

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND

Reviewing a County/Intermediate/Sponsoring Body

This paper was approved by the Churches Group for Local Unity on 8 March 2006. It consists of two parts, the main text and the appendix. The main text offers a series of questions or tasks for the review and the appendix offers an outline for the review report. While the Churches Group for Local Unity has carefully considered the content of this paper, it nevertheless would wish to stress that every Intermediate Body and every review is different and, therefore, this paper needs adapting to local needs and circumstances.

1. Setting up the review – a task for the Intermediate/Sponsoring Body

a. Initial questions/issues

- i. Why is the Intermediate Body to be reviewed? Is it part of a regular process, or because of a change of County Ecumenical Officer (CEO), or a general review of aims and objectives or of the agenda? Or is it prompted by some crisis or difficulty? Is there an underlying aim behind instituting a review?
- ii. Be clear about what is to be reviewed. Is it how the Intermediate Body works, its effectiveness? Or are there any perceived problems which the review group should specifically address?
- iii. We strongly advise that you do not try to review the CEO or his/her post at the same time as reviewing the Intermediate Body. It is far too large a task and causes confusion. Stick to reviewing one of the following at a time: the Intermediate Body or the CEO post or the incumbent of the post. Inevitably there will be some overlap but be clear about what you want.

b. The brief/remit

Care should be taken in preparing a brief/remit which should be agreed by the Intermediate Body. Ensure that it is clear and that boundaries are set (cf #1.a.iii above) and state to whom (Intermediate Body Council? Church Leaders?) the review should be presented.

c. Timescale

Be clear about what timescale you would like the review group to work towards, but be ready to negotiate. If there is a reason for a deadline, make sure you tell the review group. Allow time for the group to consult, if they wish to do so, to attend key meetings and to make an interim report to further key meetings so that the progress of the review can be assessed and adjustments made if necessary. Be aware, too, that it could take some time to assemble a review group.

d. The Review group/team

- i. The review group should consist of at least three people and no more than five.
- ii. One of these should be asked, in advance, to act as convenor. His/her task is to keep tabs on the process of the review and ensure that meetings take place, etc. The convenor usually chairs the review group, though s/he may prefer to ask another member of the group to do this. The convenor is also responsible for ensuring that the report is written. (This does not necessarily mean that s/he writes the report – it may be a team effort or someone else on the group might volunteer.)

- iii. In addition to the three to five review group members, there should be some administrative/secretarial support, perhaps from the County Ecumenical Officer, if appropriate. However, if written submissions to the review team are invited, they should be received by a review group member, not by the CEO.
- iv. The group should be as representative as possible within the size constraint – men, women, lay, clergy, denominational spread.
- v. Different reviews need different skills and experience so it is vital to match the group to the brief. Ensure that there is no more than one inexperienced person on the group and, if possible, include either a County or Denominational Ecumenical Officer (DEO) from a similar area (eg urban/rural, half-time/full-time post) or Churches Together in England's Field Officer.¹
- vi. While it is helpful for the review group to include at least one outside person, it should also include people from within the County and should include someone (either as a member of the group or as its administrative support – cf #1.d.i above) who is well acquainted with the Intermediate Body and is able to answer factual questions which will arise in the course of the review group meetings.

e. Information pack

Be ready with an information pack which you can send people as soon as they agree to join the review group. (Offer papers electronically if you can, as some people find that extremely helpful.) The pack should include whatever is necessary for the group to do its work, for example:

- i. The attached suggested outline for the review report with sections 1 and 2.a completed. This should be given to the review team in advance of their first meeting.
- ii. A copy of *Between the Local and the National – a health check for Churches working together in the counties and large cities of England*, published by Churches Together in England. (This is included in *Ecumenical Notes* and is downloadable from www.cte.org.uk)
- iii. The Intermediate Body Constitution.
- iv. The Church Leaders' Covenant.
- v. The job description and contract/Conditions of Service of the County Ecumenical Officer.
- vi. A list of Intermediate Body members/representatives with their contact details.
- vii. A list of all Church Leaders with their contact details.
- viii. Dates, times, venues, and agendas of planned meetings of the Intermediate Body and any sub groups, plus recent minutes.
- ix. Lists of LEPs, stating which kind of LEP they are, and their contact details.

¹ Churches Together in England has two Field Officers, one for the South and one for the North and Midlands. An important part of their role is to support Intermediate Bodies and they welcome invitations to join review groups.

- x. An indication of the number of Churches Together groups (the administrative support person should have their contact details if the review group wishes to contact them).
- xi. Relevant financial records.

When all the members of the review group have been found, send them a list of each other's contact details, including e-mail addresses, and indicate who is the convenor of the group.

2. The work of the review group

At its first meeting, the group needs to consider:

- a. Who will take notes of the meetings? How will review group expenses be paid? Any other practical matters?
- b. The brief/remit. Is it acceptable or does the group need to renegotiate it?
- c. The timescale. Is it realistic? (Bear in mind #2.d below and the time needed to write and consult on drafts of a review report.)
- d. How will the review group work? What is the expertise of different members? What meetings should they attend and whom should they consult?
 - o Time-wise, it is probably unrealistic to hold individual interviews with key people. It may be more useful to attend key meetings and supplement with interviews. Be clear about who arranges meetings and interviews.
 - o Similarly, collating responses to a questionnaire for *all* LEPs and Churches Together groups may be beyond the resources of the review group. If a letter or questionnaire to selected groups is decided upon, experience suggests that it should be posted, even if e-mail replies are requested.
- e. In considering the various topics which may be discussed in a review report, *Between the Local and the National – a health check for Churches working together in the counties and large cities of England* (cf 1.e.ii above) and appendix 1 of this paper may be helpful.

3. The review report

- a. The report may be written jointly or by one member of the group but must reflect the work of the group as a whole and have its agreement. Appendix 1 may be helpful in providing an outline to work from. Check the report with the CEO or someone equally knowledgeable to ensure there are no factual errors.
- b. There is a balance between a too-long report and not providing enough information. Appendices to the report can be a useful place to record, for example, the constitution, if you are commenting upon it, the text of any questionnaire you may have sent out and any other reference material which would otherwise clutter the main text of the report.
- c. The report should be truthful and encouraging, with good practice celebrated and commended.
- d. It should also be realistic about problems and challenges.

- e. Recommendations must be attainable but need not always provide solutions. It is perfectly acceptable to identify an issue and recommend that the Council/Standing Committee/Church Leaders take steps to address it. Recommendations should be accompanied by clear explanations as to why they have been made.
- f. It may be helpful to present interim findings (not necessarily in the form of a written report) to a Forum or Council or other meeting, partly to check that the review group has heard correctly what people have been saying, and partly to aid the reception of the final report.
- g. The group should present its final report to a meeting (cf #1.b above) and should ensure that those receiving it have enough time before the meeting to read and reflect upon it.

4. Follow-up

- a. Follow-up is a crucial part of the review and is the responsibility, primarily, of those who set up the review (cf #1.b above). The whole Intermediate Body, the Church Leaders and the DEOs should also take responsibility for ensuring that the review report is considered seriously and followed up.
- b. Those recommendations which are accepted should be prioritised and a clear timetable for implementation set stating who will undertake which task, how it will be undertaken, by what method and by when.
- c. If recommendations are rejected, the Intermediate Body should consider the underlying issues and whether alternative action should be taken.

Outline for the review report

We cannot stress too strongly that this outline is just a suggestion based on experience. No two reviews are the same and some reviews will omit some of the following, others will add other points and all reviews are likely to amend the order in which things are listed. But this may be a helpful starting point.

It is helpful to number all your paragraphs, for example, as this outline is numbered. That makes for easier reference afterwards.

Sections 1 and 2a should be completed by the Intermediate Body and given to the review group well in advance of its first meeting.

1. Overview and context

- a. Put the Intermediate Body into the context of its neighbouring Intermediate Bodies and in the context of the region.
- b. Give a geographical outline, with a map if possible or practical. Explain the relationship to secular bodies and perhaps the general population numbers. Is it predominately rural or urban?
- c. Who can be a member of the Intermediate Body? Refer to constitution and explain membership.
- d. How does this Intermediate Body relate to Church boundaries and Church Leaders?
- e. Give the numbers of congregations/churches of the member denominations.
- f. Give the number and type of Local Ecumenical Partnerships.
- g. Give the number of Churches Together groups.
- h. List the organisations which operate under the aegis of this Intermediate Body.
- i. List the organisations to which this Intermediate Body relates, including the regional body.
- j. What staffing does this Intermediate Body have? What is the level of funding and where does it come from? To whom is the CEO (if there is one) accountable and how is s/he supported and line-managed?
- k. Explain the basic structure of this Intermediate Body, eg councils, committees, Church Leader group, finance.

2. Remit and methodology of the review

- a. Set out the remit, including the reason for this review (routine? A response to a problem?).
- b. List the members of the review group and the 'hat' they are wearing.
- c. Explain the methodology you have chosen to conduct the review and list the meetings you attended.
- d. If you are consulting, say so and explain what you did.

Review findings

3. Summarise the findings – good and not so good.

The findings need to reflect on the various activities of the Intermediate Body, how it relates to its aims and objectives in its constitution, how the different 'bits' of it work and – a vitally important point – whether its ethos is that of Churches Together or of a Council of Churches. You will need to consider the relationship between the various denominational bodies and their decision-making processes.

The following are possible subject titles with an indication of the sort of questions which will help the review group to make a clear and pertinent assessment.

a. Geography

Are there any issues about geography, eg any areas less well served by the Intermediate Body or not served at all? Would re-negotiating boundaries with a neighbouring Intermediate Body be helpful?

b. Structure

How is the Intermediate Body structured? Is this the best structure to enable it to work effectively? What works best and what is the weak spot?

c. Decisions

What sort of decisions are made and by whom?

d. The Church Leaders

Is there a separate Church Leaders' meeting? Does the CEO attend/service it? Is there a Church Leaders' Covenant? Does it work? How good is the relationship between the Church Leaders? Do the Church Leaders attend their own meetings regularly? How good is the link between the Church Leaders and the rest of the Intermediate Body structure?

e. The Standing Committee

Are the denominational representatives the right ones for the tasks of the Intermediate Body? (Depending on the structure of this particular Intermediate Body, this question may also be helpfully asked in other contexts.)

f. The Forum and/or the Council

Who attends the Forum and/or the Council and is it successful?² Does it represent the whole range of church life in the area?³ Who writes the agenda for meetings? How much consultation goes into it? Does it reflect the work to be done, enable the work to be done, enable the members to share denominational work and information? Are there opportunities for new ventures? Does the agenda enable the Intermediate Body to be the place where sharing of knowledge, personnel and resources and the future planning of the denominations happens? (Again, some of these questions may also be helpfully asked in other contexts.)

² See *Between the Local and the National – a health check for Churches working together in the counties and large cities of England*, published Churches Together in England, the penultimate question on the back page.

³ See *Between the Local and the National*, *ibid*, question 5 on the inside pages.

g. The County Ecumenical Officer (CEO) and how s/he relates to the Denominational Ecumenical Officers (DEOs)

Who is the official employer of the CEO and who administers the post? Is the contract legal and the remuneration just? How does the Intermediate Body manage and support the CEO? Are the lines of responsibility and accountability clear?⁴

Does the CEO work well in a team with the DEOs? What is the relationship between the DEOs and their Church Leaders?

h. Care and review of LEPs

Does the Sponsoring Body take responsibility for LEP reviews etc, or is this just left up to the CEO?⁵

i. Support and care for local ecumenism, eg Churches Together groups

How is this done and how effective is it? Are Churches Together groups aware of the support which the Intermediate Body can give them?

j. Communication

How does the Intermediate Body communicate with its Member Churches, with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, Local Ecumenical Partnerships, Churches Together groups etc? Is there a regular newsletter? Is there an e-mail version as well as a hard copy version? Is there a website?⁶

k. The Constitution

Does it reflect the way the Intermediate Body works? What are its aims and objectives? Are they met? Have any anomalies arisen over the years? Does it enable rather than hinder?

l. Finance

Who administers the finance? Are there clear guidelines for this? How secure is future funding and what are the processes by which this is discussed and determined?

m. Other issues

Other issues will arise which are particular to this Intermediate Body. They may relate to the points in #1 or may have arisen in the context of reflecting and consulting during the review.

In particular, if it has not been covered in the above section, the review group should reflect on whether the Intermediate Body is a place of growing *koinonia*, common life. For example, does it behave like a council of Churches, somewhat separate from the life of its member Churches, or is it genuinely an ecumenical instrument, facilitating the working together of the member Churches?⁷ The review group should also ask if it is a place of facilitating and encouraging mission rather than maintenance.⁸

⁴ See *Between the Local and the National*, *ibid*, the final question on the back page.

⁵ See *Between the Local and the National*, *ibid*, question 4 on the inside pages.

⁶ See *Between the Local and the National*, *ibid*, questions 3 and 6 on the inside pages.

⁷ See *Between the Local and the National*, *ibid*, question 1 on the inside pages.

⁸ See *Between the Local and the National*, *ibid*, question 2 on the inside pages.

4. Summary of recommendations

While your recommendations will appear in the context of the report, it is helpful to list them again at the end. Ensure that each recommendation is numbered and refers back to the paragraph in which it appears in the report. (Microsoft Word has a useful cross-reference function which saves a huge amount of work here.)

You may also find it helpful to include a table of contents at the beginning of your report. Again, if you have used a numbering outline for your report, Microsoft Word will do this automatically for you.

5. Finally

Ensure there is a name and a date at the end of your paper and that the footer and appendices are accurate. Ensure, too, that the first page has the full name of your Intermediate Body, not just initials, and a clear description of the paper, eg Review 200X.