

Paper W3

The future of the Joint Property
Strategy Group

Strategic Oversight Group





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Strategic Oversight Group (Methodist/URC): Future of the Joint Property Strategy Group

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Revd Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council asks the Nominations Committee to identify two people to join the Revd Lucy Brierley as the United Reformed Church members of the Joint Property Strategy Group, and grants authority to the Assembly officers to confirm their appointment.
Alternative options to consider, if any	

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Mission Council on developments in the Joint Property Strategy Group
Main points	Previous work allocated to the JPSG (on the closure of church buildings, resolving a difficulty around the disposal of buildings occupied by LEPs, and a properties advice service for local churches) has been redirected to other groups. The JPSG will focus on the mission potential of buildings, engaging and inspiring congregations towards imaginative and faithful decisions regarding their premises.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council (May 2011) Paper Q for terms of reference; Mission Council and Methodist Council (October 2012) JPSG first year report
Consultation has taken place with...	Methodist colleagues through the Strategic Oversight Group; Methodist/URC Liaison Group; URC Law & Polity Advisory Group

Summary of Impact

Financial	Resources for the employment of an executive officer were committed for the period 2012 – 2014. The money will be used in whatever way best supports the aims of the JPSG.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	This is a significant partnership with the Methodist Church.

Strategic Oversight Group

The future of the Joint Property Strategy Group

Background

- 1 The October 2010 joint meeting of the Methodist Council and the URC Mission Council agreed that a new group should be established to undertake work identified by the earlier Methodist/URC Buildings Think Tank. Terms of reference were agreed by both councils in spring 2011 and the Joint Property Strategy Group began meeting later that year. Money was budgeted to enable the employment of an executive officer and the Revd Carla Maurer held this post from September 2012 until May 2013. Currently the post is vacant pending further discussion in the Strategic Oversight Group.

Fundamentals

- 2 URC participation in this joint work is guided by the following:
 - We believe we are called by God to work with other Christians wherever possible.
 - The General Assembly has asked for more co-ordination of central structures with the Methodist Church (the resolutions being paralleled by resolutions passed by the Methodist Conference).
 - The Assembly has specifically asked for the possibility of a property advice service to be explored creatively.
 - The wealth of the URC is overwhelmingly embedded in property and therefore the effective use or liquidation of property assets is a key stewardship issue.
 - In formal and informal ways, local congregations who work with, or wish to work with, local Methodists plead for perceived administrative and legal blockages to be removed.

Areas of JPSG Activity

- 3 The JPSG has had some engagement with a variety of topics. The JPSG would like to move some of its work to other groups as follows and this has been agreed by the Strategic Oversight Group.
 - **Good Endings:** This is a project to produce a definitive paper on the issues surrounding the closure of church buildings, legal, procedural, financial and pastoral. This work has been passed to the Methodist Connexional Team so that they can prepare a paper for Methodist Conference dealing with specifically Methodist issues. The URC will in parallel work on pastoral and liturgical resources and would want confirmation that the JPSG/Team work would still be available for incorporation into a wider URC resource; equally the latter would be freely available to the Connexion.
 - **Reciprocal Capital Investment Arrangements:** This work has been passed to the Methodist-URC Liaison Group (MURCLG). The URC Law & Polity Advisory Group will provide input, especially via a sub-group that is currently working on the topic.
 - **Advice on Property Aspects of Sharing Agreements, Declarations of Intent, etc;** this work to rest with the MURCLG.
 - **Property Advice Service:** to be pursued by each denomination independently. As joint work with Methodism is not currently possible, the URC will be exploring an ecumenical service for a variety of smaller denominations eg the Friends, Congregational Federation.

A Reshaped JPSG

- 4 The JPSG will focus on the People, Possibilities and Partnerships aspects of its former work. It will open eyes, inspire vision and make the sharing of good practice easier.
- 5 For the URC a key question that has not been resolved satisfactorily by the JPSG ways of working to date is how it is sufficiently linked into other URC structures for its work to inform, and be informed by, work elsewhere in the URC. The Methodist Connexional Team has post holders with overall responsibility for building matters; there are no such posts in the URC staff team. This has been a somewhat debilitating problem. The URC needs to examine this further.
- 6 The revised JPSG scope will mean a reshuffle of membership. Some previous JPSG members will continue to serve the URC in exploring possibilities for a properties advice service for local churches in partnership with other denominations.
- 7 It is recommended that the URC look for two new members who would between them have experience and expertise in the creative use of buildings, current knowledge of URC structures, and the ability to be effective advocates. In the interim the General Secretary will attend the December JPSG meeting.
- 8 The URC remains open for further discussion in the Strategic Oversight Group about the best use of the resource originally set aside for the Executive Officer post.

Resolution

Mission Council asks the Nominations Committee to identify two people to join the Revd Lucy Brierley as the United Reformed Church members of the Joint Property Strategy Group, and grants authority to the Assembly officers to confirm their appointment.