

DIOCESE OF EXETER

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 Thursday 30th November 2024 at 10.00**

Introductory Worship

The Bishop of Exeter in the chair

1. Apologies and Notices

- Apologies were received from the Revd. Canon Mike Williams, the Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, Mrs. Laura Ford, Dr Michael Wykes, Mr. Stephen Macey, the Revd. Ed Hobbs, the Revd. Preb. Mike Partridge and Mr. Keith Rushforth.
- At the final meeting of the triennium, departing members (the Revd. Ed Hobbs, Mr. Keith Rushforth and Mrs Anne Foreman) were thanked for their service.
- Dr. Kerry Gilbert was welcomed to her first meeting as the new Chair of the House of Laity

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. It was noted that the Right Revd. Jackie Searle, Bishop of Crediton, would leave the meeting for the duration of item 4.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2024 **Paper BDC/42/24**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12th September 2024 were approved without amendment.

4. To approve and endorse an application to the Dioceses Commission for the appointment of a Bishop of Crediton **Paper BDC/43/24**

The Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter, introduced the draft application to the Dioceses Commission and set out the timetable that applied for it to be considered at the Commission's next meeting on 11th December. He then noted the informal consultation process that had been undertaken with Council members before the submission of the application on 27th November and also described the wider consultation process that had been undertaken with licensed clergy, LLMs, churchwardens and others. In both cases about 80% of respondents had been supportive of the application. The Council therefore now had the opportunity to review the application and to approve and endorse its submission; if approval were not to be forthcoming, the application could be withdrawn before the Commission's meeting.

In discussion strong support was expressed for seeking the appointment of a Bishop of Crediton. It was noted that there had been relatively rapid turn over in the holders of the post over the last 20 years and that there was a need for stability and continuity in the strategic leadership of the suffragan area. The diocesan and national contexts were also thought to be particularly challenging, with no scope for a reduction in the capacity of strategic leadership in the Diocese. The sustainability of the organisational model on which the Diocese operated had relied, and in all estimations would continue to lie, in the filling of the three episcopal posts.

In terms of the timing, close consideration was given as to whether there might be an advantage in delaying the application. The potential perceived benefits were largely political in nature (for example, allowing current national controversies to subside and showing parishes in vacancy that an equivalent process applied to episcopal appointments). However, it was noted that even a prompt application would likely result in a vacancy period of some months duration. Moreover, the recent vacancy in the diocesan see had occasioned a period of increased pressure for all of the Bishop's Staff, and a second extended period of vacancy in the suffragan area would place excessive and potentially unsustainable demands on the Bishop of Plymouth and the Archdeacons of Exeter and Barnstaple in particular. Other strategic considerations (for example the submission of an application to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board, as well as the outworking of the Plymouth Review) meant that additional commitments were already 'baked in' in addition to standard responsibilities.

The following motion was then moved:

'This Bishop's Council, noting the impending vacancy in the Suffragan See of Crediton, subsequent upon the retirement of the Right Reverend Jackie Searle, wishes the See to be filled and an approach made to the Dioceses' Commission making the case for a speedy appointment.'

The motion was put to the vote and passed unanimously.

5. To give consideration to a possible motion at Diocesan Synod for transmission to the General Synod arising from the national review of diocesan finances **Paper BDC/44/24**

Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary, introduced the motion that was under consideration and described the process by which it had come into being on the back of financial challenges currently being experienced by the large majority of dioceses throughout the Church of England. He noted that phase one of the national review of diocesan finances, which had enumerated and confirmed the scale of the challenge, had been completed and that phase two, seeking ways to address the challenge (both in terms of simplification and of the provision of additional support), was in train. The intention of the motion was directly to address the second part of the challenge, seeking to re-balance the national church economy by viring financial support into Diocesan Stipends Funds, from which parochial ministry could be sustained and enhanced. It was important in this context to understand that the proposal was for a generational settlement (rather than a short 3- or 5-year funding term); the last such settlement in 1997 had involved the transfer of substantial resources from dioceses (and by extension parishes) to the national church. This approach had, if anything been too successful, and as a result the Church Commissioners were now in a position of great financial strength, much more so than the dioceses and parishes that had borne the additional financial responsibilities and burdens for more than 25 years.

Mr. Hancock noted that ten Diocesan Synods had already passed a motion in similar terms and a significant number more were in process towards that end. The aim was to seek

consideration of the motion at General Synod, supported by as many dioceses as possible, as quickly as possible. Legal, financial and actuarial advice was being obtained in order that all of the necessary information would be ready in good time for the General Synod's consideration of the motion.

Mr. Giles Frampton, the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, noted that the total amount being sought (£2.6bn of the Church Commissioners total assets of around £10bn) was roughly equivalent to the increase in those assets since the start of the coronavirus pandemic. The Commissioners' Unapplied Total Return was in the region of £6bn and current annual distributions were in the range of 2 – 3%.

In discussion support was expressed for continuing to progress work on bringing a motion to Diocesan Synod in the terms described in the paper for transmitting to the General Synod. It was felt that there had hitherto been plenty of opportunity for the development of a joint approach involving all parties but that the concerns of dioceses, for themselves and their parishes, were largely being ignored and dismissed. A solution was needed to re-establish the primacy of an Anglican theology and ecclesiology in the use and deployment of its collective resources. Support was also expressed for taking a collective approach with other dioceses in order to secure a long-term and genuinely sustainable settlement with ownership and management located in the dioceses rather than in the national Church. It was noted that it would be difficult to manage expectations in parishes and there was a risk of confused messaging in the diocesan context of on-going budget reductions, particularly throughout 2025 and in all likelihood beyond. However, it was thought that on balance the potential benefits of pursuing the motion would out-weigh the risks, especially if the latter could be mitigated, for example by means of a communications and information campaign. It was also noted that a great deal of joint working would be needed (with General Synod representatives, the Business Committee of the General Synod and other stakeholders).

Members also commented on a sense of profound disconnection and lack of trust between the national Church on the one hand and dioceses and parishes on the other. It was thought that a culture of centralised control had grown up over recent years that disabled the local church in discharging its own responsibilities, for example in relation to the cure of souls for the whole population of a diocese. A reparational settlement marked with generosity could do much to reset relationships and re-establish trust; it might also trigger local responses characterised by that same spirit of generosity.

It was agreed that further work be undertaken with a view to bringing proposals to the next meeting for a motion to be included on the agenda of the Diocesan Synod at its meeting on 22nd March 2025.

6. To approve a revised Diocesan Giving Strategy

Paper BDC/45/24

Mrs Brigit Kiyaga, the Diocesan Mission Resources Adviser, and Mr. Phil Whitlock, the Mission Resources Project Officer, set out the process that underpinned the production of the new Diocesan Giving Strategy. A consultation exercise had been undertaken that had highlighted the need for effective and varied communication, resources for fostering community spirit and a range of opportunities to enable digital giving.

Looking back to the implementation of the previous strategy, it was notable, and consistent with both other dioceses and charities more generally, that the number of donors in the Diocese had fallen but that individual giving was continuing to rise, in spite of the difficult financial context. The Parish Giving Scheme continued to prove effective for those parishes that

adopted it, but the rate of take up was falling. The roll out of digital giving had made a good start and parishes had been supported effectively with information and practical support. Lots of teaching materials had been made available and training opportunities provided.

Looking forwards the revised strategy set out 7 priorities: equipping local leaders, provision of and signposting to a wide range of resources for different contexts, personalisation of communication, on-going promotion and roll-out of digital giving, a renewed focus on extending the reach of the Parish Giving Scheme, supporting gifts in wills, and supporting fund-raising and grant applications.

In discussion, members expressed appreciation for the breadth of the report, including the analysis of the implementation of the previous Giving Strategy, and also support for the emerging priorities as set out in the revised Strategy. It was suggested that good progress was being made in a number of areas (for example in enabling digital giving and in supporting grant applications) but there remained some long-term challenges (such as enabling local leadership and teaching on the subject of finance and giving). Communications was thought to be the key challenge and theme; different forms of communication in different registers with different target audiences would help to encourage engagement and responsiveness. It was suggested that a more explicit line needed to be drawn between generous giving and intended impact, using some of the techniques deployed in other parts of the charitable sector.

The Diocesan Giving Strategy, as set out in Paper BDC/45/24, was approved by general assent.

7. To receive the annual report of the Environment Working Group and an update on progress towards Net Zero Carbon **Paper BDC/46/24**

The Ven Jane Bakker, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Environment Working Group (EWG), introduced the Group's annual report and reflected on elements of positive progress achieved during the course of the year as well as on the substantial impact of an extended vacancy in the role of Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Officer, occasioned by the DBF's recruitment freeze. In spite of support from the Creation Care Officer, the Church Buildings Officers and staff in the Property Services Department, it was clear that a number of areas of activity had reduced significantly or ceased entirely (for example the roll out of the Energy Footprint Tool). Since the drafting of the report, the Board's Standing Committee had agreed to the post being released, subject to securing sufficient national funding. Inevitably, even assuming it was possible to make a suitable appointment, it would take substantially more work and time to return to making progress across the board. It was notable that national church grant funding streams were operating with varying degrees of success but that there remained relatively little clarity about how they would gear up in future (anticipated from 2026 onwards) to enable more extensive projects to be undertaken on clergy housing and church buildings.

In discussion it was noted that the Energy Footprint Tool was thought to be complicated, difficult to work with and particularly inflexible if a full data record was not available to be inputted. For parish churches without their own capacity and expertise, and additionally without central support, it was easy to see why they would choose not to complete the process.

8. To approve revised Terms of Reference for the Church Buildings and Strategy Committee **Paper BDC/47/24**

The Ven Andrew Beane, Archdeacon of Exeter and Deputy Chair of the Church Buildings Strategy Committee (CBSC), introduced the work of the committee and described its statutory and other responsibilities as expressed in its terms of reference. The Committee had submitted revised terms of reference for consideration and approval but had subsequently decided to extend the process of reflection and review and to postpone its request for approval. Instead, it requested feedback on proposals outside of the meeting, with a view to bringing a further revision for approval at a later date.

In the absence of any discussion, it was agreed to postpone approval of the revised CBSC terms of reference until a future meeting.

9. To approve a Joint Council scheme for the parishes of St Matthew and St Sidwell, Exeter and St Andrew, Exwick **Paper BDC/48/24**

The Ven Andrew Beane, Archdeacon of Exeter, introduced the full transfer Joint Council Scheme for approval under Church Representation Rule M42. In particular he noted that this was the first Joint Council in the Diocese that had emerged from the process of a Resource Church seeking to revitalise mission and ministry with a smaller suburban church. It was hoped that streamlined governance arrangements, which had been developed and agreed by both parishes working together, would release resources and capacity into renewed community life and growth.

In the absence of any discussion, the Joint Council scheme for the parishes of St Matthew and St Sidwell, Exeter and St Andrew, Exwick, as set out in Paper BDC/48/24, was approved.

10. To receive a report on the results of elections to the Vacancy in See Committee, to elect a Chair and to note the process for making additional appointments **Paper BDC/49/24**

Dr. Ed Moffatt, the Head of Governance, reported the recent outcome of a casual lay election to the General Synod and noted its impact on the membership of the Vacancy in See Committee (ViSC) for 2025 - 2027. He also noted that a nomination process had been carried out for the Chair of the ViSC; one member of the committee, the Ven. Andrew Beane, had been duly nominated and was therefore declared elected. It was also proposed and agreed that Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary, be appointed as Secretary of the Committee. Finally, he noted that the Bishop's Council was empowered nominate up to four members of the committee, in order to address any imbalance in the membership, should it wish to do so.

In discussion support was expressed for making further appointments to the Committee, to address absences and imbalances in its membership. It was suggested that members should give particular consideration to identifying potential members who would bring representative breadth in terms of geography, theology, race, gender and age.

It was agreed that appointments would be made to the ViSC at the Council's next meeting.

Deemed Items

11. To receive an update on Common Fund received for the year to date **Paper BDC/50/24**
12. DMPC Secretary's report **Paper BDC/51/24**

13. To receive a report from the Assets Group **Paper BDC/52/24**
14. To receive a report from the DBF Standing Committee **Paper BDC/53/24**
15. To receive a report on the results of elections to the Bishop's Diocesan Council, Vacancy in See Committee, Archidiaconal Mission and Pastoral Committees and the Diocesan Board of Patronage **Paper BDC/54/24**
16. To receive an update on operational reporting **Paper BDC/55/24**