

## 51. District Amalgamations

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### 1. North West England

The 2023 Conference agreed to the formation of a new North West England District with effect from 1 September 2024. The new District will comprise the present Bolton and Rochdale, Lancashire, Liverpool and Cumbria Districts. The Council, in May 2023, authorised a consultation process with the present Manchester and Stockport Districts in respect of whether the new North West England District would also include the Manchester and Stockport District.

Under the terms of SO 401, the Council authorised a consultation process with the Synod and Circuit Meetings of the Manchester and Stockport District, and appointed a scrutiny group to assess whether the proposals had been set out clearly, whether all the views (both for and against) had been reasonably considered and whether the proposal had support within the Manchester and Stockport District. The Council also ensured that consultation was undertaken with Synods and Circuit Meetings of the Bolton and Rochdale, Lancashire, Liverpool and Cumbria Districts, since this represented a change to the proposals on which those Circuit Meetings and District Synods had previously voted.

The Council heard that there had been full consultation within the Manchester and Stockport District and with the other four Districts which are forming the new North West England District, and that the voting results in all five Districts were very largely in favour of the Manchester and Stockport District also amalgamating on 1 September 2024 with the other four Districts to form the new North West England District.

The Council therefore recommends to the Conference that the Manchester and Stockport District forms part of the North West England District, which comes into being on 1 September 2024.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**51/1. The Conference receives the Report.**

**51/2. The Conference adopts the recommendation of the Council that the North West England District, which comes into being on 1 September 2024, should comprise the Manchester and Stockport District as well as the Bolton and Rochdale, Cumbria, Lancashire and Liverpool Districts.**

### 2. South West Peninsula

The proposals have been carefully set out by the Joint Working Party and have been widely discussed both locally and at the Methodist Council. The Council agreed that there should be consultations with the district Synods and with the circuits, which was duly undertaken.

As part of the wider South West Region, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly and Plymouth and Exeter Districts have a long history of collaborative working and sharing of resources across boundaries in ways which have promoted mission and sustained ministry. The proposal for a new single District stems from a desire not simply to join the administrative functions of two Districts together over a wider area but rather to use the opportunity to change how the two Districts are empowering, encouraging and resourcing Circuits, churches, and individuals for mission.

The vision is for collaborative leadership and closer working with Circuits to support the development of vision and outworking of the mission of God. This proposed amalgamation is a proactive approach to the unique opportunity for the two Districts to reconsider patterns of leadership and to reshape existing structures to better promote and support mission. It provides an exciting opportunity to offer a new approach to support mission better, not least in the area of developing New Places for New People (NPNP) across the Circuits. The proposed renewed approach to collaborative leadership will make richer use of the gifts and graces of volunteers, lay employees and ordained staff across the new District, and may provide Circuits with targeted support that is closer to hand than is currently offered.

#### **Have the proposals been reasonably considered?**

The Council reports that there has been widespread consultation and discussion in the Districts and the Circuits. Voting has taken place at Circuit Meetings and District Synods. Care has been taken to outline the proposals and there is no doubt that much in-depth liaison, reflection and debate have been undertaken with the clear imperative of enhancing mission.

A consultation document prepared for deliberations and decision making at Circuit Meetings and Synods covered well thought out areas under the following headings:

- Introduction
- Leadership
- Structure of proposed district
- Missional Policy
- Personnel
- Financial information

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It also included a helpful FAQ section. In addition, a PowerPoint presentation accompanied the information sharing at each meeting.

The scrutiny group reported to the Council that there is a substantial majority in support of the proposal, with twenty five of the thirty Circuits across both Districts voting in favour. The Council is confident that there has been, and will continue to be, careful pastoral and prayerful liaison, outreach and discussion with the Circuits that were not in favour. The voting in the Synods represented a vote in favour of 82%.

The Council therefore recommends to the Conference that a new South West Peninsula District is established, with effect from 1 September 2024, comprising the present Plymouth and Exeter and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Districts.

### \*\*\*RESOLUTIONS

**51/3. The Conference receives the Report.**

**51/4. The Conference adopts the recommendation of the Council that, with effect from 1 September 2024, a new South West Peninsula District is established, comprising the present Plymouth and Exeter and Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Districts.**

### 3. West Midlands

#### **Background**

In September 2023 a joint meeting of the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury and Birmingham Synods received proposals to create a new merged District from September 2025. Each Synod, meeting separately, returned a vote of 70% in favour of requesting the Methodist Council to take this proposal forward. The Methodist Council, under the terms of SO 401, authorised a full consultation in Circuit Meetings and the Synods.

Every Circuit Meeting received a presentation, and had the opportunity to raise questions and concerns.

Circuits varied considerably in how many questions they raised. Questions often focused on the following areas:

- how a larger body might affect the quality of relationships within the District
- financial implications for Circuits in the short and medium term
- the impacts that belonging to a larger District might have on day-to-day circuit life
- how a new leadership structure might work in practice
- accessibility to District life (eg Synods) when on a larger scale
- location of District Office / Synods / District meetings

### **Reflection and Learning by the Joint District Task Group**

The process of meeting with the Circuits helped the task group to refine and shape what they hope a new District might embody. In particular they noted:

- The image in the video presentation of the District as a trellis upon which the vine of circuit / church life can grow proved to be a powerful one. It reconfirmed to the task group that the District is, above all, a resourcing network. They noted that a trellis structure is not a centrist model....it spreads across the area where plants are growing, offering equal support in every location.
- Whilst it will be important to “get the structure right”, a primary focus should continue to be placed on a new District as a place of good communications and relating. Leaders in a new District should prioritise the building of good relationships across the whole region.
- The strong negative reaction from one Circuit is a welcome reminder that this was not a rubber-stamping exercise. Attention will continue to be paid to addressing the concerns of this and other Circuits.
- The current Districts have within them many “marginal” or “fringe” people and places. These include:
  - churches on the geographical fringes
  - children and young people, especially those present in churches in very small numbers.
  - fledgling communities trying to be church in new ways
  - churches both urban and rural serving places of severe economic disadvantage
  - people and communities vulnerable to unjust treatment on account of their ethnicity, sexuality or differing ability.

The task group is reflecting on what a District might look like that puts these margins at the centre.

### **Does the proposal have support?**

All twenty-two circuit meetings voted. All but one voted in favour.

In total, 634 people registered a vote (266 in Birmingham; 368 in Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury). The average circuit vote across the two Districts was 87% in favour (92% Birmingham, 82% Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury). The scrutiny group reported to the Council that there is strong support for the proposals in both the Synods.

The Council therefore recommends to the Conference that a new West Midlands District is established, with effect from 1 September 2025, comprising the present Birmingham and Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Districts.

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### **\*\*\*RESOLUTIONS**

- 51/5. The Conference receives the Report.
- 51/6. The Conference adopts the recommendation of the Council that, with effect from 1 September 2025, a new West Midlands District is established, comprising the present Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury and Birmingham Districts.