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## About the South East Methodist District

### **Our Context**

The South East District of the Methodist Church was formed in 2006 as part of the wider reshaping of the Methodist Districts encompassing London. The District covers the counties of Kent, East and West Sussex, the majority of Surrey, and parts Berkshire and Hampshire. The District also includes the island of Malta and the British Overseas territory of Gibraltar.

### **Demographics**

Our extensive coastline has made the South East District a popular destination for retirement which skews the age profile in some circuits. We have pockets of rich ethnic diversity. We are blessed with Chinese and Urdu speaking congregations, and members from a wide variety of different ethnic backgrounds contribute to our diversity in many of our churches, albeit as yet in a minority.

### **Geography**

The South East District covers the region south of the Thames outside London up to (and beyond, in some cases) the borders of Berkshire and Hampshire, and take in Gibraltar and Malta. Many of the towns and surrounding areas lie in the London commuter belt. The North Downs run from Farnham to Dover, and the South Downs National Park runs from Winchester to Eastbourne. Between these two features lies the Weald, an area of outstanding natural beauty. To the north of the District sits the Thames basin, while to the south is the coastal strip, much of it reclaimed land. Kent is a peninsular thrust into the North Sea, its north coast formed by the confluence of the Thames and Medway estuaries. The most significant urban areas lie either side of London (e.g. Medway in the west and Slough in the east) and along the south coast (e.g. Worthing and Brighton). As you can see from the geography of the District, the role of Chair involves a significant amount of travelling.

### **Our Circuits**

We currently have 169 churches, of which 39 are LEPs, across 17 circuits. One circuit is a United Area, where ministry is shared across many churches with the United Reformed Church. Many of our LEPs are partnerships with United Reformed Church or the Church of England, but they also include 1 Church of Scotland and 2 with the Baptist Church.

We have 80 active ministers, of which around 20 are Authorised or Recognised and Regarded. We also have around 100 Supernumerary ministers residing in the District.

Potential changes on the horizon include 2 pairs of circuits in conversations about circuit mergers.

### **Post-Brexit**

As a District we have witnessed and experienced some of the impact of Brexit. This has impacted the communities and ministries in Malta and Gibraltar, and on the British mainland, especially though migration on the Kent coastline. Our circuits seek to respond to these local needs with compassion and working for social justice.

### **Post-Covid**

The impact of the pandemic has led to many changes to ways of working as a District, including utilising tools such as Zoom for some meetings. Wide ranging effects of the pandemic on District, circuit and church life, continue to be emerging.

## District Life

### Vision

#### Our Vision

(as adopted by the Synod April 2021)

In playing its part in seeking to fulfil Our Calling as Methodist people, and inspired by the Methodist Way of Life, the purpose of the South-East District is to:

#### Inspire

The South-East Methodist District is to inspire us to be faithful disciples, bearing witness to God's love for the sake of the transformation of the world.

#### Enable

The South-East District seeks to enable our calling to be a people faithful to God in mission through offering good governance

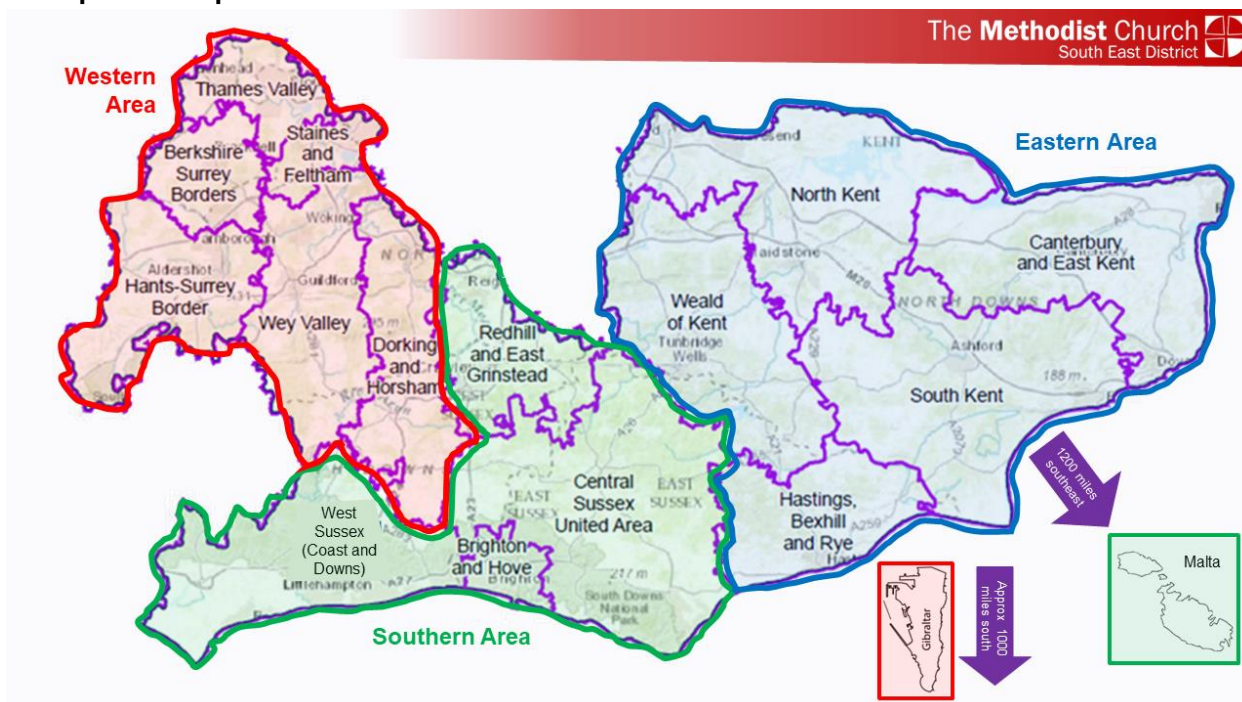
#### Encourage

The South-East Districts wants to encourage circuits, churches and individual disciples to live out their calling as followers of Jesus Christ

### Structure & District Areas

The geographical size of the District led to the creation of 3 areas within the District when it was formed; Eastern Western and Southern. Each area has an Assistant Chair assigned to the area, who exercise some pastoral oversight to circuits within that area, alongside the Chair.

#### District Map: as at September 2024



#### District Office

We currently have a District office located in a business park in Crawley, close to the geographical centre of the District, the District office includes an office & meeting space for the District Chair, and a separate administration office.

The District Office is 5 miles from the District Chair's manse, and near the M23 motorway, linking London and the M25 orbital with the M27 coastal route and the south coast. Gatwick Airport is nearby, which is vital for ease of work with Malta and Gibraltar.

## **Current Leadership**

### **Assistant Chairs**

The District is currently structured to have 3 assistant chairs, each stationed to an appointment that is 2/3 circuit and 1/3 District. The role of an Assistant chair is an integral part of the model of leadership which the South-East District established itself with, which means that leadership and oversight in the District is exercised by the District Chair alongside the Assistant Chairs.

Their oversight is in part exercised geographically, with each Assistant Chair having an oversight of one of the areas of the District (Eastern, Western and Southern), where in partnership with the Chair, they exercise a pastoral role, supporting individual presbyters, deacons, lay employees and their families, together with support to local churches and circuits in mission and ministry. They may also fulfil a representative role in those areas in ecumenical settings, on behalf of the District or the Chair.

Assistant Chairs also offer leadership across the District, which can include general leadership, deputising for the chair as the chair requires it, or offering leadership or in a particular area of District life, across the District.

Assistant chairs currently meet with the chair approximately every 6-8 weeks for mutual support, prayer and to share in conversation about the work of God and oversight of District life, in particular pastoral care for ministers and circuits.

### **District Leadership Team (DLT)**

Along with the Assistant Chairs, the DLT also includes our safeguarding officer, District treasurer, synod secretary and a lay representative. The group currently meets approximately 3-4 times a year to reflect on District life together. The DLT has recently begun to consider the possibilities of portfolio working within its own working, and wider District life.

### **District Council (Equivalent to District Policy Committee)**

The District Council meets 4 times a year to reflect on District life and discuss and make decisions on matters of policy, as required of it by the synod, conference or other bodies. The Council is made up of a combination of the DLT and ministers and lay members of each of the District areas, nominated by the synod.

### **District Staffing**

#### **Employed Staff**

- District Administrator and PA to the Chair of District (FT)
- Property officer (PT 12 hrs per week)
- Safeguarding Officer (FT – post conference 2024, expected to become a connexional employee during the current connexional year)
- Resourcing mission officer (PT) – vacant as of 1/9/25.

We are also currently exploring the possibility of employing a finance officer (PT)

#### **Consultancy**

We have an external Employment Advisor who offers employment advice to the District, circuits and local churches, paid on a consultancy basis from District expenses.

#### **Volunteer Officers**

Alongside the usual officers of a District, we have the following additional officers who offer leadership in these areas of District life, supported through oversight by an assistant chair.

- Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants Officer
- Youth Ambassador
- Interfaith Advisor

## **Mission & Ministry**

The District has a healthy mix of lay and ordained ministry, both diaconal and presbyteral, and employees with particular expertise. Sometimes resources can feel stretched and it is recognised that with fewer ordained ministers and diminishing financial resources, this may continue. Nevertheless, imagination in resourcing and sharing what we do have gives opportunity for new ways of working.

### **Superintendents**

We hold 2 Superintendents' Residentials each year, meeting for 36-hours and providing a mixture of worship, training, theological reflection, business and space for each other.

We also hold a superintendent gathering on zoom once a week for sharing, reflection and troubleshooting. This is nonmandatory and hosting the meeting is shared between the chair, assistant chairs, and superintendents.

### **Early Years in Ministry**

The District has welcomed numerous probationers over the years, and runs an 'Under 5s' group where probationers, and others within the first 5 years of their ministry gather to reflect, pray, share and engage in training together. This is facilitated by a group co-ordinator, and the current District chair has sought to attend as much as possible.

### **Ecumenism**

We value ecumenical partnerships, and there has long been a positive approach to ecumenical relationships in the District, as well as in churches and circuits. This can include formal and informal relationships and partnerships.

Church leaders meet regularly as a forum in Kent and Surrey, but much less so in Sussex.

The Anglican diocese of Canterbury lies within the District, as do the larger parts of Rochester, Chichester, Guildford, and Southwark Dioceses, and small sections of the dioceses of Oxford and Winchester. Southwark and Arundel RC dioceses and the URC Wessex and Southern synods also overlap, as do the corresponding Baptist areas.

Due to our significant sharing together in ministry, we welcome a member of the URC Southern Synod to be part of the District Council, and a member of our District Council attends the Southern Synod Council.

### **Regional & Inter-District Working**

For the purposes of stationing, the South East District works closely with the London District and the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District. This regional grouping has proved helpful over the last 15 years.

Our Safeguarding Officer has a growing collaborative relationship with the Safeguarding Officer for the Southampton District, and together they are also seeking opportunities for collaboration with London District.

Over the last 6 months we have also been exploring the establishing of a joint reconciliation group between the South East and Southampton Districts.

### **Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants**

As a result of the including Kent and Sussex coastline, plus the airports of Gatwick and Heathrow, as well as Gibraltar and Malta, many of those who come to the United Kingdom in search of a place of safety and hope arrive first in our District. This includes people from Hong Kong coming to Heathrow or Gatwick airports and from many different countries and via many different routes, to the Mediterranean islands and across the English Channel to the ports and beaches of Kent and Sussex.

A significant number of Circuits in the District are involved in projects and initiatives supporting refugees and others who have arrived in the UK in difficult circumstances. These take many forms, including drop-in centres; English language conversation; worship in mother-tongues; clothes banks; advocacy and financial support. They are often delivered in conjunction with other denominations or secular agencies.

The District has a part-time, voluntary Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants Officer, whose role is to promote good practice and provide a reference point for people working to support refugees, displaced persons and migrants in the District. To this end she convenes 6-monthly gatherings for networking, prayerful support and keynote presentations on a wide range of aspects relating to work supporting refugees, displaced persons and migrants. Reports on the Gatherings and other matters are posted on the District website.

### **Partnerships & Chaplaincy**

We have a number of chaplaincies in the District, fulfilled by both ordained and lay. These include, amongst others: mental health, prison, NHS, schools and military chaplaincy.

### ***Kent Workplace Mission***

The Chair of the South East District is currently one of the Trustees of Kent Workplace Mission, an ecumenical charity that provides chaplaincy services to workplaces (from hospitals to town centres, and from shopping centres to ports) across Kent, Medway, Bromley and Bexley. This is an opportunity to be part of a committed and engaged ecumenical Trustee body and to oversee some vital missional work on frontlines in the South East. You can find out more in recent KWM newsletters, [here](#).

### ***Schools***

We have 10 Methodist Schools within the District. 8 are primary schools. 2 also offer residential education, Kent College Pembury and Kent College Canterbury, both of which have ordained chaplains. The Chair of District is an Ex-officio governor of both Kent Collages.

### ***New Housing***

There have been, and continue to be, extensive housing developments across the South East District. We have made some attempts to facilitate some pioneering ministry in these areas. A key missional strategy set in 2018 was to have three officers in new housing, having one in each of the three District areas, employed in partnership with circuits in a similar way to Assistant Chairs, 2/3 circuit, 1/3 District, with district funding coming from the District Advance Fund. However, this strategy has not unfolded as planned, with only 1 appointment having been made.

### **Resourcing Mission**

The District actively seeks to enable resources to be utilised for mission. There is an active District Grants group who receive and decide upon grant requests for a variety of building and ministry projects, as well as training. Grants are funded through the District Advance Fund, which alongside receiving funds through property levies, also receives funds annually from the investment income received from the London Mission fund and levies on Circuit Model Trust Funds.

In 2023 the Synod adopted an environmental policy and is in the process of developing guidance to support and encourage local churches and circuits seeking to support the connexional target to reach NetZero by 2030.

### **The District Manse**

The manse is conveniently situated within two miles of the M23, a few minutes' walk from Horley Station which is on the main London to Brighton line. Gatwick Airport is nearby. The accommodation includes a lounge (3.57m x 3.15m), study (3.62m x 3.57m), dining room (3.32m x 3.1m), kitchen/breakfast room (4.58m x 3.07m), utility area, downstairs WC, conservatory (approx. 3m x 3.6 m). On the first floor there is one double bedroom with an en suite bathroom and dressing room, two further double bedrooms and one single bedroom and family bathroom. The front garden provides parking for numerous cars and there is also a garage. The rear garden is relatively large.

There are primary and secondary schools in Horley with the nearest FE college being in Crawley. The nearest hospital is the East Surrey (A&E), which is five miles away.