

Paper A1

Contingency plans for Assembly

James Breslin and John Proctor

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd James Breslin james_breslin2@outlook.com The Revd John Proctor john.proctor@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council, acting in the name of the General Assembly ... <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) authorises the Officers of Assembly to take such steps as may be needed to implement any changes as set out in resolution 21 of the 2018 Assembly, and to facilitate any other matters that may be necessary2) deems that the Revd Clare Downing and Mr Peter Pay shall take up their office as Moderators of Assembly on 13 July 20203) directs the Assembly Arrangements Committee to pass on its work to the Business Committee on 13 July 2020, the Convenor of that Committee thereby becoming an Officer of Assembly.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide clear guidance for the eventuality of this year's Assembly being postponed or cancelled.
Main points	Swift and flexible decision making may be needed, on behalf of Assembly. That is the role of the Officers of Assembly.
Previous documents	Nothing recent.
Consultation has taken place with...	Current and incoming Assembly Moderators, Clerk of Assembly, Convenor-Elect of Business Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	Difficult to predict precisely.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Assembly's invitations to ecumenical, international and civic guests are sure to be affected.

1. Introduction

This paper comes from the Convenor and Secretary of the Assembly Arrangements Committee. It has not been considered in the Committee because (a) it responds to concerns that have arisen quite recently, and (b) it asks Mission Council to make plans for a situation in which the Committee's normal remit cannot be fulfilled.

2. Coronavirus and the General Assembly

- 2.1 Some concern has been expressed about the possible effect of the Coronavirus Covid-19 on the General Assembly. While it remains our firm intention to hold the Assembly in the University of Aston on the appointed dates, we have to accept that other arrangements may have to be made.
- 2.2 For over 70 years the Presbyterian Church and now the United Reformed Church as its successor, in appointing the venue and dates of the Assembly have inserted a formula allowing for either or both of these to be changed when necessary. Resolution 21 of the 2018 Assembly specifically allows for the Assembly to meet in "such other time and place as may be duly determined".
- 2.3 Hitherto any decision to do this has been taken by Mission Council, but in a situation of rapid change where Mission Council will not meet again before the Assembly, it would seem wise to make provision for a small group to be appointed to act if needed. Accordingly Mission Council is requested to authorise the Officers of Assembly to make any requisite decisions.

3. Officers of Assembly

- 3.1 For information, the Officers of Assembly are the two serving Moderators, the Clerk, Treasurer and General Secretary, and the Convenor of Assembly Arrangements.
- 3.2 Should the Assembly's plans to meet at Aston be postponed or cancelled, Mission Council is asked to determine that Clare Downing and Peter Pay shall be the Assembly's serving Moderators from 13 July 2020. When the Assembly does eventually meet, it will surely wish to induct them to role; but plans for this will have to be set nearer the time.
- 3.3 The above proposal violates the normal principle that a Moderator's office begins with induction to the role. It breaks the normal principle because it is a provision for abnormal circumstances.
- 3.4 Mission Council is also asked to direct that the Assembly Arrangements Committee hand over its work to the Business Committee on 13 July (as is already planned), and that the Convenor of the Business Committee, Adrian Bulley, succeed James Breslin as an Officer of Assembly.