

Bromsgrove & Redditch Circuit Staffing September 1st 2024 onwards 26th August 2024

This briefing regarding staffing in the Bromsgrove & Redditch Circuit is being made available to everyone in the Bromsgrove & Redditch Circuit via the church contacts on the plan, though will be of particular interest to church stewards and members of the Circuit Meeting. It is in part a follow up to the decisions made at the last Circuit Meeting held on 20th June, which have been followed up in more detail by the Circuit Leadership Team in order to best enact them. It should be read in conjunction with the earlier brief on Circuit Hubs dated July 14th and previously distributed.

General Context

It is worth reminding ourselves that with the departure of Rev Peter Powers from the Circuit, with no one being stationed to us in terms of replacement, that is staffing terms from September 1st 2024 we will be experiencing a net fall in stipendiary staff equivalent to half a minister compared to the previous year. In addition, our two church-based lay workers Sally Meredith and Anne Batchelor are adjusting their hours with one offering more time and the other reducing theirs, leading to a net fall of two hours between them. This leaves us in Methodist terms with a stipendiary and employed staff for the coming Connexional year of:

- Rev Stephen Levett – half time
- Rev Ruth Wilson – full time
- Rev Latika Singh – full time
- Sally Meredith – 25 hours (from 34)
- Anne Batchelor – 25 hours (from 18)

In addition, we have Lucy West working at Circuit level as Circuit Administrator and Assistant Treasurer/finance Officer. We also have Rev James Hamilton providing ministry as a URC minister at Emmanuel, who also serves in other URC churches beyond our Circuit, as well as Anglican ministry at The Bridge.

All are encouraged to recognise that with the reduction on staff the remaining team will be more stretched than previously as we strive to cover churches and responsibilities that have not gone away with the departure of Rev Peter. We ask for your support, understanding and realistic expectations of the team as we continue to minister in this time of transition for the Circuit.

In the coming year staffing will be considered in two distinct phases as follow:

1. September 1st 2024 until hubs commence

2. Hubs – aiming to launch January 2025

Phase 1: September 1st 2024 onwards

Phase 1 may be considered a transition phase of what we hope will be four or five months until we launch the Circuit Hubs (phase 2) as early in the year 2025 as possible.

In the light of Rev Peter Powers departure where he had oversight of Bromsgrove and Studley, and also Deacon Janet completing her one-year oversight at Crabbs Cross we need to make adjustments to try to ensure oversight of and ministry to and through the churches of the Circuit. It was made clear at Circuit meeting that this would not only have an impact on the three churches directly concerned but would likely have impact across the Circuit. The Circuit Leadership Team and the Staff Meeting have considered the various needs and opportunities across the Circuit. We recognise that there is currently no ideal solution but have concluded that the following is the fairest way to share staff for the next few months.

Rev Steve Levett will take formal oversight of three churches of Bromsgrove, Crabbs Cross and Studley, as required of the Superintendent in the absence of other Presbyters being available to fulfil that function. Realism is needed in that Steve is not increasing his hours but will remain part time. Out of the six sessions a week he currently commits to the role of Superintendency, in the period from September onwards he will on average dedicate two to pastoral oversight of the churches, reducing what can be done in terms of Superintendency. The majority of ministry in and through the churches will be provided by others as indicated below. One consequence of this is that in the short-term Steve will not be in a position to preach widely around the Circuit but will need to concentrate leading of Sunday worship in some of the churches under his pastoral care.

Details of oversight and ministry input for the churches most impacted are as follows:

Bromsgrove

Formal oversight by Rev Steve Levett though with minimal input, with all ministry being overseen by Deacons Janet Thomas and Gwynn Bamford offering in the region of two sessions a week between them. This ministry to be complimented by preaching input once a month from Deacon Janet with some additional services led by Deacon Gwynn with Jackie Hartrey.

Deacons Janet and Gwynn are happy to continue with this arrangement for the full Connexional year to August 31st 2025 even when the hubs commence to aid in the process of them bedding in.

Communion to be provided by the Circuit presbyteral team (both stipendiary and supernumerary).

With Sally's hours reducing there had been some consideration to her ceasing the hours offered to Bromsgrove from September. However, on reflection and following further conversations the Superintendent has concluded that Bromsgrove needs her contribution at this time to help further establish some specific mission projects still in their infancy and to be part of the team at Bromsgrove with Gwynn and Janet. Sally's remaining eighteen hours will be shared with Alcester and Crabbs Cross

Crabbs Cross

Oversight from Rev Stephen Levett, including preaching once a month. Sally Meredith to continue offering lay worker support and ministry.

Studley

Oversight from Rev Stephen Levett, including preaching once a month. Anne Batchelor to continue offering lay worker support and ministry.

In addition, given some pressing challenges at ***St Andrews*** it is intended from September that Anne Batchelor offers her additional hours of around seven per week to support that church.

Other Presbyteral oversight will remain unchanged until the Circuit Hubs commence.

Phase 2: Hubs

Please refer to the previous briefing dated 14th July for more details on the Hubs. How these develop will very much depend on how envisioning and planning develop in the September to December period. How we do this will be explored at the September Circuit Meeting.

Starting principles for the Hubs as articulated by the Circuit Leadership Team include:

- **Stability** – adding to what ministers currently have, not rearranging the churches in their pastoral oversight entirely.

- Not geographically based – no return to effectively a Bromsgrove hub and a Redditch hub.
- Relational: Potential to continue developing relationships across the two main towns, not neglecting Studley and Alcester. The Hubs will not replace but rather enhance being a Circuit.
- Not only or primarily about churches sharing a minister and lay worker, but the churches themselves corporately seeking to build relationships and exploring a deepening of sharing in church life, ministry, administration and mission,

Make up of the Hubs? A decision needs to be made as to which churches go into which hubs. There is a pressure of time as the Circuit Leadership Team (CLT) have needed to propose which five churches will be included in the stationing profile, the initial draft of which needed to be ready for a meeting between the Chair of District Rev Novette Headley, the Superintendent and Circuit stewards on the evening of August 27th. This has not allowed for a period of consultation with the wider Circuit. The final profile will be agreed at the Circuit Meeting on September 12th, which will allow for some consultation in between time with both the Circuit Invitation Committee and the wider Circuit once we have met with the District Chair. At this point CLT proposes the Hubs to be as follows

Hub 1: Overseen by Rev Ruth Wilson with lay ministry provided by Anne Batchelor
The Bridge,
Rowney Green,
Forest Space (NPNP),
Bromsgrove,
Studley.

Hub 2: Overseen by Rev Latika Singh with lay worker ministry provided by Sally Meredith
Catshill,
Lickey End,
Alcester,
St Andrews,
Crabbs Cross.

Emmanuel will not be a part of a hub at this time, in part because it is under the oversight of a URC minister in this season. It will very much remain a part of the Circuit.

Further staff?

Though beginning with this distribution and level of staffing there is a general understanding that we will need to consider employing further lay staff to enable the churches and hubs to survive and thrive. For this to happen it is very likely that we would have to sell one of the Circuit manses to release funding. This appears more realistic than asking churches to significantly increase their assessments to the circuit funds to balance the budget. It is worth remembering that there are related considerations exploring whether we might need to employ staff to help with the Circuit responsibilities for Finance and Property in the absence of any able volunteers coming forward to take on the roles. Any spending on these areas will reduce amounts that can be spent on lay employees with a more church focussed ministry.

Compiled by Rev Stephen Levett on behalf of the Circuit Leadership Team, August 26th 2024