

BISHOP'S DIOCESAN COUNCIL

comprising

**The Bishop's Council and Standing Committee
The Executive of the Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd.
The Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee**

**Draft minutes of the meeting held at the Old Deanery, Exeter
on Saturday 28th January 2023 at 10:00**

Introductory worship

The Bishop of Exeter in the Chair

1. Apologies and Notices

Apologies for absence were received from Anne Foreman, Bob Mills, the Revd. Andy Atkins, Julian Payne, the Revd Peter March and the Very Revd. Jonathan Greener

- Sophie Philips (Net Zero Carbon Officer) and the Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still (Diocesan UKME Adviser) were welcomed to the meeting.
- Item 12 concerning BDC and Synod meeting dates for 2024 and the related paper BDC/09/23 were withdrawn from the agenda. Members were informed that there had been a delay in drafting the dates. The item and paper will go straight to Diocesan Synod in March.

2. Declaration of any actual or potential conflict of interest arising from the agenda or accompanying papers

No declarations of actual or potential conflict of interest were made.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2022 **Paper BDC/01/23**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2022 were approved without amendment.

4. To consider proposals relating to a Rural Strategy for Mission and Ministry **Paper BDC/02/23**

The Ven. Verena Breed, Archdeacon of Barnstaple, located the need for a Rural Strategy in the context of the 'Next Steps' for the Diocesan Vision and Strategy. Setting out a Vision for excellence in Rural Mission and Ministry she noted that there was good reason to be ambitious; enabling rural parishes to thrive, be healthy and grow would lead to the fulfilment of the Diocesan Vision in rural Devon. She then set out evidence concerning the current situation of rural churches and communities, noting the wide range of contexts from deep rural to small towns. Critically, it was suggested that rural ministry was specialist ministry, of a different character and requiring different skills and aptitudes than urban or suburban ministry. Initial

and on-going training therefore needed to be sufficiently context-specific if it was to be effective and sustaining, building confidence and resilience for clergy and laity alike.

The question was then whether there were any 'stepping-stones' missing in diocesan planning and support for rural ministry. Extensive consultation with practitioners had been undertaken and a variety of issues had been identified, which could be categorised under the headings of training, diocesan support and local / peer support. Work relating to these issues would also need a point of co-ordination, as well as some dedicated delivery capacity, and it would be possible for resourcing for this to come from a re-designation of the remainder of the funding approved by Diocesan Synod for the 'Growing the Rural Church' project, which was approaching its conclusion. A range of possible models was described and members were invited to reflect on what they thought might be the best way to proceed.

In discussion, members were keen to emphasise the need for a holistic approach to rural ministry that would concentrate on its long-term sustainability; what needs to happen now in order for rural ministry to be in a better place in 10 or 20 years' time? The desired outcomes would need to be identified, along with the actions necessary to achieve them. The current financial pressures were substantial and unsustainable, as were the training needs and deficits in capacity (both clergy and lay) and the demographic challenges. On the other hand, there were also many examples of innovation and good practice, including those developed through the 'Growing the Rural Church' project.

In developing a strategy, it was thought essential to inhabit the perspectives of the people living and working in the context in question, rather than reading across from one context to another (with it being suggested that the preponderance of national Church of England strategies were written from an urban, even London-centric, perspective). This meant an explicit recognition of rural ecclesiology and the demands of oversight ministry, with clergy posts often being difficult to recruit to. That said, any strategy for rural ministry also needed to intersect effectively not only with 'Next Steps' but also with equivalent strategies for other geographical contexts to be found throughout Devon, such as market towns. It was noted that preparatory work was underway on a strategy for market and coastal towns, and this too would be likely to describe a specialist ministry requiring a bespoke approach and resourcing within the overall diocesan strategy. It was suggested that time needed to be taken now, and if necessary resources invested, to ensure that the strategies were developed together in a coherent and mutually supportive fashion.

It was agreed to ask the Bishop's Strategy Group to do further developmental work and to determine proposals for a way forward. Where relevant these could be brought directly to the March meeting of Diocesan Synod for consideration and approval as appropriate but other strands of thinking might need a longer period of development before they were ready (for example in connecting up with strategies for church planting and revitalisation, market town ministry and urban ministry).

5. To consider a draft Racial Justice Charter, associated Strategy and scheme of amendment to Standing Orders **Paper BDC/03/23**

The Revd. Preb Philip Sourbut, the Director of Mission and Ministry, and the Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, the Diocesan UK Minority Ethnic adviser, introduced the draft Racial Justice Charter and Strategy. The purpose of the former was to set out a rationale for a four-fold commitment to Racial Justice and the latter was a framework for action to translate the rationale and the commitments into sustained action. Inevitably, some elements of the Strategy were within diocesan control and others were only open to its influence. It was of critical

importance, given past experience, that the Strategy contained policies that were dynamic and capable of being developed further in future. There was also a need for an active reporting mechanism, to ensure accountability and to drive delivery.

In discussion members expressed their support for the proposed direction of travel. It was suggested that additions be made to the Strategy in relation to communications and engagement and also to the section on education in terms of the diversity of governance. It was noted that a making provision in relation to one protected characteristic (under the Equality Act 2010) would often generate momentum for change in relation to other such characteristics. On issues of influence (rather than control) it was noted that some partner organisations, such as schools and chaplaincies, might well be in a more advanced place already and therefore in a position to assist. In the context of parishes much would depend on the willingness and capacity of local leadership, both lay and ordained, to engage effectively. It was noted that the Charter and Strategy were aspirational in nature but it was felt important to have worthwhile objectives to aim at; taking action and possibly falling short would produce better outcomes than not making the attempt in the first place. For some members, the level of aspiration could have been set higher, including in respect of the work of the Council.

It was agreed that the Charter and Strategy should proceed to Diocesan Synod, incorporating amendments in the light of the discussion. It was also agreed to add a foreword, setting out for the Synod how the debate would be framed and the importance of accurate and appropriate use of language.

Dr. Ed Moffatt, the Assistant Diocesan Secretary, noted that approval of the Strategy by Diocesan Synod would generate the need for an amendment to Standing Order 72 concerning the membership of the Bishop's Council. Accordingly, a following motion would be needed to give effect to the amendment, to be approved by the Synod immediately after the approval of the Strategy. If the Synod decided not to approve the Strategy, the following motion would fall automatically. Under Standing Order 120, the Bishop's Council was required to "report to the Synod, orally or in writing as it thinks fit, on the implication of each proposed amendment".

In discussion it was suggested that it was important to avoid a 'box-ticking' mentality that might lead to nominated members not having a suitable range of skills or experience. In response, it was noted that this was a permissive measure, giving the Diocesan Bishop sufficient flexibility to increase capacity until the elected and ex-officio membership of the Council was sufficiently diverse. The potential increase in the number of members might make the Council more unwieldy but it should enhance rather than reduce its ability to fulfil its responsibilities.

On this basis members were content to commend the proposed amendments to Standing Order 72 to Diocesan Synod.

6. To consider proposals for a diocesan vision statement for the environment and declaration of a climate emergency, the adoption of a target to reach Net Zero Carbon by 2030, diocesan alignment with the National Routemap and the development of the associated Diocesan Action Plan
Paper BDC/04/23

The Ven. Nick Shutt, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, reminded members of the preparatory discussions that had taken place at the last meeting and noted that work had been undertaken in the intervening period to improve the declarations and statements in the light of the comments received. They were therefore now in their final draft form, for commendation and onward transmission to Diocesan Synod for its

formal approval and adoption. He noted that particularly in respect of the adoption of a target, it was important to remember what was 'in scope' by 2030, including the difference between those things that were within the control of the Diocesan Board of Finance, and those things over which it had influence but that were controlled by other legal bodies (such as PCCs).

In discussion it was noted that the most significant 'in scope' asset for the DBF was clergy housing. Work was underway to assess the resource implications of committing to a net zero target in this area, and it was complicated by legislative uncertainty (for example concerning rented out housing and Energy Performance Certificates, that would need to be addressed regardless because of the potential for negative impacts on an important income stream). There would be national funding support made available but as yet it was unknown how much funding might be provided and what it would be able to be spent on. It was intended to develop a costed approach in time for it to be included as appropriate in the diocesan budget for 2024, to be presented to Diocesan Synod in October 2023.

In respect of issues outside of DBF control, support was expressed for celebrating good news stories, collaboration and other forms of encouragement, in order to influence related parties positively. Church buildings were thought to pose a substantial challenge, given the constraints that apply, but it was noted that overall the majority of church buildings started from a point of having a relatively small carbon footprint. It was not yet clear whether national or diocesan funding might be made available to support actions in relation to church buildings. It was also noted that one of the most important initial influencing actions would be to encourage the use of the Energy Footprint tool, for example by means of providing information to churchwardens at the Archdeacons' Visitations later in 2023.

It was agreed to commend the declarations and statements as set out in Paper BDC/04/23 to Diocesan Synod for its approval.

7. To receive a report of the financial situation at the end of December 2022 **Paper BDC/05/23**

Mr. Neil Williams, the Diocesan Director of Finance, summarised the situation at the end of 2022 and noted that although there had been a significant improvement in comparison to 2021, the position was still behind that of 2019, the last 'pre-pandemic' year. In respect of the Common Fund, it was anticipated that the final position (for accounting purposes as at the end of February) would be a collection rate of around 94%, some 2% (or approximately £180,000) less than budgeted. Anecdotally, the picture was mixed with some parishes showing clear signs of improvement but a small number still to make any contribution. There were, of course, parishes that were struggling to make the full requested contribution and the pandemic-related reduction in the number of participants was placing the scheme of assessment under strain.

More broadly, in spite of the signs of recovery, the overall situation remained challenging, with the combination of the pandemic and cost of living crisis having a detrimental impact on the diocesan budget. Projected annual deficits over the next 3 years remained a significant concern and were not financially sustainable in anything beyond the short term. However, the Parish Giving Scheme in particular had demonstrated its effectiveness in building financial resilience for parishes and the Mission Resources team would continue to encourage its adoption throughout the Diocese. Hardship and energy support grant funding streams had been rolled out rapidly and been well received.

In discussion, the majority of members expressed little enthusiasm for changing the Common Fund scheme of assessment at this point, although there was a small number in favour of a review. It was noted that national data demonstrated that the Diocese of Exeter's financial

recovery from the pandemic was within the top quartile of dioceses. Positive feedback was received on the practice of the Director of Finance going and speaking directly with PCCs; although time-intensive, the perception was that it was the single most effective form of communication when detailed analysis of a parish's circumstances was needed.

8. To approve an amending scheme to bring the parish of Huntshaw into the joint council scheme for the Two Rivers Mission Community **Paper BDC/06/23**

The Ven Verena Breed, Archdeacon of Barnstaple, noted that this was the first occasion on which an amending scheme for a joint council had been brought for approval. Crucially, the scheme did not dissolve the existing council and create a new one; the potential need for amendment had been anticipated in the original scheme and its possibility drafted into the original text. As a result of the amending scheme all of the parishes in the benefice would henceforward participate in the operation of the joint council.

In the absence of any discussion, the amending scheme was approved, to come into effect on 1st February 2023.

9. To agree items for inclusion on the agenda of Diocesan Synod in March 2023

Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary, proposed the following items for inclusion on the agenda of Diocesan Synod at its next meeting on 25th March 2023:

- Minutes of the meeting of 15 October 2022
- Presidential address
- To approve the Diocesan Vision Statement for the Environment, make a declaration of climate emergency and agree to sign the Devon Climate Declaration, adopt a target to achieve Net Zero Carbon by 2030 and approve alignment with the national Routemap to Net Zero Carbon
- To approve the Diocesan Racial Justice Charter and Strategy and consequential scheme to amend Standing Orders
- To receive the annual report of the 'Growing the Rural Church' project
- To give consideration to the development of a Rural Strategy for ministry and mission and proposals to re-purpose the remaining diocesan funding allocated to the 'Growing the Rural Church' project
- To receive an update on developments in the life of the Cathedral
- To receive a presentation relating to Modern Slavery
- To receive the annual report on women in ordained ministry (deferred from October)
- To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches
- To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Board of Education (2021 to 2022)
- To receive a report from General Synod
- To receive meeting dates for Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Diocesan Council for 2024
- Questions

The proposed agenda items were agreed.

Mr. Hancock then set out some ideas that might assist with the conduct of discussion and debate at the Synod. Although these stopped short of requiring the amendment of Standing Orders, it was hoped that the provision of additional guidance and procedural explanation during meetings would provide clarity and enhance members' participation.

Deemed Items

- 10. To receive a report from the Assets Group **Paper BDC/07/23**
- 11. To receive a report from the DBF Standing Committee **Paper BDC/08/23**
- 12. To approve draft meeting dates for 2024 for the Diocesan Synod and BDC **Paper BDC/09/23**

This item and the related Paper BDC/09/23 were withdrawn
- 13. To note documents sealed by the Diocesan Board of Finance **Paper BDC/10/23**
- 14. To note Trusts and funds for investment accepted by, or wound up by, the Diocesan Board of Finance **Paper BDC/11/23**