
Statement of Needs and Opportunities

Leadership & District Structures

Collaborative leadership

The District's collaborative model of leadership offers opportunity for those in District leadership to serve in ways that complement each other, utilising each other's strengths and gifts, passions and skills.

Therefore, the Chair of the South East District is required to have an executive, leading and oversight role in the whole life of the District, but expected to exercise some of that leadership by delegating to and empowering others.

Review and reshape District structures

Current District structures are largely unchanged from how they began when the District was formed in 2006. The District was originally formed on a basis of being 'District-lite', only having that which is essential for District life, and allowing circuits creative and imaginative space to shape their mission and ministry as they feel God leading them to. However the passing of time, increasing legislative and governance demands, and the impact of connexional changes and conference decisions, such District involvement in leadership of God for All, and recent connexional reflection around emerging models of leadership in the Districts, lead us to question whether 'District-lite' is a realistic shape of District structures for the current age.

The experience of the pandemic, and the introduction of widespread ability to hold online meetings has had a significant impact on ways of working in the District. In some ways this has had a positive impact, for example removing the need for travel time for meetings. In other ways it has had a negative impact, for example removing some of the places and spaces where relationships previously would be nurtured.

In recent months we have begun to consider the prospect of introducing portfolios as part of our oversight.

Therefore, the District Leadership Team and District Council believe that now is the time to review our existing leadership model and oversight structures, to consider whether alternative ways may better serve the needs of the District in the present. We seek a new chair who will take a leading role in this work.

Inter-District and Connexional Relationships

Recent changes to the structure of the Learning Network have caused a change to relationships with the network team, and in some areas, this has had a negative impact on ongoing work and training. We are conscious that the anticipated changes to the structure of safeguarding in the Districts may also have an impact. Therefore, the District needs to continue to be attentive to establishing strong relationships with these networks and our aligned officers.

Communication

Over the last couple years, we have become increasingly aware of a need to strengthen our digital communications, and have been working on a digital strategy, however this work has been slower than desired due to competing priorities, and ongoing challenges with our office database and access to update key communication tools such as our website. These challenges have led to members of the District feeling excluded due to not receiving, or being able to find, key information. These are current areas of focus for us, and we anticipate this to continue to be so in the 2025-26 connexional year.

Ministry

Alongside the faithful witness of God's people in local neighbourhoods and communities. There are many exciting mission projects occurring across the District, from community hubs and warm spaces, to partnerships running foodbanks and community fridges. Earlier in 2024 a new Soft Play centre was opened at Offington Park in Worthing, as a community and missional space and we look forward to seeing what God does there.

Emmanuel Eastbourne is an LEP which has been formed from what were formerly 4 congregations, and they opened a new building in 2023, where since opening they have already begun to see community growth. Many such projects take a lot of time and energy, and ministers and local leaders benefit from support, encouragement and pastoral care from the District Chair and wider District leadership.

Stationing

The size of the District means that every year includes a large number of ministers entering the re-invitation process and/or circuits and ministers entering stationing. Many circuit appointments which enter stationing come out of a process of wider circuit restructuring and/or reviews of circuit vision and mission plans. The District chair has a significant role in supporting ministers, families and circuits in this process.

Churches and Circuits

The reality in the District is that there are numerous local churches which are in decline, which has significant impact on their ability to function with the appropriate number of church officers, and this can also affect circuits ability to function. We seek a Chair who will show understanding in these situations, and lead the District in a way that will help support churches and circuits in these situations to explore new ways to be church. This may include being permission giving to churches and circuits to explore or try out new ways of working.

Support and care for our Ministers

Ministers need to be encouraged, and know they are cared for. Superintendents in particular can bear significant pressures, and need to know they are supported by the Chair and wider District leadership. Care for the families of ministers is also essential, including dependants and family who reside with them, as well as extended and found family. Attentiveness to the realities that being minister as a single person can bring, is also needed.

God for All

The renewal of the Connexional Evangelism and Growth strategy, God for All, and additional funding for District staff overseeing New Places for People and Faith Related Community organising is a great opportunity to reimagine how as a District we resource and enable mission. We consider that this work, and the creation of these appointments, could potentially be connected to the review of District structures referenced above. We seek a Chair who has a heart for mission, and will be able to lead the District in a way which supports and encourages churches and circuits in mission.

Over the last 10 years there has been significant investment, from District grants, and of local church and circuit funds, into mission to areas of new housing. This is seen as a huge opportunity by many, but discovering how to respond to that opportunity remains a challenge. Many projects have not been deemed successful.

Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants

Ministry among refugees, displaced persons and migrants continues to be an opportunity for mission that holds uniqueness to the District due to our geographical position. Continued encouragement of this work is needed. There may also be opportunities to better connect this local work with Connexional strategy, for example Justice Seeking Church and the work of JPIT. We would hope a new Chair would champion our work in this field, and contribute to strengthening connections with Connexional activity.

Supervision

The District was a pilot district for Ministerial Supervision, and this therefore is well established across the District. However, due to capacity issues relating to accredited supervisors, we have not yet begun to offer supervision to Lay Employees, as mandated within the Connexional Supervision Policy. Currently, the Chair of District holds and updates the Supervision Implementation Plan.

Ecumenical

Being a large District which does not naturally map with many boundaries of our ecumenical partners, nurturing ecumenical relationships does not always happen naturally. We seek a Chair who has an enthusiasm for ecumenical life, and alongside others will seek to strengthen our ecumenical relationships.

Due to our significant sharing in ministry with the United Reformed Church, we have a liaison group between the District and the URC Southern Synod. This group has not fully established itself post-pandemic, and so there is an opportunity re-ignite, and perhaps reshape, this group.

Volunteers

Circuits, and the District, increasingly struggle to identify volunteers for roles. Many faithful congregations and leaders feel tired and sometimes discouraged. The new chair will need to be able to recognise this reality, inspire and encourage congregations, and alongside others, support them in discerning their future direction.

As a District, we have been running with a slowly increasing number of vacancies in various places, which has in some ways contributed to an increase in workload for the Chair, Assistant Chairs, Synod Secretary and others.

As a large District, we have extensive experience and gifts spread across the lay and ordained in our churches and circuits. We would like to see how we can better inspire, enable, and encourage people to offer those gifts to the life of the District.

Connexional Leadership

We seek a Chair who is committed both to the District and the Connexion who can balance the needs of working within the District and providing support to Connexional committees in a way that is affirming to all. The District's size means that the Chair will need to find creative ways to manage these competing demands effectively.

Some local churches and circuits speak of not knowing what 'The District' is, and so there is sometimes a sense of disconnect and distance from one another within the District. This is also true of the sense of being part of the Methodist Connexion, and so there is a need to strengthen our sense of connexionalism through encouraging engagement with connexional life, and we would hope our Chair would live out that connexionalism within their own role and contribution to connexional life, as well as encouraging others to offer their gifts and skills to the connexion, and inviting the gifts and graces available across the connexion to contribute to District life.