

South Western Synod 8th March 2025

Synod Executive Report

Since the last meeting of Synod in October 2024 there have been two meetings of the Synod Executive.

The arrival of our new Moderator in Autumn 2024 has given impetus to bring to conclusion the issues which we had been addressing, such as the Synod Staffing Review. This has resulted in recommendations which are the subject of other items on the agenda for this meeting of Synod.

Executive has been aware of the challenges which are facing local churches in resourcing their ongoing activities, managing and maintaining their buildings and dealing with the increasing prominence of compliance issues. It believes that the proposals coming before Synod today will enhance our capability to support local churches.

Such challenges are evident across the whole of the URC, and the Church Life Review is also seeking ways of providing support at a national level. Members of Executive have also been participating in this national work, which will come to a special meeting of General Assembly in November.

At the October 2024 Synod meeting the introduction of the new Manse Policy was approved. Executive has been reflecting on the early stages of implementation of the policy. To date the process has been completed for two churches which have ministers in occupation. As indicated in the Synod Treasurer's report a number of further churches have passed resolutions to confirm that they wish to transfer their manse to the Synod and these are in progress. Executive has also confirmed that where a church has a manse which houses a serving minister the church will remain eligible for synod property grants.

A number of churches are in the process of developing large building projects which would require significant funds. Examples include the need to re-order property owing to the church hall having to be closed owing to structural problems, and the need to change the property provision following the joining of two congregations onto a single site. Executive is piloting an assessment process which will invite the church to reflect on its context in terms of mission and outreach as a gateway to receiving funds for a building feasibility study.

Executive has recognised that there are a number of repeat requests for grant funding which give rise to long term expectations on the part of bidders. In preparing bids for project funding Executive would expect bidders to plan for the sustainability of a project if they envisage it is likely to continue beyond the initial grant period. One example is projects supporting people who are wanting to get into work. The reduction of funding from other sources seems likely to make it challenging to continue such pathways to employment projects in the future.

General Assembly 2024 adopted a resolution encouraging Local Churches, Synods, Synod Trust companies and the URC Trust to review, amend or adopt where necessary their own conflicts of interest policies. In line with the national guidance and template a proposed Synod Conflict of Interest policy has been drafted, and a copy of the proposed policy is attached as an appendix to this report.

Recommendation

Synod is recommended to adopt the Conflict of Interest Policy.