

Women's Officer A New Leadership Role for our Communities

The Chief Rabbi and the United Synagogue are delighted to announce the introduction of a new Honorary Officer position to support the engagement of female members in community life.

Purpose of the Women's Officer role

The purpose of this new portfolio is to ensure that positive opportunities for women's engagement are incorporated into all areas of community life and that the synagogue is welcoming to and inclusive of women. The Women's Officer will support the active participation of our female members in community life and religious services, with particular sensitivity to issues which affect them. The role is exclusively for women.

How will it function?

The Women's Officer role is flexible, and there is scope for communities to tailor it to their needs. Listed below are responsibilities that could be included within the role. Communities might identify additional responsibilities that will suit their particular needs.

The list below is not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive, but rather aims to give some ideas of the responsibilities that a Women's Officer could take on. All of these, as well as any others, should be agreed with the local Rabbinic team.

Services

- Being the point of contact and offer guidance and support in the women's section of the synagogue.
- Being involved in the planning of service times, particularly for chaggim, to ensure that they are accessible for women (for example, running a second kol nidrei, second megillah, kinnot).
- Providing specific support and advice during services relating to various touch points relevant for women, including:
 - Acting as liaison with the wardens to alert them to women wishing to bensch Gomel (a thanksgiving prayer) and recite Kaddish (mourner's prayer).
 - Offering support and liaising with the wardens regarding the misheberach for cholim (prayer for people who are unwell) particularly when names are recited aloud and need to be conveyed to the wardens).
 - Offering assistance in following the service and orientating women during Kriat HaTorah and Haftarah.
- When women wish to attend weekday services, including when they have a yahrtzeit or are in avelut (mourning), ensuring that there is a mechitzah in place as well as support for females saying Kaddish.
- Where there is a desire within the community and working with the Rabbinic team, to organise approved women-only services and women-only megillah readings.

Lifecycle Events

- As above, assisting women with saying Kaddish, bensching Gomel and misheberach for cholim.
- Providing input and support in planning the ceremonial element of smachot (celebrations) in relation to Bat Mitzvah and Simchat Bat.

Wider Women's Engagement

- To support the rabbinic team on issues that relate to or might affect women.

- To help implement and support US initiatives relating to inclusion and women's engagement
- Be involved in ongoing considerations on the synagogue architecture and layout (not only during property development projects,) as this impacts on women's engagement.

What will the Governance structure be?

The position of Women's Officer is an Honorary Officer position included in the US Byelaws, allowing any community who wishes to introduce the position to do so. It is, however, optional. Each community, therefore, has the flexibility to implement the role in the way that best suits them.

In order to work most effectively within a community context, the Women's Officer should be fully involved in all areas of the leadership structure.

It is proposed that the Women's Officer:

- Be a member of the local HO team.
- Participate in the services committee.
- Participate in the programming/education committee.
- Be part of the committee planning Yamim Noraim (High Holy Days) arrangements and coordination.
- Be the liaison with the central representative for the new role on the Women's subcommittee of the US Trustee board.
- Contribute towards the wider responsibilities of the HO Team. The Women's Officer should be a full member of the HO team and, like other HOs, would have responsibility for all HO matters.

The title given to the role in the Byelaws is 'Women's Officer'. If a community prefers a different, acceptable title, they can use that instead.

Further questions?

If you have any further questions or would like to explore how a Women's Officer could work in your community, please contact: Michelle Bauernfreund at the Office of the Chief Rabbi on michelle@chiefrabbi.org or Jo Grose at the United Synagogue on jgrose@theus.org.uk.