

SYNOD COUNCIL REPORT

1. Personnel

Synod Clerk: We are grateful for the appointment of Rev'd Martin Hayward as full-time Synod Clerk.

Convenor of Synod Council: Rev'd Russell Furley-Smith has been appointed to this role, scoped at 25%.

Ecumenical Development Officer: Rev'd Christina Cipriani, currently serving in West Midlands Synod, has accepted a call to this role. The post is scoped at 50% and is linked with a 50% scoping for Crawley URC.

2. Staffing Review

The first phase of the staffing review (Synod Office staffing) has been completed and led to the appointment of a full-time Synod Clerk. The review highlighted the dedication and service of the Synod Office staff and how fortunate the Synod is to have the current team working on behalf of Synod and local churches in supporting the life and mission of Southern Synod. Synod Council is grateful for the review undertaken by Nigel Macdonald and Sandy McLeish.

With the appointment of Rev'd Martin Hayward to the role of Synod Clerk there is now an urgent need to move to stage two of the staffing review: field staff. Alongside the field staff review, work also needs to be done to consider providing, where appropriate, administrative support for Synod/United Areas.

Council is grateful to Rev'd David Marshall-Jones and Mrs Diedre Harrison for undertaking this phase of the review.

3. Synod Strategy

In 2018 Synod Together recognised 3 priorities for Southern Synod over the next 5 years:

- 1. Supporting Walking the Way as the cornerstone of our planning and activity.*
- 2. Encouraging local churches to review their local mission and ministry and to identify their own priorities within Walking the Way.*
- 3. Working for an equitable use of resources within the Synod and across the URC.*

Some work was done in 2022 in reviewing the Synod Strategy but that primarily focused on communication and updating the Synod website.

Council recognises that a fuller review of Synod Strategy is overdue and the Synod Officers have been tasked, in consultation with others, to bring updated priorities for the Synod to Synod Council in February 2024 for consideration and discussion at the Spring Synod Together meeting in March 2024.

4. New Strategic Mission Post: Pioneer Minister and Chaplain to Brighthelm Church and Community Centre

Synod Council has approved, in principle, the creation of a new Strategic Mission Post: outreach minister to the gay community in Brighton.

Brighton has the highest number of same sex households in the UK and the highest gay population is found around the Kempton area just east of Brighthelm URC.

The creation of this post is motivated by the need for all to know the transforming, healing, saving love of Christ. This outreach post is not exclusive but inclusive but with an emphasis on being 'primarily' to those who do not identify as heterosexual. The role is evangelistic and pastoral in nature and not an advocacy role within the Synod nor any action which would contradict General Assembly.

The creation of this post has the support of Brighthelm URC, the Trustees of Brighthelm Community Centre, the Surrey and Sussex Synod Area and their Pastoral Committee.

5. Synod Prayer Days and Proposed Merger of WKESSA and EKSA

These two matters will be considered under separate items on the agenda of Synod Together.

6. Other Matters

Synod Council remains grateful for all the work undertaken on behalf of Southern Synod by Synod Committees and Synod/United Areas, particularly by Pastoral Committees.

We equally recognise and value the work done within each local congregation to further the work of the United Reformed Church in Southern Synod.

Synod Council continues to deal with a number of significant, confidential matters which often require increasing amounts of resource in terms of personnel, time and finance.

We are grateful to those who deal with these matters in such a sensitive, pastoral and missional way.

Rev'd Russell Furley-Smith
Convenor, Synod Council
October 2023