

Synod Structure Review

A follow on from the Synod Strategy

“re-new re-imagine re-order”

Introduction

The Synod Strategy referred to a review of Synod structures. It was agreed to set up a small group and see if our structures are helping the local churches to flourish.

It was also agreed to extend the remit to include a review of the Synod's financial strategy however the first piece of work needs to be 'what do we need' and then see how it is best funded. It is hoped the first piece of work will report back at the autumn Synod Together in 2026.

Background

In 2007 General Assembly agreed to remove one Council of the church to prevent duplication and make the organisation more streamline. In 2009 Southern Synod moved to Synod Areas and pastoral committees, originally called ACTs (Area Coordination Teams) the structure has remained largely unchanged. However, over this time there has been an approximate 40% drop in membership, 20% reduction in church buildings and a 55% drop in Stipendiary Ministers

Staffing levels have fluctuated over this period with differing roles but remains approximately the same. 2009 10 F/T and 5 P/T 2025 9 F/T and 5 P/T. This is in a background where greater expertise and legal scrutiny is now expected.

2007-9		2025	
165 Churches	99 Ministers Including 24 other denomination's NSM & SCM	132 churches	38.5 Ministers including NSMs & CRCWs
7 Districts	9200 members	4 Areas	5400 members

Ethos and Ecclesiological background

We are aiming to be true to our URC Identity: – including core principles of "Reformed and Reforming in the Word of God" and our conciliatory nature of government and leadership.

The voice of churches

We are hearing from the relatively new Field Officers and Administrators of the 'climate' and situation of congregations and their current relationship with Synod and its structures. It is crucial that this review listens carefully to our members, shaping the report to reflect their expectations and needs, and proposing structures and processes that will help congregations thrive in whichever direction God is leading them.

The process will involve an information gathering exercise including interviews with key people and engagement with Synod committees.

A simplistic approach could be to re-order the structures to fit the present need. However, this goes against the Synod paper which clearly states 'renew, re-imagine and then re-order'.

To that end the group has agreed the following aims:-

To recommend changes, where they are needed, to the structures of the Synod to enable the local church to flourish and thrive.

The fundamental questions are:

- 1) do our structures enable or hinder 'Re-new, Re-imagine and Re-order?
- 2) what changes do we need to make to enhance these aspirations?

From Group members
 The Synod Clerk, Sue Eardley and Keith Morrison

Local Church Mission Criteria	
1.	This church is outward looking and is actively seeking to reach new people for Jesus Christ
2.	This church is committed to encouraging and enabling people to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ
3.	This church is committed to caring for people of all ages both inside and outside its own community
4.	This church provides relevant, inspiring and engaging worship which is accessible to all people including those new to church life
5.	This church is committed to serving its local community through a variety of programmes and activities
6.	This church is committed to resourcing its life and mission through its personnel, finances and buildings
7.	This church is committed to the wider church of God through the United Reformed Church nationally, ecumenical relationships and the world church
8.	This church is committed to addressing issues of justice, peace and the environment
9.	This church is committed to regularly reviewing its life and mission in light of the above criteria always seeking the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit