

The Council: format of meetings and ways of working

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1. Physical meetings and online meetings

- 1.1 Following the long period in which the Council has been unable to meet physically, and building on the experience of meeting online, there seems to be an opportunity to consider the format of the meetings which are planned as well as other ways in which the Council undertakes its business. Elements of working online have proved very effective and helpful and these, combined with a need to reduce the expenditure on connexional meetings, enable us to move into a mix of modes during the next few years.
- 1.2 It is proposed that, for the connexional year 2021/2022, the Council meets physically in October and online in January and April. After such a long period of online meetings only, nearly half of the members of the Council have never attended a physical meeting, and so it seemed most appropriate that the first meeting of the connexional year be conducted physically. However, it is suggested that in future years, it might be the spring meeting (March/April) that is held physically, since that is the longer meeting and the Council's preparations for the Conference would benefit from conversations in person at that point in the year. The physical meetings will be planned in such a way as to maximise the value from them, particularly when it comes to being able to share in worship together. However, there can be unexpected factors which disrupt planning and it might not be wise to be too rigid about plans or expectations for future years. The Council is therefore asked to agree that only one of its meetings each connexional year be in person, to indicate its preference (or otherwise) for that to be the March/ April meeting, and formally to delegate to the Chair of the Council final authority to determine in what form the Council meets each time.

2. Online Meetings

- 2.1 The level of engagement with online meetings has been encouraging, although it is recognised that there are inevitable distractions connected with being at home. To optimise the online working of the Council, members are asked to block the time for meetings in the same way as would be required for physical attendance so as to be able to engage fully with the sessions of the Council.
- 2.2 There are different responses to arrangements for online meetings, and members of the Council are asked to consider whether they would prefer online meetings to be longer with more space and screen-breaks or shorter, perhaps with more intense periods of working on Zoom. For example, for a lunchtime- to-lunchtime meeting two full days would normally be required, in order to allow time for travel. One possibility is still to use the two full days for sessions on Zoom, but with longer screen breaks.
- 2.3 Feedback received so far has indicated that online group work has been appreciated, and has facilitated the whole Council in making decisions, trusting that a smaller group has considered a particular matter in more depth. The Council may wish to consider greater use of this as a way of working, perhaps with groups meeting prior to the scheduled full meeting and reporting to the full meeting.

3. Urgent Decisions

- 3.1 The Council has a range of responsibilities to fulfil and has a variety of constitutional functions that it is required to undertake. There are times when the Council needs to make decisions rapidly and

between scheduled meetings. In some cases (as has been the case with matters concerning MIC Ltd and Methodist Church House), the Council has been willing to meet online for a short (usually 90 minute) session. Other matters have appeared not to require much debate (eg, a decision to make a stationing recommendation to the President under SO 315 which follows a discernment and interview process) and the Council has been asked to vote by e-mail on the resolution. However, there is nothing in writing to guide the Chair or Secretary in determining what should or should not be determined by e-vote or in a meeting.

4. Towards protocols for how decisions are made

The following outline protocols are therefore suggested:

1. Matters that are considered in a full scheduled meeting of the Council (whether online or physical):

Managing trustee business (SO 212(9))

Policy decisions

Conversations about strategy

Acting on behalf of the Conference (SO 211(1))

Adoption of the financial statement (SO 212(1))

Recommending the budget (SO 212(2))

Recommending stipends and allowances (SO 212(3))

Nominations under SO 210(2)(d) or 313

Recommendations for reinventions under SO 315(2)

Setting the terms of reference of a subcommittee or working party

Letters of greeting

Reports from the Committees of the Conference and Council and other bodies.

2. Matters that require an additional full meeting of the Council to be called:

Urgent managing trustee business

Urgent matters where the Council needs to act on behalf of the Conference

3. Matters that can, if necessary, be decided by means of an electronic vote and reported to the next meeting:

Recommendations for stationing under SO 315(1) (and *in extremis* under 315(2))

Approval of reports that have been delegated to another group

Appointment of scrutiny groups, working groups or committees (particularly where there is precedent or agreement of the composition of a group in advance)

Other items should be considered in full scheduled Council meetings unless in the view of the Chair it is necessary for a decision to be made more urgently, in which case the Chair (in consultation with others as necessary) shall determine how the matter is to be presented to the Council.

*****RESOLUTIONS**

73/1. The Council receives the report.

73/2. The Council approves the format of meetings as set out in paragraph 1.2, and delegates to the Chair of the Council the authority to determine in what format the Council meets each time

73/3. The Council approves the outline protocols for decision-making as set out in paragraph 4.