

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 27th January 2024 at 10:00**

Introductory worship

The Acting Bishop of Exeter in the Chair

1. Apologies and Notices

Apologies for absence were received from the Very Revd. Jonathan Greener, Revd Peter March, Dr. Michael Wykes, the Ven Andrew Beane, the Revd Preb. Mike Partridge and Mr. Nigel Price.

- Mr. Raf Krasnodębski (Diocesan Strategic Programmes Manager) and Mr. Costa Nassaris (Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser) were welcomed to the meeting for items 4 and 7 respectively.
- Members were advised of two forthcoming diocesan events to take place in the Cathedral: 28th April (Creation Care) and 19th May (Thy Kingdom Come).

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 2nd December 2023 **Paper BDC/01/24**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December 2023 were approved without amendment.

4. To give consideration to work leading towards an application to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board and to approve a direction of travel and outline timetable

Mr. Raf Krasnodębski, the Diocesan Strategic Programmes Manager, reminded members of the change in the national strategic funding landscape and noted that there was currently an opportunity to submit an application for funding to support work in market and coastal towns (of which there were more than 30 in the Diocese with a population of over 5000). Any such application would need to be aligned with the national Church of England's vision and strategy and with the Diocesan vision and strategy 'Next Steps'. In particular, it would be essential for the application to have a focus on missional engagement with children and young people. A great deal of preparatory work had been carried out, building the necessary evidence base and considering potential strategic approaches. As with all such previous applications, demanding outcome targets would need to be set as part of the application and there would inevitably be both synergies and tensions with other areas of activity and resource streams, especially in the

context of needing to make expenditure reductions to address the deficit in the diocesan budget. It was anticipated that it might be possible to apply for funding in the region of £3m over a project period of around 6 years.

Mr. Krasnodębski noted that although the strategy needed to be comprehensive, the application could concentrate on a smaller number of locations of key strategic importance that were particularly strong candidates for investment. One idea under consideration was a community chaplaincy approach that would work to connect homes, schools and church communities and engage missionally with children and young people in a co-ordinated fashion in each of those contexts. Each community chaplaincy team would be tasked with working with local churches to enhance points of contact and sustain engagement in a way that would work with the grain of the parish's own missional impetus.

The Ven Verena Breed, the Archdeacon of Barnstaple, noted that at present there was no opportunity to make an application to support work in rural areas but that in considering an application for market and coastal towns, it was important to set them in their wider rural context. There was a clear need to take a holistic approach, sensitive to the inter-relationship between them. She also noted that, as previously agreed by Diocesan Synod, work was proceeding to appoint a part-time Diocesan Rural Officer, embedded in a rural parish in North Devon, and it was hoped that this would act as a pilot project that would prepare the ground for a future strategic funding application with a rural focus.

Members were invited to discuss around tables and feedback in plenary. The following comments were made: Overall members were supportive of the submission of an application with a focus on market and coastal towns in support of the delivery of the Diocesan vision and strategy. There was ready acceptance of the proposed focus on children and young people in their different social contexts, which also implied engagement with their families, schools (and their governing Multi-Academy Trusts) and church communities. The attitude and enthusiasm of the 'host' churches and schools would be a critical factor in enabling a project to thrive, to the extent that it would be a less effective use of the resources to invest in locations where proactive engagement and leadership was absent. Church communities and their leaders (and schools and their leaders) could be faced with the need to make significant changes to their existing ways of being in order to enable the success of the projects; some investment might be needed up front to promote culture change.

Support was expressed for the community chaplaincy model but it was acknowledged that it could only operate in partnership, which meant that the relationship between the projects and the existing organisations needed to be clear and mutually supportive. There were different views on the extent to which the projects should engage with the rural communities that related to the towns; for some this was a necessary acknowledgement of their inter-connected nature and for others it represented a risk of losing focus on the primary objectives. It was noted that the chaplaincy would need to demonstrate flexibility to meet the challenges of their specific local contexts and also sensitivity to the different ages and developmental stages of children and young people; existing links tended to be stronger and easier to sustain in the primary schools (and children of primary school age) than secondary schools.

Members acknowledged that planning was still at a formative stage but also noted that more information would support effective decision making. In particular there were questions about the constraints on funding, the continuity and sustaining of the work beyond the project term and potential difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced professionals that could not be answered at this stage. Concern was expressed that the opportunity for receiving funding should neither drive the strategy nor should it generate ways of working that were disconnected from other outreach work in mission communities. That said, it was also felt that

there was a pressing need to make significant progress and that an application of this type was one realistic and achievable way of seeking to improve outcomes in line with 'Next Steps'.

The Acting Bishop of Exeter thanked members for their extensive input and noted that the proposed application would continue to be developed. In due course a decision would be made about when to make a submission; a more fully developed proposal would then be brought forward for consideration and determination in line with that timetable.

5. To review the implementation of the Diocesan Racial Justice Strategy **Paper BDC/02/24**

The Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, the Diocesan UKME Adviser, reminded members of the process that had led to the adoption of the Diocesan Racial Justice Charter and Strategy in March 2023. She noted that the Strategy had identified four priority areas for action: participation, education, training & mentoring, and history & memory. Of the progress made in implementation so far, the focus had been on the participation strand. Actions had been taken to address UKME under-representation on the BDC, for example, but it remained the case that the relative lack of data collection and monitoring was hampering the compiling of evidence to support the need for further change. Furthermore, there was an opportunity to invest in Unconscious Bias Training or Anti-Racism Training, but again the evidence was lacking as to which would be more appropriate and for which groups of decision makers. Finally, it was noted that there was a lack of capacity to proceed with priority actions. Apparently, it is now possible to apply for national funding to support an appointment and that this could be done in partnership with another Diocese. The additional capacity and expertise would enable more significant and rapid progress.

In discussion members gave consideration to which sorts of training would be most useful, the most critical groups to invite (e.g. those involved in parochial appointments processes) and the most appropriate and effective modes of delivery (in person, remote or on-line training materials); members suggested that some form of interaction would be important because there would be a need to engage with attitudes and behaviours and not just provide straightforward information. It was noted that the Diocesan Racial Justice Strategy was not currently on the Diocesan Website and that this needed to be addressed. Suggestions previously made at Diocesan Synod to simplify the language of the Racial Justice Strategy and to seek to learn from Local Authorities in Devon had yet to be actioned. It was suggested that advice could be sought from a neighbouring diocese who are in the process of receiving funding and appointing a Racial Justice Officer

It was agreed that in respect of the recommendations for priority actions, the training element should be progressed in as far as it was possible at this time (working in conjunction with the Department for Mission and Ministry and also the People Services Team). Furthermore, a proposal for the funding and appointment of a Racial Justice Officer should be considered. The question around enhancing data collection and analysis required further thought; a temporary solution might be considered for the period until a Racial Justice Officer was in position to provide additional capacity.

6. To consider the draft Diocesan Environment Policy **Paper BDC/03/24**

The Ven Jane Bakker, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Environment Working Group, noted that the Diocesan Synod had previously taken some major decisions concerning the commitment to seek to reach Net-Zero Carbon by 2030, the declaration of a climate emergency and other major strategic initiatives. As a result, a substantial amount of work was being

undertaken, for example to deliver the Net Zero Carbon Action Plan. However, thus far the Synod had yet to adopt an over-arching environmental policy for the Diocese, that would act as an instrument for co-ordinating all of the related workstreams. It was also a pre-requisite for an application to be recognised as an Eco-Diocese. The draft policy did not imply or propose any additional work to that already being undertaken.

In discussion members noted that, as with the target for Net Zero Carbon, there were areas and activities that were under the direct control of the Diocesan Board of Finance and others that were under the control of a different responsible body but that might reasonably be influenced. Parishes, church schools and the Cathedral, amongst others, would all need to determine their own environment policies and to agree actions arising. A template parish environment policy was requested. It was suggested that such a policy should be supported with some advice on how to deal with difficult local scenarios (such as when there is a clash between such a policy and a contradictory need – for example in relation to a decision to replace a time-expired environmentally-unfriendly boiler with an alternative energy source).

It was agreed to forward the draft Diocesan Environment Policy to Diocesan Synod for approval, supported with additional guidance on issues raised by members.

7. To review the Diocesan Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse policies Paper BDC/04/24

Mr. Costa Nassaris, the Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, introduced the triennial review of the Diocesan Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse policy statements. He noted that there were no substantive changes that needed to be made at this point (although the opportunity had been taken to make some minor textual amendments and update the Foreword). He further noted that there was the prospect of significant change to the statements being required in the relatively near future, but on a timescale that was yet to be determined. In this regard he noted the conclusion of the Pathfinder project (which might lead to the embedding of Regional Safeguarding Leads throughout the country), emerging new national standards and guidance, the adoption of a new safeguarding database and the impact of a national review of safeguarding (led by Professor Jay). A further review of the diocesan policy statements would therefore probably need to take place before the occasion of the next regular triennial review.

In discussion members sought clarification on arrangements for alternative approaches to training when there was the potential for an attendee to find the experience (re-)traumatising and for support to and monitoring of Parish Safeguarding Officers (PSOs). It was noted that support was also made available to parish clergy during PSO vacancies, and to PSOs and churchwardens during an incumbent vacancy.

It was agreed to transfer the policy statements to Diocesan Synod for approval.

8. To consider the DBF risk register Paper BDC/05/24

Mr. Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, noted that the Assets Group had reviewed the whole of the Risk Register in December 2023. The role of the Council was to consider the most significant risks as set out in the accompanying paper and to note their potential impact, including once remedial actions had been taken.

In discussion, members noted a small improvement in the attendance and participation data, recovering in part from substantial reductions during the period of the coronavirus pandemic. This was thought to be an uncertain and uneven process, and in any case was unlikely to have a

positive impact on the Common Fund in the short term. However, from the perspective of directors of the company and trustees of the charity, concerns were expressed that any recovery in participation was clearly insufficient to address the budgetary deficit that had emerged during the pandemic and was anticipated to persist into 2025 and beyond; as general reserves were decreasing, more urgent interventions to reduce expenditure would be needed to address the situation. Also noted was the increasing risk associated with church buildings no longer being able to be supported locally, for reasons to do with financial pressures and governance failure. Staffing reductions (for example resulting from the conclusion of the 'Growing the Rural Church' project) meant that there was relatively little central support available to parishes in this area. Furthermore, a concern was expressed that the language used to describe the risk associated with 'Living with Love and Faith' was insufficiently neutral. Finally, clarification was requested in relation to risks that were primarily the responsibility of other organisations (for example, Multi-Academy Trusts); it was noted that a direct risk for one organisation could pose a substantial indirect risk for another (particularly in reputational or wider strategic terms).

Mr. Frampton noted that the purpose of the document was to identify and quantify risks and to provide an opportunity for them to be noted. Remedial actions were already being undertaken but this could not mean that the risks themselves had been, or necessarily could be, resolved given the actions that were realistically available.

The register was noted with a recommendation to the Assets Group that it give further consideration to the neutrality of the language used in the report and also to presentation of risks that might be understood to lie, primarily, with another responsible body.

9. To approve schemes of representation on the Plymouth City deanery synod for the church plants that make up the 'Plymouth Partnership in Mission' **Paper BDC/06/24**

The Ven Jane Bakker, Archdeacon of Plymouth, introduced the schemes of representation under Church Representation Rule 24 for the Plymouth Partnership in Mission. She set the schemes in the context of the history of the Mission Initiatives and consideration currently been given to their future organisation.

In discussion members asked about the recording of attendance and participation statistics in the Mission Initiatives and also about the payment of Common Fund. Members were reminded that the church plants were not themselves resource churches but community churches in deprived areas. While receiving support from the Strategic Development Fund, they would not pay Common Fund contributions but they would start to do so, on a phased basis, once the external funding had concluded. It was noted that there was no connection between the payment of Common Fund and synodical representation, although the view was expressed that this would be the ideal.

The schemes were approved for forwarding to Diocesan Synod.

10. To agree items for inclusion on the agenda of Diocesan Synod in March 2025

Dr Ed Moffatt, the Assistant Diocesan Secretary, proposed the following items for inclusion on the agenda of Diocesan Synod at its next meeting on 16th March 2024:

- Minutes of the previous meeting
- Presidential address
- To approve the Diocesan Environment Policy

- To receive report on a submission to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board
- To approve schemes of representation for Plymouth Partnership in Mission
- To receive a report on the implementation of the Diocesan Racial Justice Strategy
- To review the Diocesan Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse Policy Statements
- 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 Committee
- To receive a report from General Synod (November and February)
- To receive an update on elections taking place in 2024
- To receive meeting dates for Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Diocesan Council for 2025
- Questions

In discussion members suggested that the Synod be provided with an update on the work of the Crown Nominations Commission and also that the items on elections be expanded to address wider issues of representation, vacancy rates and engagement.

The proposed agenda items were agreed.

Deemed Items

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| 11. | To receive a report from the Assets Group | Paper BDC/07/24 |
| 12. | To receive a report from the DBF Standing Committee | Paper BDC/08/24 |
| 13. | To receive a report of the financial situation at the end of December 2023 | Paper BDC/09/24 |
| 14. | To approve draft meeting dates for 2025 for the Diocesan Synod and BDC | Paper BDC/10/24 |
| 15. | To note documents sealed by the Diocesan Board of Finance | Paper BDC/11/24 |
| 16. | To note Trusts and funds for investment accepted by, or wound up by, the Diocesan Board of Finance | Paper BDC/12/24 |