

59. Two Districts, One Chair: Southampton and the Channel Islands

1. For the last few years, the Districts in the South West of England have explored the possibilities of closer working in light of the reduced resources and new ways of working. The conversations led, among other things, to the formation of the South West Peninsula District in 2024, and to various areas of cooperation between the Southampton and Channel Islands Districts.
2. The Southampton and the Channel Islands Districts are not at a point when it appears that a merger will be helpful and, given the unique context of the Channel Islands, are unlikely ever to be. However, the decision of the Chair of the Channel Islands not to seek reinvasion after 2026 has prompted discussions about whether that District needs its own Chair.
3. The Channel Islands District Policy Committee (DPC) met to discuss the question of the need for its own Chair. The members of the committee reflected that the current model requires the Chair to be away from the District for a significant proportion of the year to represent the District at the Conference, the Chairs' Meeting, and Stationing Matching. This is not easy when the Chair is also superintendent minister with pastoral charge of Local Churches and seems disproportionate to the size of the District.
4. The Southampton District Policy Committee also met to discuss the possibility of sharing a Chair with the Channel Islands. Concerns about the possible increase in workload of the Chair were discussed and it was noted that there were significant areas of work that were already shared (eg. Probationers' Committee, Safeguarding, and Presbyteral Synod) and that there were also meetings that were at present attended by both Chairs which would result in no added work. However, it is clear that considerable work will need to go into the development of the Deputy Chair roles in both Districts.
5. Both DPCs noted that, for the past 9 years, the Chair of the Scotland District has also been the Chair of Shetland, representing both Districts in connexional bodies. The Shetland District has a Deputy Chair who works pastorally in the District on behalf of the Chair and can act as the first point of reference on the islands. The Channel Islands DPC is minded that a similar, but not identical model, might work with the Southampton and Channel Islands Districts.
6. The Deputy Chair of Shetland is appointed following a process similar to that of a District Chair. The Channel Islands DPC feels that this is unnecessary in this context and that it would be better for the distinct nature of the Channel Islands District, with its multiple jurisdictions to be recognised by the Synod appointing one of the Superintendents as Deputy Chair, whilst expecting that the two Superintendents in the District will work jointly and severally, each representing the District within the jurisdiction, Circuit and ecumenical context in which they serve. That would also mean that the appointment of deputies in both Districts would be by the same process (ie under SO 426).
7. Neither District believes that it is necessary for these arrangements to be included in the Standing Orders, but acknowledges that this might be a matter for further discussion, possibly in the Law and Polity Committee.
8. The Synods therefore propose that the Channel Islands and Southampton Districts remain as separate Districts, and that from September 2026 the Chair of the Southampton District shall also be the Chair of the Channel Islands District. The Synods have delegated responsibility for enacting the agreement and agreeing any practical arrangements to the District Policy Committees. The Synods have further agreed that, for the purposes of SO 421A, the District Policy Committees shall meet together to nominate jointly a representative group to the Synods for appointment.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 59/1. The Conference received the Report.**
- 59/2. The Conference agreed to the change in the number of Chairs for the Channel Islands and Southampton Districts as set out in this report with effect from September 2026.**
- 59/3. The Conference requested the Law and Polity Committee to advise on whether it is necessary for this change to be reflected in the Standing Orders.**