

## District Commissions – Discussion paper

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Discussion paper
<b>Action Required</b>	Discussion and guidance

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	This paper contains proposals and questions relating to the District Commission process agreed by the 2016 Conference. It seeks the guidance of the Council as to the outworking of this proposed process.
<b>Main Points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.0 Introduction</li> <li>2.0 Proposed timeline</li> <li>3.0 Suggested ways of addressing the proposed questions</li> <li>4.0 The roles of the Secretary of the Synod and the Secretary of the Conference</li> <li>5.0 Cost implications</li> <li>6.0 Proposed changes to Standing Orders</li> <li>7.0 Conclusion</li> </ol>
<b>Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)</b>	<p>MC/17/11 – <i>Taking forward Larger than Circuit resolutions Larger than Circuit</i> report to the 2016 Conference (Report 15)</p> <p><i>Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings</i> – available from the Conference Office (<a href="mailto:conferenceoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk">conferenceoffice@methodistchurch.org.uk</a>)</p> <p><i>Code of practice for the appointment and reinvitation of District Chairs – May 2014</i></p>

### Summary of Impact

<b>Standing Orders</b>	Likely; it is proposed that changes are made to Standing Orders following a pilot phase (see Section 6)
<b>Financial</b>	Likely; the convening of District Commissions (which will have financial implications) has already been agreed by the 2016 Conference – however, different models will incur different costs (see Section 5)
<b>Personnel</b>	Likely; the proposed process will involve the appointment of a number of District Commissioners and will affect District Chairs and Synod Secretaries, among others

## District Commissions – Discussion paper

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Following the adoption of Resolutions 15/7 and 15/8 by the 2016 Conference, MC/17/11 expressed the hope that proposals would be brought to the April 2017 Council regarding the following areas of the District Commission process:
- A proposed timeline;
  - Suggested ways of addressing the proposed questions (eg materials to be gathered, suggested consultation partners);
  - The roles of the Secretary of the Synod and the Secretary of the Conference;
  - Cost implications;
  - Proposed changes to Standing Orders.
- 1.2 However, MC/17/11 also acknowledged the possibility that the timescale originally envisaged by the 2016 Conference (ie that Resolution 15/7 would take effect from 1 September 2017) might prove to be unfeasible, given the scale of the work and the need for careful consideration of the process prior to implementation. For this reason, this discussion paper contains proposals and questions in each of the areas listed above, in the expectation that the Council will provide guidance.
- 1.3 The relevant section of MC/17/11 is given as Appendix I. Appendix II contains the relevant section from *Larger than Circuit Paper B: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*, with proposed questions for District Commissions to address.

### 1.0 Proposed timeline

- 1.1 In accordance with Resolution 15/7(b)(ii), a District Commission may be established at any at time “when a District or group of Districts wants to engage in the process of reflection or review.” However, District Commissions relating to Resolution 15/7(b)(i) must follow a timescale that “will allow the outcome of the review to inform the work of the Chairs Nomination Panel when a new Chair is sought or the present Chair is exploring the possibility with the District of a reinvitation.” In accordance with SO 421A, a nomination committee is appointed in the last year but one of the existing Chair’s term of service.
- 1.2 It is worth noting that some of the questions in Appendix II relating to models of leadership will doubtless overlap with questions that may be asked shortly afterwards by the nomination committee with a different purpose (see p. 3 of the *Code of practice for the appointment and reinvitation of District Chairs – May 2014*).

**Question 1: When a District is seeking a new Chair or exploring the possibility of reinvitation, should the District Commission process: a) be completed before the nomination committee begins its work (but sufficiently recently that the results will still be relevant) or b) overlap (at least in part) with the work of the nomination committee? How could the District Chair be protected from feeling that the District Commission is simply an extension of the reinvitation process?**

**Question 2: Should there be a maximum length of time (eg six months) given for a District Commission to complete its work?**

## **2.0 Suggested ways of addressing the proposed questions (see Appendix II)**

- 2.1 The District Commission must have the confidence of the District, be a manageable size and be balanced fairly. Its constitution must take into account the concern expressed previously that nomination committees are weighted towards the District and do not always take into full account the needs and priorities of the wider Church. A list of proposed nominations have not been brought for appointment by the 2017 Conference as it was felt to be important first to clarify the needs and constitution of District Commissions.
- 2.2 It is proposed that each District Commission shall consist of ten members, comprising the Secretary of the Synod (convener), four members appointed by the District and five selected by the Secretary of the Conference from a pool appointed by the Conference (this is to address the concern raised that nomination committees are weighted towards the District). Those selected by the Secretary of the Conference should not be members or stationed in the District under review.

**Question 3a: Based on what criteria should the Conference appoint a pool of potential Commissioners (eg should they have recent experience of serving on the Methodist Council)?**

**Question 3b: Who should chair the Commission?**

**Question 3c: Could Commissioners be asked to serve on more than one Commission in the same year?**

**Question 3d: How can consistency be ensured between the Commissions? Does the Secretary of the Conference need to be a member of every one?**

**Question 3e: Should a minimum number of the members of each Commission be lay people?**

**Question 3f: Would it be appropriate for members of the nomination committee also to serve on the Commission?**

- 2.3 It is suggested that a one-day training event would need to be organised for District Commissioners (to ensure consistency of process). It is suggested that the District Commissioners should meet at least twice – once at the start of the process to scope the task and once at the end to compose their report. The questions proposed in Appendix II must be addressed individually, but held together under the overarching questions: What is the state of the work of God in the District? How can the Methodist Church participate most fully in the work of God in this place?
- 2.4 It is proposed that the role of the District Commissioners is to facilitate the review process, to enable the District and the Church more widely to review the state of the work of God in that place and to ensure the process is underpinned by prayer. As such, the final report must be representative of the review in its entirety, and not simply the views of the Commissioners.
- 2.5 Consultations with conversation partners could take place in person, by phone or Skype, or through written submissions. Where possible, it will be desirable to gather together conversation partners with some or all of the District Commissioners, in order prayerfully and corporately to discern God's will for the District. In some cases, it will be possible to utilise existing meetings, eg a district superintendents' gathering.

- 2.6 In order to address the questions in Appendix II, it is suggested that the following documents should be compiled (this is the minimum list – further documents that are relevant to the district context should be added):
- The district development plan (Standing Order 962) – SS (see Section 4)
  - The district statement of needs and opportunities formulated when a District Chair was last appointed (Standing Order 423) annotated with significant changes that have taken place in the interim – SS
  - Any other agreed statements relating to the mission of the District – SS
  - Papers and minutes from the most recent district Synod – SS
  - Financial records and projections – SS
  - An indication of significant developments in the life of the District over the past five years (eg Circuits that have merged, the number of churches that have closed and opened, new areas of mission and development, changes in the number of ordained ministers in the District and patterns of leadership etc) – SS
  - Our Calling and the Priorities for the Methodist Church – SoC
  - Recent material from the Conference outlining connexional priorities (eg for the use of resources and property for God’s mission) – SoC
- 2.7 The following people and groups should be consulted (again, this indicates the minimum):
- The District Chair (and any Assistant or Deputy Chairs)
  - Representatives of each neighbouring District
  - The district Lay Stationing Representative
  - Other district officers and chairs/secretaries of key district committees, including the Policy Committee
  - The district treasurer(s)
  - The Superintendents in the District
  - A member of the regional DMLN staff team
  - Representatives of the wider Connexion, as determined by the Secretary of the Conference (for instance, it may be helpful to consult the Chairs of the Stationing Committee and the Stationing Matching Group)
  - Ecumenical representatives
  - Representatives of partner agencies (where applicable)

**Question 4: Does this minimum list of documents seem appropriate? Should anything be added/removed?**

**Question 5: Does this minimum list of consultation partners seem appropriate? Should anyone be added/removed?**

- 2.8 Every effort should be made to ensure that the range of consultation partners includes a suitable balance in terms of gender, age, ethnic background and lay/ordained status. Every effort should be made to ensure that the review process is made known throughout the District and that those who wish to share their views have the means to do so. It is suggested that the District Chair should not be a member of the District Commission, but should be consulted in depth and kept informed of the activities of the Commissioners as the work progresses.

### **3.0 The roles of the Secretary of the Synod and the Secretary of the Conference**

3.1 The Conference directed that “the Secretary of the Synod in consultation with the Secretary of the Conference shall convene a District Commission, jointly appointed by the District and the Conference.” The following proposals are made with regard to the roles of the Secretary of the Synod and the Secretary of the Conference (see also Section 3):

3.2 The Secretary of the Synod shall:

- Convene the District Commission in consultation with the Secretary of the Conference.
- Ensure that four other members are appointed by the district Synod.
- Gather the documents marked ‘SS’ from the list above.
- Ensure practical arrangements are made for the meetings of the District Commission (and any gatherings arranged for the purposes of consultation).
- With the Secretary of the Conference, ensure appropriate dissemination of the report of the Commission (and any recommendations for action) and ensure that it informs the work of the nomination committee (where applicable).

3.3 The Secretary of the Conference shall:

- Maintain an overview of when reviews are required in each District.
- Assist the Secretary of the Synod to convene the District Commission.
- Select five members (who are not members or stationed in the District) from the pool appointed by the Conference, ensuring the membership of the Commission is balanced.
- Supply the documents marked ‘SoC’ from the list above.
- With the Secretary of the Synod, ensure appropriate dissemination of the report of the Commission (and any recommendations for action) and ensure that it informs the work of the nomination committee (where applicable).

**Question 6: Do the proposed roles of the Secretary of the Synod and the Secretary of the Conference seem appropriate?**

### **4.0 Cost implications**

4.1 The costs incurred by each District Commission are likely to vary significantly depending on the size and geography of the District. However, they are likely to include venue hire, travel costs (for the District Commissioners and conversation partners) and a level of administrative support.

**Question 7: Should the funding model follow (roughly) that of nomination committees? The expenses of those appointed by the Conference could be paid from the Methodist Church Fund and those appointed by the District from district funds. The District would arrange and cover the costs of meetings and the expenses of consultation partners.**

### **5.0 Proposed changes to Standing Orders**

5.1 It is suggested that before changes are made to Standing Orders, the process outlined above is allowed to run in a small number of Districts as a pilot, in order to address any issues that arise.

### **6.0 Conclusion**

- 6.1 Currently, it is anticipated that five Districts will be seeking a new Chair or exploring the possibility of reinvitation for September 2020. A number of Chairs' appointments are due to end or will be subject to reinvitation before this, which would (it is anticipated) not allow sufficient time for the District Commission process to run.
- 6.2 The Council will see, from the proposals and questions above, that significant work and resources is required in order to ensure that a robust and careful process can be implemented.

**Question 8: In light of this, the Council is asked to consider what further work is required and whether the timescale envisaged by the 2016 Conference (ie that Resolution 15/7 would take effect from 1 September 2017) is feasible.**

## Appendix I

### From MC/17/11 – *Taking forward Larger than Circuit resolutions*

#### 5. Resolutions 15/7 and 15/8

5.1 The 2016 Conference adopted Resolutions 15/7 and 15/8 [Daily Record 7/13/1 and 7/13/2]:

**15/7.** (Recommendation 6) The Conference directs that:

(a) At the times specified below, the Secretary of the Synod in consultation with the Secretary of the Conference shall convene a District Commission, jointly appointed by the District and the Conference, to oversee and undertake a thorough review of the life of the District, set in the wider regional, connexional and ecumenical context.

(b) A review shall take place:

(i) At a time which will allow the outcome of the review to inform the work of the Chairs Nomination Panel when a new Chair is sought or the present Chair is exploring the possibility with the District of a reinvitation; and

(ii) At any other time when a District or group of Districts wants to engage in the process of reflection or review.

**15/8.** (Recommendation 7) The Conference directs the Council to bring a process for implementing the creation of a District Commission, and the nomination of those to be appointed by the Conference as District Commissioners to the 2017 Conference.

5.2 The Conference resolved that Resolution 15/7 would take effect from 1 September 2017 [Daily Record 8/42/2].

5.3 This recommendation was made in response to the suggestion that “present structures militate towards self-perpetuation [and] it is not clear how either District appointments, or indeed the life of the District, are required to reflect on the wider priorities of the Methodist Church connexionally, or regionally” (*Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*, p. 39). The report proposed that a more “robust, connexionally-engaged and connexionally-consistent, process of discernment” was needed to allow Districts to engage with opportunities for review with confidence and imagination (para. 43).

5.4 Questions and areas for reflection regarding the life of the District, region (including neighbouring Districts) and wider Connexion that could form the basis of the work of a District Commission are given in Appendix XI of *Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*.

5.5 Some district Synods have already adopted resolutions to encourage and resource Circuits and Local Churches to carry out a similar review process with regard to their finances, property and policy and mission statements. In the Chester and Stoke-on-Trent District, Circuits and Local Churches are invited to avail themselves of a small team of people appointed to assist in this review process.

5.6 It is hoped that a small group with knowledge of these existing processes will bring proposals to the April meeting of the Council as to how the questions outlined in Appendix XI of *Larger than Circuit: Consultation, Methodology and Findings* might be addressed, including:

- A proposed timeline for the District Commission process;
- Suggested ways of addressing the proposed questions (eg materials to be gathered, suggested consultation partners);
- The roles of the Secretary of the Synod and the Secretary of the Conference;
- Cost implications;

- Proposed changes to Standing Orders.

5.7 Should it prove possible to complete this work within the timescale envisaged by the 2016 Conference, proposed nominations for appointment by the 2017 Conference as District Commissioners will be brought to the April meeting of the Council.

## Appendix II

### From *Larger than Circuit Paper B: Consultation, Methodology and Findings*

#### Appendix (XI): District Commission

One of the challenges of the present structure is that it is geared for self-perpetuation. For example, when a vacancy for a District Chair arises, as Standing Order 423 (1) states:

*“...Where a new appointment is to be made, the Policy Committee shall prepare for consideration by the nomination committee a district statement of needs and opportunities and, based upon it, a person specification indicating the qualities required of the person to be appointed. The existing Chair shall be consulted, as shall leaders of such other churches as the Policy Committee believes appropriate. The statement and person specification shall be sent to the Secretary of the Conference for circulation to the nomination committee before its meeting...”*

As the above quotation makes clear, the focus of the invitation process is on the perceived needs and opportunities as defined and interpreted by the District itself. Whilst the District Policy Committee is encouraged to consult other churches as it deems necessary, there is no explicit (or even implicit) comparable requirement for the District Policy Committee to consult either the wider Connexion, or even to consult with neighbouring Districts as to the way ahead. This seems to make an instrument which perpetuates the present structures, without necessarily giving rise to any wider, critical thinking about the development of the Methodist Church connexionally or regionally. It simply focuses on the individual District through the lens of the District Chair and, unless two District Chairs are sought simultaneously in two adjacent Districts, it is not presently required that neighbouring Districts be consulted over the appointment.

It is also worth noting that the composition of the Chair’s Nomination Committee (Standing Order 421A) means that the Nomination Committee is drawn from nine Synod-appointed members and five appointed by the Connexion, thus ensuring that the balance is always in favour of the District.

#### The challenge

Given that the present structures militate towards self-perpetuation, it is not clear how either District appointments, or indeed the life of the District, are required to reflect on the wider priorities of the Methodist Church connexionally, or regionally. It is not clear that the trigger point for the appointment of a new District Chair should simultaneously trigger a more fundamental review of the life and purpose of the District itself, let alone its future shape within the wider Methodist context. Thus structures are made for self-perpetuation, rather than for critical and imaginative self or external evaluation.

#### Recommendations

Given this flaw in the present system, it is necessary that a method be developed by which Districts must be required to engage in critical reflection, not only on the needs of the individual District as it perceives them, but for a thorough review of the District’s life, purposes, and structures.

Thus, the CG is of the view that when a new Chair is being sought, or the present Chair is exploring the possibility with the District of a re-invitation, or a District or Group of Districts wants to engage in the process of reflection or review, the Secretary of the Synod in consultation with the Secretary of the Conference shall convene a District Commission, jointly appointed by the District and the Methodist Conference to oversee and undertake a thorough review of the life of the District, set in the wider regional, Connexional, and ecumenical context.

### Considerations about the District:

The District will need to have a clearly developed mission policy and strategy, in order to test how this strategy is being developed and being reviewed;

The District will need to explore whether the structures within the District are fit for purpose. For example, do they enable the mission of the Church to be facilitated?

Is it possible to recruit people to the positions the District requires?

Are the finances of the District sound in the short, medium, and longer terms?

Does the leadership model within the District facilitate a dynamic, missional focus? For example, is a new District Chair required, or is a new way of working in partnership with other Districts a more effective?

Might the development of Assistant or Deputy Chairs offer a more suitable model of leadership?

### Considerations about the Region (including neighbouring Districts):

How does this District engage in working beyond its formal boundaries? For example, how does the District work with neighbouring Districts, other Churches, or partner agencies?

Do present regional ways of working (such as the DMLN or stationing regions offer an effective means of facilitating mission within the District and beyond?

Does the existence of this District make good financial, missional, geographical, ecumenical, and environmental sense – or would more creative cross-boundary working make more sense in all or many of these criteria?

### Considerations about the wider Connexion

How do this District's priorities and practices reflect the priorities of the wider Methodist Connexion?

To what extent does the District engage in the wider Connexional Church?

Does the continued separate existence of the District in view make a positive contribution to the wider Connexion and, ecumenically, to the wider Church?

### Proposed Way Ahead

The CG believes that the work of a District Commission needs to be enshrined in Standing Orders. The District Commission (and therefore District Commissioners) need to be appointed annually by the Conference (as are Connexionally appointed members of the Chair's Nomination Committee).