolution was put:

Assembly Executive:

- 1. Adopts the Modern Slavery Statement.**
- 2. Asks Synods and local churches to adopt policies in response to this Statement and to implement appropriate supporting procedures.**
- 3. Notes the commitment from General Assembly staff and office-holders to implement a Modern Slavery Policy and revise other policies in response to this statement while also implementing procedures to underpin the policy and overarching statement.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/09

Paper A3

Business Committee

The Deputy General Secretary, Discipleship, the Revd Adrian Bulley, presented paper A3, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive agrees in principle to the proposal to enter a service level agreement with Place for Hope for five years, with a review in year four, as detailed in Assembly Executive February 2024 Paper A3.

Following discussion, Mr Bulley suggested removal of *'in principle'*, and add at the end *'and asks for conversations between Synods and inter-synod resource sharing Task Group as to how this may be funded'*.

Further discussion took place about funding. The General Secretary warned that, should Assembly Executive agree this resolution, it would be agreeing that General Assembly is the 'backstop' provider of funding.

Further debate took place regarding the appropriate source of funding: General Assembly, Synods, or both.

The Moderator ruled that the resolution be sent to Facilitation Group, which will report back.

24/10

Paper I1

Mission Committee

The Convenor of the Mission Committee, Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, presented the report.

The Moderator, on behalf of Assembly Executive, thanked the Mission Committee for the considerable amount of work that this report represents.

The meeting adjourned at 13:01.

Session six

Free time.

Session seven

24/11

The meeting resumed at 16:30.

The General Secretary moved the *en bloc* resolutions:

A4 – General Secretariat transitions

A5 – Business Committee: Minutes Secretary

F2 – Worship, Faith and Order Committee: amending terms of office

G1 – Pensions update

J1 – Nominations Committee

R2 – Ministerial resignations

X1 – Mersey and North Western Synods: Synod changes.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/12

Paper Z2

The Secretary of the Education and Learning Committee, the Revd Jenny Mills, reported on the appointment of the Revd Dr Peter McEnhill as principal of Westminster College. In doing so, she paid tribute to the work of the Acting Principal, the Revd Dr Robert Pope.

24/13

Paper S1 (from 24/07)

Report of Facilitation Group

The Facilitation Group reported, and proposed that Assembly Executive agree to:

Add boxes to the matrix to include any roles within URC not mentioned above but falling within the criteria of Regulated Activity as defined by the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

Following discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/14

Church Life Review (from 24/04)

The General Secretary, in the light of earlier discussion, moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive authorises the Business Committee, if necessary, to find alternative ways to forward the work envisaged to be undertaken by the Church Life Review Task Groups determined by resolution at GA 2023 within the ethos of the URC.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/15

Paper A3 (from 24/09)

Report of Facilitation Group

The Facilitation Group proposed a slightly amended resolution A3:

Assembly Executive agrees to the proposal to enter a service level agreement with Place for Hope for five years, with a review in year four, as detailed in Assembly Executive February 2024 Paper A3 and asks the Business Committee in consultation with the URC Trust, URC Finance Committee and Resource Sharing Task Group to identify the most appropriate and sustainable sources of funding.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/16

Paper F1

Worship, Faith and Order Committee

The Revd Dr Robert Pope presented the report of the work of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee, and responded to a number of questions.

24/17

Paper Z1

Assembly Executive met in closed session.

The meeting adjourned at 17:25.

Session eight

The meeting resumed at 19:45.

24/18

The Church's Commitment to Net Zero

The Convenor of the Mission Committee, Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, introduced Mr Roo Stewart and Ms Maya Withall, Moderator-Elect of the Youth Assembly, who gave an overview of the effects of global warming and reminded Assembly Executive of resolution 17 of the 2022 General Assembly:

Resolution 17

General Assembly:

- a) *Resolves that urgent action should be taken to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, with the aim of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030.*
- b) *Adopts the Environmental Policy in Part 2 of paper I2 of General Assembly 2022 with effect from January 2023, and instructs the committees and bodies under its control, and encourages associated bodies (including Trusts, the Retired Ministers Housing Society, and Resource Centres for Learning), Synods and local churches to adopt as a minimum the practices it sets out.*
- c) *Instructs each Assembly committee to develop a Net Zero Action Plan for its area of responsibility, and set and monitor targets for implementing this policy, reporting by March 2023, and annually thereafter.*
- d) *Establishes a Net Zero Task Group with membership of one Synod Moderator, one member of the Finance Committee, one representative of the URC Trust, the Secretary for Church and Society, the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources), a representative of URC Youth, a representative of URC Children, a Synod Property Officer, and a Synod Green Apostle.*

The group's remit shall be to:

- 1. *oversee progress in implementing this policy and report regularly to the Assembly Executive and General Assembly;*
- 2. *identify, advocate for, and where possible put in place any additional resources, support and expertise that are needed to implement this policy across the Church;*
- 3. *engage with Assembly committees around their Net Zero Action Plans and support them to develop them further;*
- 4. *and, encourage and facilitate the sharing of experiences across the Church, including celebrating achievements.*

Assembly Executive met in small groups to reflect on the questions:

- Is your church an eco-church, and is your Synod aiming for a bronze/silver/gold award. If not, why not?
- Share an example of where the issue is being discussed in your church or Synod.
- What practical support do you need to help the church towards net zero.

The Chaplain, Miss Karen Campbell, led Assembly Executive in worship, and the session ended at 20:51.

Sunday 11 February

Session nine

Assembly Executive resumed at 09:30.

Opening worship was led by the Chaplains, Miss Karen Campbell and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo.

24/19

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

The Convenor of the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Revd Paul Robinson, presented paper B1 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive agrees to seek funding for the establishment of a formal ministry for children's, youth and/or family work from either:

- a) by empowering CYWC to ask sources within and beyond the URC for funding, or**
- b) within the M&M budget.**

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Should we be talking about financing a project when we haven't decided its exact nature?
- The project is not advanced enough for funding patterns to be decided.
- If this is going to be a formal ministry, then it should be funded from M&M.
- 'Seek funding' sounds like asking for funds. Does not a) include b)?
- The CYWC ought to look at this, rather than Assembly Executive deciding.
- We compare this to Children's and Youth workers, but it is different. It is the difference between 'working with' and 'ministering to' young people.
- Make it clear this is a pilot study, and outside funding could be available until it is permanently established.
- The best model is of a CRCW specialising in youth or family work.
- We need a wider discussion about the uses of M&M funding. Where are the priorities?

The mood of the meeting was assessed: no clear mind was discerned, but possibly a slight bias in favour of option a).

The Treasurer noted that a) and b) are not mutually exclusive.

Mr Robinson withdrew the resolution and thanked the AE for its input.

The Revd Ken Forbes was thanked for his long service as Minutes Secretary across two periods of service, presented with a card and gift, and wished well in his retirement.

Mr Forbes made suitable reply.

The meeting was concluded with worship and the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by the Chaplains, and the Assembly Executive was adjourned.