

6. Committee on Methodist Law and Polity (1)

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SECTION A GENERAL REPORT

1. Standing Order 211 (previously Standing Order 338) sets out the functions of the committee, including the committee's responsibility to scrutinise all new legislation which is proposed to the Conference in order to ensure its coherence with existing usage and Methodist polity. The committee must also be consulted on all matters directly concerning Methodist law and polity which are presented to the Conference by other bodies, including the Connexional Council, or to the Connexional Council for decision under the council's own powers. Various members of the committee undertake this task and have commented upon all the proposals and other matters submitted to the committee by those bodies.
2. The committee appointed Miss Elizabeth Ovey as its representative to the 2025 Conference under Standing Order 102(1)(iv).
3. The committee appointed its 2025 Conference Sub-committee under Standing Order 211(6) as follows: the Conference Officer for Legal and Constitutional Practice (Secretary and convener), the Secretary of the Conference, the Revds Andrew Charlesworth and Jennifer M Dyer, Mr David Gibson, the Revds Helen R Hollands and Kenneth G Howcroft, Miss Elizabeth Ovey, and the Revds Ian S Rutherford and Dr James N Tebbutt (Chair). Mrs Susan Howdle has been invited to act as a consultant and adviser to the Sub-committee if required.
4. In previous years, the committee has appointed its Complaints and Discipline Sub-committee for the year in accordance with the Sub-committee's terms of reference. However, given the committee's involvement in the work required to review the Church's Complaints and Discipline Process (the Part 11 Review), appointing a Complaints and Discipline Sub-committee for the connexional year 2024-25 was held in abeyance pending the outcome of that review. A report on the proposed Standing Order amendments required in connection with the Part 11 Review appears elsewhere in the Conference Agenda.
5. The Secretary of the committee meets with the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee from time to time to collaborate on matters in which both committees have an interest. The committee has nominated the Revd Kenneth G Howcroft to attend the Faith and Order Committee's meetings as an observer on the committee's behalf.
6. The committee has had another very busy year, meeting four times in total: online in October and December 2024 and April 2025, and in person in March 2025. The committee has provided support and guidance to the Secretary of the Conference and the Connexional Team on numerous matters and continues to assist with significant projects being undertaken by the Church, in particular:
 - the work of the Oversight and Trusteeship Task Group;
 - the work of the Part 11 Review Implementation Group.
7. Other work undertaken by the committee this year includes:
 - assisting in the annual review of the Church Stewards', Circuit Stewards', Superintendents' and Property Stewards' Handbooks;
 - advising the Secretary of the Conference on the need for a Gifts Policy for ministers and also on the Law Commission's consultation on Burial Ground and Cremation law;
 - forming its own working group to consider matters relating to Data Protection legislation.

7. The Chair and Secretary of the committee are grateful to all the committee members for their continued support and willingness to assist with the committee's work.

*****RESOLUTION**

- 6/1. The Conference received the General Report.

**SECTION B
OVERSIGHT AND TRUSTEESHIP RESOLUTIONS OF THE 2024 CONFERENCE**

The extensive work required to fulfil Resolutions 50/7 and 50/8 of the 2024 Conference (cited below) was completed during the CPD editing process immediately following that Conference. The committee now reports this work to the 2025 Conference and confirms that no further action is required.

- (i) Resolution 50/7

The Conference directs the Law and Polity Committee to make such amendments of the numerical cross-references in Standing Orders generally as are necessary to accord with the changes made by the adoption of Resolutions 50/5 and 50/6.

[DR/7/7/5]

- (ii) Resolution 50/8

The Conference further directs the Law and Polity Committee to amend, where necessary, the text of Books IV to VII of Constitutional Practice and Discipline for the same purpose.

[DR/7/7/6]

*****RESOLUTION**

- 6/2. The Conference received Section B of the Report.

**SECTION C
DISTRICT MISSION PLANS**

In 2024, by Resolution 34/4, the Methodist Council agreed the requirement for all Districts to have an active and sustainable District Mission Plan that prioritises outward-focused action, and requested the committee to draft amendments to Standing Order 962 for recommendation to the 2024 Conference for approval.

In the event, those amendments were not available to be brought to the 2024 Conference and the committee therefore brings them to the Conference now.

The committee advises that, rather than amending Standing Order 962, Standing Order 400A is amended instead by adding a new clause (2) (in the place of a previously revoked clause (2)), as follows:

400A Nature and Purposes (1) ...

(2) ~~revoked~~ ***Each District shall produce annually a District Mission Plan detailing the missional priorities of the District in supporting the Circuits and Churches in advancing the mission of the Church in its region. The Mission Plan shall incorporate the District Property Development Plan and shall be submitted by the Synod Secretary to the Conference Office.***

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 6/3. The Conference received Section C of the Report.

6/4. The Conference amended Standing Order 400A(2) as set out above.

**SECTION D
AMENDMENTS TO STANDING ORDERS**

The committee proposes the following Standing Order amendments arising from business previously discussed by the committee's Conference Sub-committee.

1. Standing Order 134A *En bloc* business [at the Conference]

There are occasions when the Conference Sub-committee, in the discharge of its responsibilities under Standing Order 211 during the Conference and in particular with a view to minimising the need to bring additional business in the exercise of its functions under Standing Order 131(25), is of the opinion that an item of *en bloc* business requires more specific attention and the possibility of debate. In practice the Business Committee and the Sub-committee work well together and there is no reason to doubt that a request by the Sub-committee that an item be withdrawn from the *en bloc* business would be agreed to, but as a matter of good governance the committee thinks it is preferable that the Standing Order should make clear that a request must be acted on.

The committee therefore recommends the following amendment to be made at the end of the current provision in Standing Order 134A(1)(c):

- (c) Subject to sub-clause (e) below any resolution, including any recommended reply to a memorial, which becomes the subject of an amending notice of motion shall be removed from the list. In addition, by giving notice to the Secretary of the Conference in writing before the close of business on the third day of the Representative Session, any six members of the Conference may, without proposing an amendment, require any item or items, except a recommended reply to a memorial, to be removed from the list. The Business Committee itself shall be free at any time before the resolutions are moved to remove any item or items from the list, **and shall do so if so requested by the Law and Polity Conference Sub-committee.**

2. Standing Order 805 Retirement Benefits

In 2022 the Conference Sub-committee reported to the Conference [DR 8/47/7] that it would seek to establish the position relating to the anomaly under Standing Order 805(3)(b) that "it is only presbyters or presbyteral probationers who may apply to the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons in the circumstances there specified", and would bring any appropriate amendments to the 2023 Conference.

The committee was not in a position to report to the 2023 Conference, but does so now. The committee understands that there are numerous funds available to assist presbyters, deacons and probationers in a variety of circumstances, and the committee does not believe the details of these need to be enshrined in Standing Orders. Having reviewed Standing Order 805 in detail, and having been assured that applications may be made to the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons by presbyters, deacons and probationers in the circumstances set out in sub-clause (3) (among other circumstances), the committee recommends that sub-clauses (1) and (2) be retained, and that sub-clause (3) be deleted, as follows:

805 Retirement Benefits. (1) (a) A minister or probationer may apply to become a member of the Methodist Ministers' Pension Scheme according to the Rules for eligibility and application set by the Trustee of that Scheme.

(b) The Conference may from time to time on the recommendation of the Trustee of the Scheme approve levels of contribution to the Scheme that are required from Circuits or other bodies providing the stipend for a minister or probationer, and from any minister or probationer who applies to be a member of the Scheme.

(c) The Conference shall receive reports from the Trustee of the Scheme as to the level of pension and deferred pension to be paid by the Scheme to its members.

(2) (a) A minister or probationer may apply to the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society for help with housing upon becoming a supernumerary, according to the Society's eligibility criteria.

(b) Upon the death of a minister or probationer, their spouse or civil partner may apply to the Methodist Ministers' Housing Society for help with housing according to the Society's eligibility criteria.

~~(3) (a) A presbyter may apply for assistance from the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons on becoming a supernumerary.~~

~~(b) Upon the death of a presbyter or presbyteral probationer their spouse or civil partner may apply for assistance from the Fund for the Support of Presbyters and Deacons.~~

*****RESOLUTIONS**

6/5. The Conference received Section D of the Report.

6/6. The Conference amended Standing Order 134A(1)(c) as set out above, and deleted Standing Order 805(3).

SECTION E CONNEXIONAL FUNDS TREASURERS

Following the decision of the 2024 Conference to receive Section F of the Methodist Council Report (Part 2) ("the Report") in relation to the role of connexional funds treasurers in Circuits, the committee has considered what changes are required to Standing Order 505, along with any consequential changes, to effect that decision.

In its deliberations, the committee noted the statement in the Report that not all Circuits are in a position to appoint a connexional funds treasurer and surmised that the Council had intended that the requirement on Circuits to appoint one should be removed (meaning Standing Order 505 could be deleted in its entirety). However the Report did not say this; rather it stated: "The role of connexional funds treasurer will be retained...", and simply recommended that the reporting obligations in Standing Order 505(2) be removed.

The committee recognises, as did the Methodist Council, that many Circuits have made arrangements which enable connexional funds to be dealt with effectively and that the connexional funds treasurer may also be an effective advocate for connexional funds. Its reading of the report is that the Council did not intend to make changes where systems are working well and in such circumstances it is clearly sensible for the Circuit to continue to appoint an officer, or more than one officer, with those responsibilities. The committee is, however, concerned that Circuits finding it impossible to persuade anyone to take on the office of connexional funds treasurer should not be put in the position of being in breach of Standing Orders and believes that the Council shared that concern. In the committee's view, the way forward is to remove the obligation from Standing Orders and so to leave Circuits and Local Churches free to make their own arrangements for dealing with connexional funds in whatever way works best in the particular situation. Since it has not been possible, as a result of the abolition of the Methodist Council, to seek clarification from the Council itself, the committee, while drawing the apparent departure from the Council's recommendation to the attention of the Conference, therefore recommends that the Conference resolves to delete Standing Order 505 in its entirety, thereby removing the requirement for every Circuit to have its own connexional funds treasurer. In making this recommendation, the committee advises that the removal of the absolute requirement under Standing Order 505 does not preclude a Circuit Meeting from choosing to appoint someone to an office with some or all of the former functions of a connexional funds treasurer under Standing Order 551 (Discretionary Appointments) if so desired.

If Standing Order 505 is deleted, Standing Order 584(2)(v) should also be deleted.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 6/7. The Conference received Section E of the Report.**
- 6/8. The Conference deleted Standing Order 505 and Standing Order 584(2)(v).**