
Synod Council Report

1. Introduction

1.1 Synod Council continues to address strategic issues on behalf of the Synod. We have met twice since our last report to Synod Together.

1.2 We remain conscious of the need for the Synod Strategy - summarised in the words *Renew, Reimagine, Reorder* - to shape and guide our agenda.

1.3 Much of our time since the last report has been devoted to matters that will also be considered elsewhere on today's agenda.

2. Synod Moderator

2.1 When Synod Together last met in March 2025, the Revd Bridget Banks had recently begun a period of absence due to ill health. Sadly, at the end of June 2025, Bridget was required to take early retirement on the grounds of ill health. Synod Council gives thanks for Bridget's faithful ministry among us, and we extend our warmest wishes to her and Margo for her retirement.

2.2 The process of seeking a new Moderator is now well under way, though it requires patience and discernment. An update on the proposed timetable will be given to Synod Together; at present, interviews are expected to take place in late February or early March 2026.

2.3 Those representing the Synod on the appointment panel are: Revd Russell Furley-Smith, Mrs Deirdre Harrison, and Mrs Nicola Martin. The panel will be convened by the Revd Lucy Brierley (Minister of Woking URC) and will also include further denominational representatives.

3. Synod Committees, Synod Trust, Synod/United Areas, and Personnel Changes

3.1 Synod Council regularly receives reports from the Synod Committees (Finance, Property, Youth and Children's Work), from Synod Trust, and from the Synod/United Areas. We are deeply grateful for the invaluable contribution of all these groups to the work of the Synod. Items elsewhere on today's agenda highlight the vital importance of their service.

3.2 We have been pleased to welcome:

- Mr Simon Loveitt as Convenor of Synod Ministries, and
- the Revd Anne Lewitt as Surrey & Sussex Synod Area Leader.

We also record our thanks to Mrs Jo Patterson and the Revd Helen Higgin-Botham, from whom Simon and Anne have respectively taken over.

4. Synod Staffing

4.1 The pilot project involving two Synod Area Administrators — Mrs Denise Woodhatch (Surrey & Sussex) and Mrs Ruth Willis (Kent & East Sussex) — has proved very successful. Denise indicated earlier this year that, due to family circumstances, she would only serve for 12 months, and we are grateful for her significant contribution to the Surrey & Sussex Synod Area during that time. We are hopeful of appointing a replacement in due course. Meanwhile, we are thankful to Ruth for providing additional cover for Surrey & Sussex alongside her excellent work for KESSA.

4.2 Safeguarding Officer: Safeguarding rightly remains a priority for all our churches and organisations. Since our last report, it became clear that Southern Synod needed to recruit and appoint a full-time Synod Safeguarding Officer. We are grateful for the previous arrangement with Thames North Synod, under which we benefited from the services of their Safeguarding Officer. We record our particular thanks to Mrs Belinda Herbert, who has served us faithfully in this role since 2019. Following a process of advertising and interviews, we are delighted to announce the appointment of Ms Natalie Van Camp as our new Synod Safeguarding Officer, and we look forward to working with her.

5. Church Life Review

5.1 Synod Council has followed with interest the work of Phase 2 of the Church Life Review, which will conclude with a special meeting of General Assembly in November 2025.

5.2 We recognise the key aims of the Review: reducing the burden currently borne by local churches in matters of governance and personnel; providing accessible information to support local congregations; and encouraging creative ways of being church in new contexts. Synod Council is supportive of the resolutions relating to this Review that will be brought to Synod Together today.

Rev'd Russell Furley-Smith
Convenor, Synod Council
October 2025