



The Methodist Church Southampton District

ANNUAL REPORTS 2025-2026

We will be a District where Circuits, Local Churches and individuals of all ages are accompanied and encouraged to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and participate in God's mission in the power of the Holy Spirit.

DISTRICT CHAIR: THE REVD RACHEL BENDING

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It's wonderful to see in these reports the range and depth of work across the District, I hope you will read and absorb these reports and join me in giving thanks for the individuals and teams that they involve.

I am so thankful for the connections that exist within this District and the varied ministry of people in all areas, all working together to seek and follow God's plans for us. It has been great to have a chance in my first few months as your Chair to meet so many of you and learn of your ministry and the work of God amongst you. As a Synod we celebrate and give thanks for this.

Every blessing, Rachel

COMPASS PROJECT PORTSMOUTH – March 2025 to March 2026**Catherine Burt****What is Compass?**

New Places for New People projects are being set up around the country by the Methodist Church, to introduce people to the Christian faith in contexts and ways that are relevant to them. The Southampton District's New Places for New People lead project, called Compass, is focused in the north of Portsmouth



(Copnor area) and is primarily working with families, based on a need evidenced by a period of research.

My job, as the Compass Project Lead/Pioneer and seconded to the East Solent & Downs Circuit, is discerning what this looks like in reality. I meet weekly with the District's Intergenerational Mission Enabler, Mark Tizzard, to discuss and progress the Compass Project. The project is not about being in competition with existing churches, but about giving people an option to explore faith in different ways (some of which may also contain an element of social action), as well as building community. Compass will be a deliberately relational, intergenerational, inclusive, family focused, and disciple making community.

This is a summary of what I've achieved during the past year.

Listening to the local community

- We're targeting the 8th Portsmouth Girls' Brigade group and 4th Portsmouth Boys' Brigade group families, predominantly based in the area of the city my project is targeting (Copnor) and who I already have relationships with, and then rippling out into the wider community. It's been encouraging to see growth in both these groups over the past year. I've been busy meeting with more of the groups' leaders and parents to find out how they feel about faith and what needs they perceive their community has. One of the recent conversations highlighted to me the need for activities for home schooled children so this is an area for further exploration/prayer. It's been encouraging to meet with parents at our end of term events, such as the Girls' Brigade awards night in July and our Christmas hoe down, and to build better relationships with them. The best feedback we heard was that the parents really value that the leaders get to know the children as individuals.
- I'm spending more time in the Copnor area of the city, such as the cafes/park, to meet people and hear what needs/dreams they have – wearing a Compass branded t-shirt/hoody so people recognise me. As a result of the Easter Egg Hunt and Hide & Seek Nativity, see Events section below, I'm starting to build connections with local shop keepers and businesses on the Copnor Road and, again, this is an area for further exploration/prayer. Over the school summer holidays in 2025 I spent time in College Park each week to pray for the area, observing who uses the park, and having in-depth chats with some of the Girls' and Boys' Brigade leaders and their families.
- I've met with two of the local Copnor ward councillors on Portsmouth City Council to share about Compass and hear what needs they perceive their community has.
- I met with local charity Enable Ability to hear more about their work, to share about Compass and discuss potential collaborations.
- I met with the local MP, Amanda Martin, in July, to share about Compass and hear what needs she perceives the community has. She had some great insights and is keen to support what we do going forward.
- I've had contact with a couple of local schools who have shared my event flyers with parents and I'm looking to build on these relationships.

Making connections

- I've been attending One Body Portsmouth events for church leaders to become aware of other local churches' projects and meeting regularly with Rev Ray Goddess from Portsmouth Methodist Church. Although my project is not part of Portsmouth Methodist, we obviously have some overlaps, so we meet to talk and to cheer each other on.
- I've also been attending the circuit staff meetings, leadership meetings, full circuit meetings and synod to gain a better understanding of how the Methodist church works and to embed the project within this structure. I'm continuing to meet with the circuit ministers/staff to learn from their experiences and attended a Southampton District lay employees' event in May. I've helped with circuit projects such as resources for Lent and Digital Church.
- I've been meeting with people in this geographical area whose roles also relate to children and families such as Jordan Cousins - Scripture Union's Mission Enabler for the South East region - and Heather Powney from the Diocese of Portsmouth, who is the Children, Youth and Families Officer. I attended a youth workers event run by Scripture Union and the Diocese of Portsmouth and a day retreat for the same group; and a youth event called High Tide, for all churches in this area in July. In October I attended Faith in Football's Lego club, and this February I was part of the team delivering a district youth event.
- In October I attended 3Generate with a group from 8th Portsmouth Girls' Brigade; a Connexional New Places for New People meeting and a day looking at safeguarding in the pioneering context. In February I was asked to attend a Connexional Zoom call discussing the Well.
- I'm getting involved in some District meetings sharing what I do and encouraging others and helping to plan mission events - we had a Pioneer Curious Zoom call in March and I met with Jo Throp from the Fordingbridge NPNP, and Jo is coming to see what I am doing with Compass in the next few weeks, as we both have lots to learn and share from each other. I will shortly be setting up a WhatsApp group for the District pioneers so we can chat easily and support each other. I'm happy to come and chat to anyone about Compass and what we're learning - feel free to reach out using the contact details at the end of this report.

Listening to God

- Prayer is such an important part of this project, so I've continued to pray and to do prayer walks in the Copnor area, particularly ahead of events in the park.
- I'd like to build up a team of prayers for my project, so please get in touch if you'd like to receive prayer points by email and/or attend prayer walks and/or Zoom prayer sessions. My email is at the end of this report.

Events

The Compass Project Portsmouth doesn't have a designated building which means our events so far have taken place in College Park, a local pub, and a local school.

- In April 2025, I ran an Easter Egg Hunt. Around 17 local shops and businesses on Copnor Road agreed to display egg posters for children to find and many more agreed to display a poster promoting the event. The children then had to find 5 posters, note the shops they were in, before coming to College Park to find me and the Compass team where they could tell us the 5 names to claim a chocolate egg and a booklet about the meaning of Easter. 100 children plus their parents took part and we had some great conversations with them as we demonstrated our love for the Copnor area with this free event. We also had some dog treats available and had some good contact with dog walkers in the park too as a result. I distributed the leftover eggs to the businesses that had displayed posters which enhanced my relationship building with them further - free chocolate goes down very well! The event was a good way of introducing Compass to the local community in a more visible way and starting to build relationships.
- A craft group, based on the requests of some local women, met for the second time in July 2025. This was a time for people to chat as they do their own craft projects or learn from others, as well as spending some time reflecting together on our Creator God.
- I organised a Something for the Grown-ups event at a local pub in early December targeting the Girls' and Boys' Brigade leaders and parents of those who attend both groups. It was great to get to know some of the parents by name and to chat rather than referring to them as Mum of X etc.

- In addition to the Something for the Grown-ups event, December also saw our Hide & Seek Nativity take place. Around 120 people took part in this event in the Copnor area of Portsmouth. The event, on the morning of Saturday 13 December 2025, saw five sets of nativity characters 'hidden' outside shops/businesses in Copnor Road for people to find. It was a great day and lovely to see so many smiling faces celebrating the real meaning of Christmas together. Each set of nativity characters had a word related to Christmas and, once all five had been collected, participants had to share them with the Compass team in College Park in order to receive a little festive sweet treat. The event received coverage from the Connexional in their news emails and also an article on their website - [Hide and Seek Nativity - The Methodist Church](#)
- Everyone who attended the Hide & Seek Nativity, plus the Girls' and Boys' Brigade members, was given a flyer promoting GB and BB, the New Year's Stomp trail we did in 2025, and a family board games night at a local school in January.
- In January, around 20 people attended the Bring on the Board Games event. Lots of fun was had playing games, socialising, and spending time together reflecting on a new year.
- Easter egg hunt - this event is running again in April 2026 and it's been so encouraging to have more shops want to take part - 26 at the time of writing - with some even promoting it to each other! This event is going to be followed up, 3 days later, by a board games event during the school Easter holidays.

Branding

- The Compass Project logo is finalised and branded clothing has been produced to help build brand recognition and for my volunteers to wear at events.
- The Compass Project Facebook page and Instagram account have been set up. The Facebook page was a great way to promote the Easter Egg Hunt 2025 and the Hide & Seek Nativity 2025 and to run some targeted advertising in the area. Content on the page had 15.4K views in April 2025 and 19.5K in December 2025. You can find out is at www.facebook.com/compassprojectportsmouth

Reading and training

- I have a long reading list and I've recently read Innovating for Love by Kenda Creasy Dean, The Anxious Generation by Jonathan Haidt, and Remember: Revealing the Eternal Power of Answered Prayer by Richard Gamble.
- There have been a number of webinars and courses targeted at pioneers/New Places for New People projects organised by the Connexional that I have attended to learn and meet other pioneers - this has included some of the monthly Wholehearted webinars; a Growing and Sustaining New Christian Communities Course in May, a course for pioneers on navigating conflict in June, the Connexional's Childrens' and Families Conference in June, and a pioneer retreat in February.
- I've completed Methodist Church training such as my foundation and advanced safeguarding; a course on youth mental health first aid; food hygiene; a webinar on public speaking, and a Mark Arnold course on additional needs.
- I have regular coaching sessions, thanks to the Methodist Pioneer Pathway, which help to hone my thinking, and both inspire and challenge me!

Next steps....

- My reading and networking mean I continue to have lots to reflect on and pray about.
- All the pioneers I've spoken with have said not to rush the networking and learning about your community part of the pioneering process.
- Looking forward I think there is a need for one-off events, like the Easter Egg Hunt, as well as more regular smaller group activities that offer deeper connection and discipleship. Our events are well supported by GB and BB families, so continuing to get to know them on a deeper level is important.

Catherine Burt catherine.burt@sdmc.org.uk

The District Policy Committee (DPC) has met three times since the last scheduled Synod, in September 2025. We have had two planned meetings in person and one meeting held on Zoom, together with business conducted via email consultations.

In our first meeting, in October 2025, we spent time having a follow-up discussion on Reality and Resilience, particularly the keynote presentation by the Chaplain General. Central to the discussion was how churches across the District could play a role in supporting families and the community, in better preparedness in case of future conflict. There will be more on this topic during the following months. DPC welcomed the interim Chair of the District Safeguarding Group, the Revd Nick Oborski, who has been central to the on-going work of the group, and supporting the District with the Safeguarding Audit.

At the Autumn Synod, DPC informed Synod that the Methodist Conference 2025 had approved Resolution 59/2:

The Conference agrees to the change in the number of Chairs for the Channel Islands and Southampton Districts as set out in this report with effect from September 2026.

A sub-group of DPC members have met with colleagues from the Channel Islands DPC to make preparation for the change to take place. It was agreed that it is important that both District Synods are kept informed of the progress made and the plans for further action. A joint paper has been prepared and is included in the agenda.

At our full day DPC meeting in March we spent considerable time discussing mission activities across the District and the need to have that activity shaped and directed through Mission Plans. The need for such plans is applicable at all levels, including the District and Circuit. The Circuit Representatives in DPC gave an insight as to their own Circuit plans and how they encourage mission and provide support to churches.

An area of real concern for DPC is the high number of District appointments that are not currently filled or will become vacant at the end of the year. DPC will seek to find people to fill these appointments but appreciate that there is a shortage of volunteers and that this replicates the challenges at both Church and Circuit level.

DPC continues to be updated on the following areas of District business:

- Finance.
- Stationing.
- NPNP Project.
- Ecumenical Matters
- Lay Employment.
- Methodist Women in Britain.
- District Grants.
- District Property.
- Eco District.
- GDPR.

Several of the above will be referenced in other reports and Synod business.

DPC has continued to review applications for closures of a place of worship as well as applications to preside at the Lord's supper. See Synod business for the specific details.

DPC has one more meeting this year, taking place in June.

ECO DISTRICT

Dr John Evans

Energy audits. Through the last year there have been extensive discussions to enable a scheme to provide Circuits with externally assessed energy audits for their buildings. The aims are to provide individual assessments of church buildings and manses that will afford steps along the pathway of Net Zero Carbon (NZC). These are typically in three stages starting with ways to reduce the carbon footprint together with reduced running costs, finishing with the means to approach NZC. Being independent, these proposals will have an authority when it comes to submitting applications for funding. There are over 200 church buildings within our District's portfolio and the aim it is to complete the surveys in 2 years.

The District Policy Committee agreed to the scheme in principle at its meeting in January 2026, and subsequently (in March) to setting up a project management group to carry it out. Funding is to be by a Connexional Action for Hope grant to the District rather than needing funding by circuits. If there is excess funding this will be transferred to the Property and Grants Committee to be used for projects including an element for sustainability.

Eco Church

As of March 2026, 54 churches in our District have registered for Eco Church, 33 of which have obtained at least a Bronze award. Of these 10 have a higher award, two which have attained Gold. We have already attained an Eco District Bronze award. To be considered for a silver award 50% of our churches will need to be registered with 40% having gained an award. 16% of churches will also have to hold silver or gold awards. Our Eco Church performance so far led to eligibility for the Action for Hope grant. With the higher profile of Eco Church through the energy-audit scheme, it is hoped that more churches will register, respond to the prompts provided by answering the survey and gain awards.

FINANCE

Christine Holland

During the year the District received total income of £659,075 (2024: £566,650) and spent £552,440 (2024: £452,369). At 31 August 2025 the District had funds totalling £1,492,090 (2024: £1,385,107). The District's funds have increased during the year primarily due to an increased income into the District Advance Fund from the Connexional Advance and Property Fund and levies on circuit model trust funds and lower than budgeted expenditure on travel and repairs and maintenance on the District manse.

At 31 August 2025 the District held the following funds:

- General funds £166,188 (£139,453 at 31 August 2024)
- District Development Fund £42,047 (£45,888 at 31 August 2024)
- District Advance Fund £366,135 (£302,702 at 31 August 2024)
- Portsmouth University Chaplaincy £5 (£5 at 31 August 2024)
- Property Reserve (District Manse) £735,000 (£735,000 at 31 August 2024)
- Benevolent Fund £2,131 (£2,131 at 31 August 2024)
- MIH Fund £131,056 (£130,837 at 31 August 2024)
- A balance of £29,173 against our New Places for New People connexional funding (£14,649 at 31 August 2024)
- £20,355 of Mission Alongside the Poor funds. (£14,442 at 31 August 2024)

In 2024-25 the District paid grants from the District Advance Fund that totalled £176,890 to churches, circuits, university chaplaincies and ecumenical groups. At 31 August 2025 grants totalling £558,609 have been committed from the District Advance Fund that are payable in future years. The balance on the District Advance Fund as at 31 August 2025 after taking into account commitments against the fund is £366,135.

Rev John Yarrien is chair of the group and Fran Jenkins is the secretary.

As Christine Stuckey had stepped down as MWiB rep, we welcomed Hilary Evans into that role. We were also saddened by the death of Geoff Goodman, LP/WL rep for many years, following long illness, May he rest in peace.

The remit of the group is: 'GLaD' (Group for Learning and Discipleship) is responsible to the DPC (District Policy Committee) and reports to it. GLaD is the District champion for various learning and discipleship pathways available to Lay and Ordained, paid employees and volunteers across the District. One main vehicle we have for promoting and encouraging learning and discipleship in the District is through the District website. We continue to review the website, seeking to making it easier to navigate to the wealth of information and support that is available there. With language which invites looking further, and a particular focus on signposting to the Learning Network, grants that are available to support learning, and information for ministers about Sabbaticals, on LP & WL and other training, mapped around Methodist Way of Life.

GLaD continues to fulfil the following functions:

1. Agree sabbatical prospectuses and receive the post sabbatical report
2. Approve grant applications from lay and ordained with respect to learning*
3. Champion discipleship, learning and vocation in close partnership with the Learning Network.

GLaD provides a focused space for a two-way conversation between the District representatives (e.g., MWiB, LP/WL) and the Learning Network.

We continue to benefit from 'Dwelling in the Word' as our opening devotions, listening to and sharing what the Bible passage has said to us.

This past year we have again agreed grants for various training courses and the purchase of mission resources. At our latest meeting we also discussed Ministerial Development Review.

We meet again in June.

** The reviewed Application Forms for Grants, now in the new format, are available from Fran Jenkins, Sarah Potheary or the District website.*



Mark Tizzard

Thank you so much for your continued support, prayers, and encouragement over this past year. They have meant more to me than I can fully express. As many of you know, receiving a cancer diagnosis in my right eye—and walking through the treatment that followed—was an unexpected and challenging season for me and my family. Your kindness, messages, and faithful prayers carried us more than you realise.

I'm grateful to share that I'm doing much better now, even as I continue regular screenings for possible liver cancer. Please know how deeply thankful I am for the love, patience, and steadfast care you've shown throughout this journey.

Intergenerational Mission: What It Means

Intergenerational mission is, at its heart, about bringing people of all ages together so we can learn from one another, serve side by side, and discern God's work in our communities—together. It's a way of being Church that honours shared experience, mutual encouragement, and the truth that everyone, regardless of age, has something important to contribute.

I have the privilege of travelling across our District and witnessing this in action. Each week, I see creative, faithful examples of you building meaningful connections with your communities. I learn so much from what you're doing, and I love sharing your stories to inspire others. It often feels like a beautiful tapestry of God's mission woven through all of us.

A Rich Tapestry of Ministries

We are blessed with an astonishing variety of ministries across our District. Many people's first connection with church life comes through our Toddler Groups—still one of our greatest gifts to local communities. Alongside them you'll find lots of things including:

- Messy Churches and children's groups
- Uniformed organisations
- Youth groups where young people can explore faith
- Parenting courses
- Knit and Natter groups
- Coffee mornings
- Computer clubs, art groups, football clubs, walking groups
- 'Warm Spaces,' foodbanks, and other Church at the Margins projects

This list isn't exhaustive but gives a flavour. Each one of these ministries meets people right where they are, offering welcome, belonging, and hope. If you're dreaming about new ideas or wondering what might work well in your own context, I'd love to explore that with you.

One of the major areas of ministry that I'm supporting at the moment is the Compass Project—our District-led NPNP initiative exploring what new Ecclesial Communities might look like across the Solent and Downs. Catherine and her team are working with families connected to Girls' Brigade and Boys' Brigade, listening closely to their needs and experimenting with ways of forming a new worshipping community.

It's inspiring to see a fresh expression of Methodism taking shape—without a building, and in many ways without a fixed agenda—simply growing out of genuine relationship and curiosity. Catherine is preparing a fuller report on their progress, so do look out for that.

Opportunities for Deeper Engagement

These ministries matter deeply—not only because they meet practical needs, but because they gently open pathways for people to step more deeply into the life of the church and into relationship with God.

The Bible Society's *Quiet Revival* (although some questions have been raised about this report) reminds us that faith is quietly growing through everyday conversations, small acts of kindness, and the simple gift of authentic community. And Mark Matlock's *Faith for the Curious* highlights that people of all ages are still asking profound questions, searching for meaning, and looking for places where they can wonder about God without pressure. As you continue shaping ministries with intention, you are creating vibrant, welcoming, spiritually alive churches—places where curiosity is embraced, belonging is nurtured, and people encounter God in the ordinary moments of daily life.

Listening to the Soil: A Model for Mission

Rooted in the Parable of the Sower

The idea of *listening to the soil* finds its deepest inspiration in the Parable of the Sower. Jesus invites us not only to think about the seed, but to pay attention to the soil it lands in. Some soil is ready, some is weary, some is shallow, and some is overgrown—and each one needs something different.

Like a gardener preparing the ground—checking its richness, easing its compacted places, removing stones—mission begins by attending to the soil of our communities. Every neighbourhood carries its own stories, hopes, hurts, and longings. Some are aching for hope; others are hungry for belonging; others are slowly healing; and some are surprisingly fertile in ways we might never expect.

Listening to the soil means joining God in the quiet, often unseen work already happening beneath the surface. The Parable of the Sower teaches us that the Spirit is active even where growth isn't obvious. Our calling is not to force outcomes but to pay attention, to tend gently, and to honour the pace of the soil we've been given.

Different soils invite different responses—clearing, nourishing, waiting patiently, or simply scattering seeds with trust and tenderness. When we take this posture, mission becomes less about strategy and more about attentiveness—a slow, faithful presence rooted in the belief that God is already at work in the everyday earth beneath our feet.

Recommended Reading

- *Faith for the Curious* – Mark Matlock
- *All Ages Becoming* – Valerie M. Grissom
- *Future Focused Church* – Kara Powell
- *Being an Intergenerational Church* – Suzi Farrant & Darren Philip
- *A Gospel for All Ages* – David M. Csinos
- *Innovating for Love* – Kenda Creasy Dean

I would love to visit, chat, pray with you, or discern together how God might be leading your church in mission. Please get in touch in whatever way suits you:

Phone / Text: 07391017548

Email: mark.tizzard@sdmc.org.uk

Website: <https://www.sdmc.org.uk/ime/intergenerational-mission-enabler-news/>

Facebook: Intergenerational Mission Enabler

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/intergenmissionenabler/>

Substack: <https://marktizzard.substack.com>

LEARNING NETWORK

James Devenish

The **Learning Network** exists to support, encourage, and inspire Methodist people in all aspects of Our Calling. Together, we strive to be a church that is inclusive, justice-seeking, evangelistic, and growing.

How the Learning Network Works

The Learning Network (LN) primarily works with lay and ordained church leaders, helping you develop your skills so you, in turn, can equip others. The LN collaborates with other colleagues in the Connexional Team, with many of you in District and Circuits leadership roles, as well at times with local churches to equip and resource church communities.

District Alignment: Support for Church Leaders

Each Learning & Development Officer (LDO) is aligned with a specific Methodist District, and I am aligned to the Southampon District. Some of my key alignment responsibilities in the District are to:

- Accompany lay and ordained church leaders, supporting their growth and ministry.
- Enable church, circuit and district leaders to access lifelong learning opportunities.
- Facilitate growth and mission planning for the district and circuit.
- Support the work of the District NPNP team.

Connexional Learning & Development: Church-Wide Initiatives

Alongside District-based work, LDOs contribute to wider Connexional learning and development opportunities. This includes:

- Planning, delivering, and evaluating learning and development opportunities across the Methodist Church.
- Collaborating with colleagues across the Connexion to create resources and events that support ministry and mission.
- Leading or supporting key Connexional projects, offering expertise in areas such as leadership, safeguarding, worship, pastoral care, and theological learning.
- Many of these initiatives take place online, reaching a broad audience across the Church.

We also collaborate with external partners, and this year we have been delighted to offer three 'Dementia Inclusive Worship' sessions in partnership with the Methodist Homes Chaplaincy team.

We love for as many people as possible to know of our work, and therefore there are different ways to remain connected with us. Hopefully one of these will work for you;

Newsletter; this comes out monthly, direct to your inbox. [Sign Up for Newsletters - The Methodist Church](#)

Facebook; There is a closed group, currently with 1300 members, where you can join for conversation about learning and development in the Methodist church, and to hear first about upcoming opportunities.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thelearningnetwork/>

Eventbrite; Join over 1000 people, and receive emails from time to time promoting new Learning and Development opportunities. [Methodist Learning Network Events - 36 Upcoming Activities and Tickets | Eventbrite](#)

Methodist Church Website; There are many learning and development opportunities within the church, some we lead and some by other colleagues. [Direct link to the brochure](#)

If you would like a conversation with me, you can either call me on 07799 902567 or email:

devenishj@methodistchurch.org.uk to arrange a time to speak.

I look forward to working with you and hearing from you!

James Devenish

METHODIST WOMEN in BRITAIN (MwiB)

Hilary Evans

Methodist Women in Britain across the District has undergone some changes since last Autumn. Following the District day in October 2025, some of the long standing members of the organising group 'retired'. A new steering group then began to form with a few established members and some new to the group. The number has grown over nine months and now has a multicultural mix.

We are still establishing as a group, and developing how we keep in touch with people, but regular newsletters, and sharing connexional news are important aspects of this. We now send a monthly blog to all on the contact list as well, to help us 'touch base' with women across the District. The content is varied and we welcome new interest, especially from anyone who would be willing to author a blog from time to time. It normally goes out on the last Friday of the month.

Currently, we are promoting the Easter Offering service, and encouraging people to attend a service, or consider using all or part of it in a meeting. Written by a Methodist woman, or women, it is a service gifted each year to the connexion. Offerings made go in entirety to the Church's World Mission Fund to support partners overseas, and respond to emergency events. This year the title is 'Unbound: a gospel that breaks barriers'. There is a good selection of stories to choose from, any of which could be used independently as part of worship. You can find it on the Methodist Church website.

In the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey circuit a group of Methodist women take some services, which have been well received. So, we are going to offer these as scripted services to those on the mailing list. They could be used for local arrangement services, or again in groups and meetings. Look out for the next newsletter with a resume of the first three services, and how to access.

Our Chair of District, Reverend Rachel Bending will be the keynote speaker at a **District day on October 10th at Chandler's Ford Methodist Church**. We will be exploring one or more of the lesser read stories of women in the old testament, and their resilience in the face of significant challenge. The day will include bible study and practical activities as we respond to our discoveries.

In due course we hope to offer opportunities for quiet sessions in venues across the District.

There is an active group in the WER circuit who are supporting The Honeypot Children's Charity this connexional year. An Advent calendar raised a significant amount. A 'Not quite tea at the Ritz' event is planned at Romsey on 9th May, followed by an afternoon tea at Canada Common on 4th July. Some of the group are also involved in performing a Murder Mystery play at Bishopstoke church on 23rd May in support of two sister churches.

At connexional level, there are further changes happening to the way the organisation operates. There will be a Functional Executive group who will be the Trustees. There are new roles to be added to this group, so sharing the overall volume of work. The Ambassadors role will be increased and strengthened, and measures put in place to establish good communication throughout the organisation. These measures should ensure the long term sustainability of MwiB, and it is hoped to have the new arrangements in place from September 2026.

If you would like to have your name added to the mailing list, or would like to know more, please get in touch by emailing hjfe49@gmail.com or amjudd50@gmail.com

Hilary Evans

Connexional website: www.mwib.org.uk

NPNP

District New Places for New People Group

Rev Dr Mark Cheetham

The District is tasked by the Conference to promote and develop New Places for New People, with priority being given to Church at the Margins. The hope is to establish an increasingly pioneering mindset within an expectant and hopeful culture of prayer and reflection as we seek to respond to opportunities unfolding under the Spirit's prompting.

Following the development and submission of appropriate governing policies and processes to the Connexional Team, the District Group has delegated authority to access the funding allocated to the District. There is still funding available in the current Connexional year with a further tranche of funding available from September 2026-August 2032 for Circuit based/facing NPNP's. The District NPNP Project in Portsmouth, Compass, is reported on elsewhere. But below is an idea of the District groups current work:

The District Researcher has been retained for a piece of work looking at NPNP potential in the Eastleigh area of the Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit, this is due to conclude as April crosses in to May.

The District group has received a funding request from Salisbury Circuit and part of the scrutiny of this application involved a visit to the Resonance Church plant (Fordingbridge). This principle of an on the ground experience where District group, NPNP leaders and other local stakeholders gathering, exploring and sharing experience to date is a helpful model adopted as part of our response to future discernment of funding submissions. Some of the initial work of Resonance Church is being brought to this Spring Synod, but the concept of planting a new church in a community we have previously ceased to have an obvious presence or church in could be of interest in multiple locations.

The Salisbury Circuit also benefits from the ministry of an NPNP facing Deacon, focussing primarily on responding to community need and the enabling of a church plant with those serving on Salisbury Plain. There has been involvement in Dorset South and West conversations of what taking some next steps in the NPNP/CAM direction might look like. The District Mission Enabler has visited two Circuits beginning/exploring this type of work and the Superintendents meeting has heard of a further Circuit considering exploring a military facing NPNP church plant/project.

The other current piece of work for the District group is, along with other officers and practitioners, discerning ways of progressing the NPNP and FRCO roles, 85% funded by the Connexion, that are available to each District.

PROPERTY – GENERAL

Peter Frank

Firstly, a big THANK YOU to all involved in the care of our churches and manses. Many bring significant challenges, both financial and on the ground, and it takes an immense effort to keep them safe, dry, compliant and comfortable. Also, thanks to the visionaries who identify and pursue the improvements that enable and enhance our mission to our communities and congregations.

Recent briefings from the Connexional Property Support Team have included information on:

- Drones and their use on property surveys
- Faith Security Training
- Methodist Church archiving
- The new and updated Online Suite, which includes the property consent pages
- The Renters' Rights Act
- Places of Worship Protective Security Scheme
- The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025 (Martyn's Law)
- The Property Stewards' Handbook (updated last year)
- Closure of the Listed Places of Worship Grant Scheme
- Action for Hope (our commitment to care for creation)

...and much more. If you have any interest in any of these topics or other property-related questions, please do contact me.

Peter Frank

Property Secretary, email resources@bhbcircuit.org.uk

PROPERTY - MANSES

Henry Stroud

Simply put the District Manses Committee has the task of ensuring that our ministers have satisfactory manses. Of course it is the circuit stewards who have the primary responsibility to do this and it has been good to work with them over the year as many have been working hard to improve the existing manses and, in several cases, to purchase new properties. Some of these purchases have been triggered by recent circuit reorganisations. In the District we now have about 35 manses occupied by ministers, and about an equal number of other properties let while not needed for ministers.

We are required to visit each manse every 5 years, that is about 7 per year. Because of disposals and acquisitions we normally need to plan to visit a larger number. In 2025 initially we planned to visit ten manses but owing to the effects of stationing and other local reasons we were only to undertake 8 visits. I am pleased to report that most were found to be well maintained by the diligent work of the circuit stewards and also the ministers found them to be very satisfactory as homes and places from which to work. However in several cases we had to report that significant remedial work was required, in one case owing to significant mould infestation and the other, a new purchase, requiring multiple tasks to bring the property to the required standard and comfort levels. In each case the circuit stewards have responded positively and improvements have been expeditiously approved.

All this happens only through the work of the small group of manse visitors who give their time and energy to carrying out the visits and producing comprehensive reports. This is a good point to note our gratitude for their willing endeavours.

I remind circuit stewards and others that there is a wealth of information on the Methodist website to help in the purchase and maintenance of our manses. Please contact me if you cannot find what you want. I would also remind circuit stewards that the committee must be consulted when the purchase of a new manse is being considered so that we can advise about the suitability of the property before the process proceeds too far.

PROPERTY AND GRANTS COMMITTEE

Revd Bryan Coates

With one exception, Grants for Property Projects that were agreed during the 2024/25 Connexional Year have now all been paid as the actual work has, at least, been started. The exception is the Grant agreed for the roof work at Cadnam which is subject to a planned delay because of the annual cycle of bats!

As we receive the requests for payment, accompanied by the required Annual Reports, the District Grants for Mission Personnel are also being met.

So far, this Connexional year we have received a lower than usual number of applications for Grants for Property schemes.

I remain grateful for the speedy turn-round of the requests by of the Members of the Group which enables us to respond quickly to the applications.

In early February the Group shared lunch and an in-person Meeting. It is important to report to Members of Synod, and to those responsible, that one of the outcomes of that Meeting was the agreement to produce a completely revised Property Grant Application Form with a much more direct focus on the Mission purpose of property work for which a Grant from The District Advance Fund may be applicable.

Bryan Coates

Secretary to the Grants Committee

The verse which has been on my mind a lot over recent weeks is Is 53 v 6:

We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.



As we have seen over recent months so many people have ‘turned to their own way’ regardless of the harm and cost to others. If we want a positive to take away it has become abundantly clear that no-one is immune to being held accountable for their actions.

However, as we celebrate Easter we can be assured that Jesus’ death and resurrection offer hope to everyone. Primarily to those who have been abused or harmed or have experienced hurt.

I have been reflecting on what we as Christians can learn from the terrible events of the recent months. Many have been deeply shocked by the case of Vincent Chan or Nathan Bennett, the nursery workers who abused children in their care.

When the **Epstein files** began circulating, the public response was horror and grief. That some of the most powerful men on earth used their wealth and influence to procure vulnerable girls for sexual exploitation feels almost beyond belief.

It’s not the first time we’ve seen this kind of story. Whether it’s on a Caribbean island, or on the streets of Rotherham and other towns. Strip away the scenery and budget, and what remains? Powerful men abusing vulnerable girls for sexual gratification, confident they would not be stopped. Oh, wait – **not just men** - let’s not forget Ghislaine Maxwell’s role.

Epstein, Maxwell, and their friends dehumanized the girls they trafficked. When Maxwell was asked who the girls were that she brought to Epstein for a “massage,” she answered, “They’re nothing; they’re trash.” Maxwell didn’t even acknowledge them as human beings.

Christians, however, should see the girls as human beings made in God’s image, **Imago Dei** (Genesis 1:27). The Creator of the heavens and the earth knows each of the victims by name – even the number of hairs on their heads. “Sex trafficking treats a person as an object to be exploited for pleasure rather than as a **human being with inherent, incalculable dignity**. As Christians, we are called to defend the dignity of every person, because every human being is made in the image and likeness of God. This mandates that we stand up for victims of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.”

The move to all DSO’s being employed by Connexion has happened. We now have a new title – **Regional Officer for Safeguarding, (ROS)**, new email: fisherj@methodistchurch.org.uk, and new phone number **07799 902570**. But, in essence, the work remains the same.



Flexible delivery options for training continue. We will deliver the Advanced Module Face to Face course on Zoom again. Online but no requirement to do any online self-learning. The Advanced Module is currently under review – due to be launched next year. Those who need to refresh Foundation training are now able to do this via an online self-study module.

We continue to work with Circuits to ensure all Ministers are up to date with both **DBS and training**. We have not yet had to action the process with any refuses. Work is underway to ensure all Local Preachers are up to date with training and DBS. A similar process for refusers is likely to be put in place. Work continues to clarify our responsibilities in respect of visiting preachers.

We continue to establish good working relationships with other denominations and agencies.

There has not yet been a process for migrating the historic data to the Connexion Management Record System. A centralized system does allow us to share information and files in more effective and safe manner.

This year **Safeguarding Sunday** is **15 November 2026** – Please put the date in your diary and on the Plan. On **24 September, 19:00** there will be a workshop for people to share ideas, ‘talk’ together and think what they can do. It may be devoting a whole service to Safeguarding, or including safeguarding in the prayers, or interviewing your church / circuit safeguarding officer. A range of resources will be provided to support you.



Work continues to clarify the guidance for record retention for safeguarding. The latest schedule is ambiguous in places.

The District Safeguarding work was audited by the Connexion Audit Team at the end of last year. We are working to address some areas highlighted by the Team.

Jane Fisher, March 2026

STATIONING REPORT

Liz Ward

This year seems to have been a lengthy stationing process and we are just about to start training for appointments for 2027.

This year there were 3 requests for re-invitation, all of which were agreed.

We have made 4 appointments and the following will be joining these circuits in September 2026:

Southampton – Sophia Odoom (Probationer)

BHB – Adefolurin Orekoya (MOCC)

BHB – Denise Binks

Salisbury – Rumbidzavi Zvorwadza (MOCC)

Rachel Borgars is moving to an appointment in Bromsgrove and Redditch

We pray that those joining us and those who are leaving have easy moves and soon feel welcomed and valued in their new churches/circuits.

All stationing processes are time consuming, but I feel particular thanks need to go to those who filled in the very lengthy forms for a Probationer and a MOCC. Having said that, I do not wish to deter circuits for considering such an appointment, indeed I would encourage circuits to consider if it would enhance their ministry, new eyes and new ideas surely enable us to develop our spirituality and our outreach.

And so, we begin the process for appointments for 2027 (do you sometimes feel we wish our lives away?). At the moment, we presume that the Code of Practice will be little altered from last year as Conference, yet again, deferred making the recommended changes and asked that the Ministries Team conduct a further review. The outcome of this should come to Conference in June and we await the report to find the extent, or otherwise, of changes for the following years.

I do understand the pressure stationing puts on Ministers, their families and Circuits and Churches. Because of this it is essential that we engage with it prayerfully, sensitively and honestly. The simple reality is that not all circuits will be able to fill their appointments and we need to plan well ahead to consider what we can do if circuits have an unfilled appointment.

SUPERNUMERARY GIFTS AND NEEDS GROUP

Revd Stephen Maunder

The group meets three times a year either by Zoom or in person. Our focus continues to be upon the needs of supernumeraries, and the gifts which ministers who have ‘sat down’ offer to their local churches, Circuits, District and wider Church.

At the District Ministers’ Conference in January, an additional session was arranged specifically for Supernumeraries during the programme. Around 25 ministers attended and this was a welcome development with thanks expressed to the Conference organisers.

The group would like to be able to respond by offering a greeting to colleagues facing particular difficulties, as well as those who have newly retired into the District.

In order to keep in touch with those in need, contact with a wider representation from across the Circuits would be beneficial so that the Group can be aware of situations where a pastoral approach might be appreciated.

In the same vein, in order for the group to remain active additional members are being sought. We would therefore welcome an approach from any supernumerary who felt that they might be able to join and contribute to Group's ongoing work within the District.

WORLD CHURCH

Global Relations Report to Synod

Your Global Relations secretary has focussed in this report on two countries where we relate to Churches through personal links, but I am aware of other links and I would be very pleased to hear more about them and share in a future report:

1. Sri Lanka:

A two-month long visit to Sri Lanka saw me give greetings from the Southampton District, Salisbury Methodist Circuit and Salisbury Methodist Church to Methodist congregations in Sri Lanka, presenting them with 2025/26 prayer handbooks and Wesley memorial plates from Salisbury Methodist Church, as well as to the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (affiliated to the World Council of Churches and has links with CTBI – Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) Churches in Sri Lanka have much to share with us about witness and service in a non-Christian culture, albeit a culture where about 95% practice a faith. We worshipped back at Kandy Methodist Church on a few Sundays, our church whilst we were in Sri Lanka, where I also was invited to preach and play the piano for a couple of services!

My husband James and I had been Mission Partners in Sri Lanka, 2005-2010, living and working at the Theological College of Lanka, which was founded in 1963 by a Methodist Missionary, the Reverend Basil Jackson. At the time there was hope, that the Indian model of the ecumenical Church of South India (CSI) and Church of North India (CNI) would be coming to Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) and the College was set up to



train Anglican, Methodist and Baptist, and later Presbyterian students for ministry, and, just as important, people from both ethnic groups: Sinhala and Tamil. The College now has an active link with the Queen's Foundation in Birmingham, which began in 2009.

A brief report from this visit to Sri Lanka is on the World Church section of the District website.

Rosemary presenting a plate from Salisbury Methodist Church to the the General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka (NCCSL) Rev. Sujithar Sivanayagam 20th January 2026

2. Zambia:

Our District link with the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) continues into its twentieth year. This link is about:

- A) People: meeting, visiting, texting, emailing and/or Face Timing each other.
- B) Prayer: praying for each other, exchanging prayer calendars and prayer requests.
- C) Perceptions: seeking to learn about, experience and understand our various patterns of worship and Christian living.

There are several UCZ ministers serving in British Methodism – two as circuit superintendents. We are the mission field, and, through our link, the UCZ shares with us enthusiasm, commitment and experience of being a lay-led church. In the World Church section of our District website there are regular news items and prayer requests from the UCZ. The Revd Dr Teddy Kalongo, a former General Secretary of the UCZ, and now Superintendent of the Bristol and South Gloucestershire Circuit, has given a daily reflection for each day in Lent from an African/Zambian perspective, – on the Bristol and South Gloucestershire Circuit website.

<https://bsgc.org.uk/>

Following your Global Relations secretary's visit to Zambia in 2025, Mr Whiteson Chenge, the UCZ's link person with British churches, is with us at this Synod on 25th April. He will then be coming back to the Salisbury Circuit, for various events and meetings and staying with James and myself. If you are interested in forming a link with a UCZ congregation, then please speak to him or to me.



Rosemary with Whiteson and his wife Justina

Additional information

For information, the Baptist organisation *Tools with a Mission (TWAM)* supports Zambia, and I met a Deaconess whose project benefitted from goods received from them. So, this is one idea for churches wanting to support Zambia. <https://www.twam.uk/> The Salisbury Circuit held a very successful event for TWAM in July 2025 and we would be pleased to pass on lessons learnt from our event.

And, if you were not able to attend the service at Salisbury Methodist Church on Sunday, 26th January 2025, celebrating Zambia's 60 years of Independence and 60 years of the UCZ, and if you want to learn more about Zambia, then please go to the Salisbury Methodist Church website to share in the Service <https://youtu.be/fIFjt9KT7p0>

What else could you do?

If your church is interested in twinning, please do get in touch with me: rosemary.fletcher@methodist.org.uk The agreed criteria for links are people, prayer, perceptions, so please don't think they are all about money. If anyone is interested in having a talk or a World Church Service on my time in Zambia, or even Sri Lanka, then please do get in touch.

The UCZ University has set up the Peggy Hiscock fund which supports those who have a discerned vocation for ministry but cannot afford to train. Maybe the District could send a grant in memory of Peggy?

The Reverend Peggy Hiscock, who died in 2021 in Poole, was a Methodist minister who worked as a missionary in Zambia from 1958 to 1974. She travelled to Zambia as a Deaconess.

Rev Peggy is remembered in Zambia as a pioneer and champion of women's ministry and someone who inspired and trained many women. Peggy was the first woman Presbyterian to be ordained in the UCZ by the Rev Dr Colin Morris, the then General Secretary, in 1968. When she returned home, her transfer was accepted by our conference and as such she became the first Woman Presbyterian to serve in our British Conference. In her work in Zambia, Peggy established the Order of Diaconal Ministry and founded a school for the training of deaconesses in the United Church there.

The Reverend Rosemary Flecher
rosemary.fletcher@methodist.org.uk
District Global Relationships Link Person



This report comes with warm greetings and heartfelt thanks from all of us at Action for Children. Your support year in year out means so much to us. Childhood is precious. We don't have long to get it right. That's why every action you take is so vital. Every bake sale. Every carol concert. Every person you tell about our work. Every faith-filled Action for Children Sunday service. With every pound, every prayer, every raised voice – you really do help change the lives of children and young people. Thank you!

We'd like to thank the Methodist Conference President, Revd Richard Andrew, and Vice President, Matthew Forsyth for visiting our services, where they saw firsthand the impact of your generosity. Matthew visited Northampton Short Breaks service which gives children and young people with disabilities a safe, fun place to make friends, grow in confidence and build independence. Revd Andrew visited Spring Leam Lane in Gateshead, where he learned how our nurseries help children thrive and support families, especially where early years provision has been reduced. We are grateful for their support and prayers.

How we're making an impact with your support

Children and young people are at the heart of everything we do, and this year, we are doing even more to make sure they have what they need to thrive. Thanks to your sensational support, we're working to create safer, more stable homes; building spaces where disabled children can fulfil their potential; and being there for children who are struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

Every child deserves stability, care and the chance to stay close to their communities and the people they love. Sadly, more children than ever need safe, loving and specialist homes. So, we're creating even more places where children can thrive across the UK. Last year, we opened eight new homes across the UK to support children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, disabilities and neurodiversity. This year we'll open four new ones between April and October 2026 in Swansea, Warwickshire, Flintshire and Northumberland.

In England, we are growing our network of specialised, accessible homes so more disabled children have safety, comfort and the chance to flourish in a stable and nurturing home. Rouncil Lane in Warwickshire and Acorn House in Northumberland are being transformed into three-bed homes for disabled young people, fully furnished and upgraded thanks to supporter donations. Silverton Home in Hamilton is being redeveloped into a long-term, nurturing home for two disabled children. In Edinburgh, we opened Al Rahman House, a bespoke home providing 24/7 specialist care for a young person with highly complex needs.

Thanks to our supporters' generosity, we're upgrading the sensory rooms, playgrounds and facilities at Camden and Islington Short Breaks, creating a welcoming space where disabled children can relax, play and thrive for years to come. A generous donation from longstanding supporters has enabled us to install specialist outdoor play equipment at Renfrewshire Short Breaks, Kilbarchan, and Castlelaw near Edinburgh, transforming the experience for the children who use these services.

As mental health challenges among young people rise, we're strengthening our support, so they don't face them alone. We offer one-to-one emotional wellbeing support, counselling and guided self-help to help them understand and manage their feelings.

We know more needs to be done. Everything we learn along the way helps us influence the Government to make lasting, meaningful change, so children and young people across the UK can live safe and happy lives. We're using the current focus on those not in education, employment or training to show how our work can help them into meaningful jobs. We're also sharing new research on the barriers care leavers face when looking for work, thanks to funding from the John Lewis Partnership.

In Scotland, we're committed to reducing child poverty and improving access to family support. Ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections, we launched our Investing in Scotland's children manifesto, which calls for safer, happier childhoods. Key recommendations include a national strategy on child criminal exploitation and an increase to the Scottish Child Payment.

There is so much incredible work underway, and our ambitious plans for children and young people are only possible because of supporters like you. We are truly grateful for your support and are looking forward to everything we'll achieve together in the months ahead.

Helping us communicate and support you better

We truly value our relationship with the Methodist Church, so we asked how we can communicate and support you better. Your thoughtful insights shared through focus groups and a survey will guide us going forward. Thank you to everyone who took part.

You told us your support is rooted in Christian values, authentic stories and our shared commitment to giving every child a safe, happy childhood. You also said you would like us to be more visible in your communities. Our online Faith Space offers updates directly from frontline staff, young ambassadors and fundraisers. Join here <https://actionforchildren.org.uk/faith-space>

You told us that practical resources—such as posters, leaflets and real-life impact stories—are the most useful for fundraising, so we're working to make more of these available. Guest speakers and videos also remain powerful tools for inspiring giving. We've created a new inspirational video featuring Revd Helen Cameron and Christopher, a young person we've supported: <https://youtu.be/aCsofBliNdc>

Many of you highlighted the challenges of smaller congregations and reduced local contact—but we were encouraged to hear how churches are finding creative ways to fundraise, from coffee mornings to seasonal events.

The feedback is already helping shape how we communicate with and support you in the year ahead.

Upcoming fundraising activities

Your tireless fundraising continues to contribute thousands of pounds to our work. Thank you to everyone who donates and joyfully organises events and Home Collection Boxes. Your commitment and creativity are truly inspiring.

We love **Action for Children Sunday** - a powerful reminder and celebration of what we achieve together. It is an important opportunity to highlight the challenges children face today and raise vital funds. Please celebrate with us on 12 July (or on any convenient date). The theme 'Everyone's welcome' shines a light on the life-changing impact of our fostering work. An all-age service booklet with worship ideas, stories, videos and crafts will be available in April at <https://actionforchildren.org.uk/faithFR>

Whether you host a service, a lunch, a bake sale, or something wonderfully unique to your church family, every effort—big or small— helps transform the lives of children who need us most.

With brighter weather ahead, we invite you to take part in Step Out for Children, our sponsored walk supporting children without safe and loving homes. A new guide to help churches and faith groups plan will be shared soon through District newsletters.

For more fundraising ideas or support with your plans contact your local fundraiser at <https://actionforchildren.org.uk/your-local-fundraiser> Once again **THANK YOU** from all of us on behalf of the children and families we support. I wish you an enjoyable time at Synod.

Blessings,



Report by Karis Kolawole, Faith Partnerships Lead, karis.kolawole@actionforchildren.org.uk

Fund for Human Need

Reg. Charity No. 208866



Spring Synod 2026

Patron: The Rt Hon the Lord Boateng

How we help

Set up 66 years ago by a group of Methodists "to relieve and remove hunger and poverty in all parts of the world," since the 1990's the Fund's focus has been on the needs of destitute and desperate people in the UK. One-off payments are made irrespective of faith, ethnic origin or social group to help those facing particularly challenging financial circumstances. The Fund seeks to offer not only money but also love and the means for those struggling to find hope and self-confidence.

Our Supporters

We are grateful to all who have contributed to the Fund in the past connexional year. Personal donations and churches' fundraising enabled FHN to make 776 grant payments totalling £79,330.

We express our thanks to the Cupalt Foundation for their generous commitment to fund our administrative, fundraising and governance costs from September 2025. This generous funding means that **100%** of donations made by individuals and churches is now going directly to help people in need.

FHN has become a member of the *Charities and Networks in Association* of Churches Together in England and it is expected that this ecumenical link will lead to an increased awareness of the Fund's work.

Own Arrangement Service

We have now produced a full order of service with suggested hymns, prayers, readings and an address, together with links to a video that can be downloaded, which churches may find useful in preparing a local arrangement service. For further information and more resource material contact our administrator and see our website:

Ways to help

- arranging a fund-raising event – making a special collection at your church
- donating regularly by standing order
- adding 25p to each £1 given by gift-aiding your donation, if a tax-payer
- including FHN as a bequest in your will

Further information

Mrs G. Mason, Administrator, Fund for Human Need,
6 Newlands Road, Darlington, DL3 9JL. Phone 07561 717230
email fundhumanneed@gmail.com website <https://fundforhumanneed.org.uk>