

Joint Steering Committee

Central Presbytery Transition

Update: February – March 2026

The Joint Steering Committee (JSC) has met four times since its formation in early February, meeting fortnightly by Zoom. This is the first in what will become a regular monthly update on the JSC's work for members of Sydney Presbytery, Parramatta Nepean Presbytery, and Macquarie Darling Presbytery.

Getting Established

The JSC held its inaugural meeting on 5 February. Denise Wood (MDP) was appointed Chair, with Geoff Stevenson (SP) and Graeme Tutt (PNP) as Deputy Chairs. The committee adopted Terms of Reference, agreed on a quorum of 50%+1, and approved the appointment of two alternate members per presbytery. A regular meeting rhythm was established: second Thursday evenings (longer sessions focused on relationships and connection) and fourth Tuesday evenings (shorter sessions focused on structures and business).

Delegation of Authority

A delegation of authority was developed to enable the JSC to make transition-related decisions on behalf of the three presbyteries, specifically around the structural, legal, financial and fiduciary requirements needed for 1 September. All three presbytery councils have now formally approved this delegation.

Building Relationships

Each meeting has included intentional time for relational connection and reflection, facilitated by Ben Gilmour. In February, the committee explored personal hopes and gifts through a session titled "The Gift, the Strain and the Hope." In March, Ben led a session on recognising cognitive biases in group discernment, drawing on practices of spiritual awareness. These sessions are helping the committee build trust and develop a shared culture of honest, reflective engagement.

Committee Structures and Identity

The JSC has begun exploring what committee structures might look like for Central Presbytery. Rather than defaulting to existing models, the committee is asking what the new presbytery needs to be and do, and letting that shape structures. Discussions have surfaced important questions about balancing staff and volunteer involvement, learning from what works well in each presbytery, and remaining open to creative approaches. The three PRCs have been meeting together to share processes and priorities, and the Property and Business/Finance committees are likewise exchanging information. Consultations have also been held with Uniting Mission and Education around the responsibilities and guidelines for Ministry and Education Committees in the new presbyteries.

Baseline Staffing Model

The Transition Commission circulated a baseline staffing model. The model sets out a proposed minimum core positions and responsibilities, not the full staffing that will ultimately be needed to operate. The JSC gave this significant attention at its most recent meeting and raised a number of substantive questions and concerns.

On the model itself, members questioned whether certain roles as described reflect how Presbyteries actually operate now. For example, the traditional Secretary and Treasurer roles have in some Presbyteries been effectively replaced by Financial Controllers and administrative staff. The scope of the proposed Presbytery Minister role was seen as unrealistically large, and members asked what the key challenges, external relationships, and qualifications for such a role would be. The relationship between the Chair and Dean also needs more careful definition. More broadly, the committee observed that the model appears to adapt a system designed for twelve Presbyteries to three much larger ones, without sufficiently rethinking the underlying assumptions. Central Presbytery will begin significantly larger than the other two new Presbyteries and will continue to grow. The JSC is looking for more creative thinking about how structures like Standing Committees and PRCs will function at this scale, and how questions of zones, team leadership, and governance best practice should shape the staffing model.

The committee also raised an important question about authority and process: is the JSC's role to develop a staffing model that incoming leadership will work with, or is the expectation that new leadership will design roles and responsibilities themselves? Clarity on this question will shape how the committee engages with the co-design process going forward.

Members expressed concern about how the baseline model has been communicated to current staff. When staff discover that their roles are not reflected in the documents, it creates understandable concern. The committee noted that pastoral care in this context means providing clarity where possible, naming uncertainty where clarity is not yet available, and consulting with staff directly and broadly, consistent with standard practice across other sectors. The JSC has asked the Transition Commission to ensure that lay staff employed by Presbyteries are explicitly included in consultation processes. Further consultations are planned for after Easter, with further models to be developed and shared for discussion.

Finance

The Presbytery Resource Fund (PRF) funding model was discussed across several meetings. Under the proposed model, each of the three new presbyteries will contribute \$1 million for an initial period, with funds redistributed to support the Northern and Southern presbyteries as they establish themselves. The hope is that each presbytery will be financially sustainable within three years, though a number of factors remain unknown. At its March meeting, the JSC confirmed receipt and acceptance of the PRF proposal and agreed to move forward as suggested.

Communication

The JSC has committed to providing regular updates to presbytery members and congregations. A monthly summary will be made available, and shorter updates prepared for congregational newsletters. These will be hosted on the Sydney Presbytery website with links shared across all three presbyteries. The committee has also asked that Presbytery Chairs share Transition Commission communications with their presbyteries as they are received.

On the Horizon

The Transition Commission's consultation program is now underway. The TC is also working with Bronwyn Murphy to develop a database of congregational information and to identify congregations that may need particular support and care. On a question raised by the JSC, the TC confirmed that Synod-based roles are not expected to transfer to presbyteries at this point, though conversations about the boundary of responsibilities between Synod and presbyteries continue. Key upcoming dates include:

13 April: Face-to-face presbytery consultation on new Standing Committees

After Easter: Baseline staffing co-design consultations (virtual town halls and targeted sessions)

Late April: PRC consultation

8–9 May: JSC face-to-face meeting on identity, values and the culture of Central Presbytery

May: Co-designed baseline staffing model to be presented to the JSC

Members of all three presbyteries are encouraged to engage with the upcoming consultations and to share their perspectives with their presbytery representatives on the JSC. Anyone who feels a sense of call to serve on the new Standing Committee is invited to notify their current Presbytery Chairperson in order to receive an invitation to the April 13 consultation.

The JSC meets fortnightly by Zoom. For questions or input, please contact your Presbytery's Chairperson:

- Sydney Presbytery – Rev. Graeme Tutt: chairperson@sydneypresbytery.org.au
- Parramatta Nepean Presbytery – Rev. Geoff Stevenson: geoff@pnpuca.org.au
- Macquarie Darling Presbytery – Denise Wood: chairpersonmdp@gmail.com