

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 25th January 2025 at 10.00**

Attendance: The Right Revd Dr Mike Harrison, The Right Revd James Grier, The Ven. Andrew Beane, The Ven. Douglas Dettmer, The Ven. Verena Breed, The Ven. Jane Bakker, The Very Revd Jonathan Greener, Mr Giles Frampton, The Revd Preb. Michael Partridge, Dr Kerry Gilbert, Mr Bob Mills, The Revd Canon Dr Mike Williams, Mrs Laura Ford, The Revd Preb. Samantha Stayte, The Revd Deborah Leighton Plom, Mr Richard Buzzacott, Dr Jennie Golding, Sir James Burnell-Nugent, The Revd Preb. Rosie Austin, Mr Nigel Price, Mr Mike Jefferies, Mrs Annie Jefferies

Introductory Worship

The Bishop of Exeter in the Chair

I. Apologies and Notices

Apologies for absence were received from Dr. Michael Wykes, the Revd Peter March, Dr. Lystra Hagley-Dickinson, the Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still and Mr Stephen Macey.

- The following new members were welcomed to their first meeting: Dr Jennie Golding, the Revd Deborah Leighton Plom, Mr. Richard Buzzacott and Sir James Burnell-Nugent. Mrs. Annie Jefferies was also welcomed back in her new capacity as a lay representative of Plymouth Archdeaconry.
- Also welcomed to the meeting was Mr. Steve White, independent chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel for the item on the safeguarding audit recommendations.
- It was noted that, in the absence of the Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, the annual report on the implementation of the Diocesan Racial Justice Strategy had been deferred.
- A short additional item to make a nomination to the Assets Group was added to the agenda, supported by a tabled paper.

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

No declarations of actual or potential conflicts of interest arising from the agenda were made.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2024 **Paper BDC/01/25**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30th November 2024 were approved without amendment.

4. The Diocesan Vision and Strategy: Next Steps

Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary, reminded members of the process behind the adoption and on-going development of the Diocesan Vision and Strategy, including the associated consultation process and the key work streams that had emerged as a consequence.

At previous stages, the delivery of the Strategy had been supported by national grant funding for localised interventions in urban areas, as well as additional stipendiary training curacies. More recently, the national grant funding stream had been renewed with a wider remit that was more responsive to the wider diocesan context. Extensive conversations were on-going as a pre-cursor to seeking additional grant funding, with there being an aspiration to submit an application during 2025. This would be expected to be in close conformity with the Diocese's Vision and Strategy, as well as the Church of England's Vision and Strategy to 2030.

The Right Revd. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter, noting the importance and embeddedness of the Diocesan Vision Statement ('Grow in prayer, make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy') then set out five strategic principles that he intended to focus on in order to see the Vision and Strategy implemented. As a consequence, they would also provide the framework for any national funding application, which if successful could allow the principles to be implemented at scale:

- Missional Leadership
- Missional DNA
- Vocations
- Children and young people
- Mixed ecology

Each of the principles were then broken down into specific initiatives or areas of activity that would create favourable conditions for growth to take place.

In discussion clarification was sought on the quantum of funding that might potentially be available. In response it was noted that there was some uncertainty but indicatively the figure might be £25-30m over 9 years as awards had recently been made to other dioceses at this level. The management and reporting requirements would be extensive and would have to be resourced. It was also noted that where there were opportunities for cross-diocesan working and if the funding arrangements permitted it, a co-ordinated regional or sub-regional approach could bring additional benefits. A question was raised about whether there was a need for a pilot scheme in respect of the proposals relating to focal ministry and in response it was noted that the full scheme could not conceivably be ready to proceed in the current calendar year (whereas the pilot scheme could) and in addition external resources to support the scheme would not become available until 2026.

5. To receive the Bishop's nominations for the triennium

The Right Revd. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter, noted the provisions within Standing Order 72 for the President of the Synod to nominate members to the Bishop's Council. Accordingly, he nominated the following people to serve in this capacity for the 2025 – 2027 triennium: Mr Bob Mills, The Revd. Canon Mike Williams, The Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, Mrs. Laura Ford, The Revd. Preb. Samantha Stayte, Dr. Lystra Hagley-Dickinson and Dr. Michael Wykes. He noted that there remained one vacancy for a nominated member.

6. To appoint the vice chairs of the Diocesan Board of Finance

Mr. Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, noted that under Article of Association 55, the directors of the Board 'may [...] appoint from amongst their number one or more vice chairmen of the Executive' and that it was the Board's custom to appoint one lay vice chair and one clergy vice chair. Accordingly, he nominated Mr. Bob Mills to be the lay vice Chair and the Revd. Canon Mike Williams to be the clergy vice chair.

In the absence of any discussion the appointments were duly made.

7. To appoint the Standing Committee of Diocesan Board of Finance and to review its terms of reference **Paper BDC/02/25**

Mr. Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, presented the proposed membership of the Standing Committee of the Diocesan Board of Finance for the next 3 years and described the Committee's primary functions, including confidential and urgent matters as well as individual employment issues. He noted that the Committee had recently reviewed its terms of reference.

In the absence of any discussion the proposed appointments and the Committee's terms of reference were confirmed.

8. To appoint members of Archidiaconal Mission and Pastoral Committees **Paper BDC/03/25**

The Ven. Douglas Dettmer, Archdeacon of Totnes, reminded members of the functions and membership of the Archidiaconal Mission and Pastoral Committees (AMPCs) and in particular the provision of one representative from among the elected members of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee to each of the AMPCs. Accordingly, it was proposed that:

- The Revd Preb. Rosie Austin be appointed DMPC Representative to the Barnstaple AMPC;
- The Revd Deborah Leighton Plom be appointed DMPC Representative to the Exeter AMPC;
- Mr Mike Jefferies be appointed DMPC Representative to the Plymouth AMPC;
- Sir James Burnell-Nugent be appointed DMPC Representative to the Totnes AMPC.

The Archdeacon of Exeter also proposed Mr Richard Buzzacott as one of his nominees to the Exeter AMPC.

In the absence of any discussion the appointments were agreed.

9. To consider the membership and functions of, and to nominate members to, the Church Buildings Strategy Committee **Paper BDC/04/25**

Mrs. Laura Ford, Chair of the Church Buildings Strategy Committee, noted that the Committee was a sub-committee of Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee (DMPC) with two main functions as set out under its governing measure: to maintain an overview of matters relating to church buildings in the diocese and their use and to make every endeavour to find a suitable alternative use for churches which are proposed to be closed for public worship. Hitherto, casework relating to the second of the functions had dominated the Committee's work and the Committee was considering how the imbalance might best be addressed. It was intended to return with amendments to the Committee's terms of reference in the near future, with the expectation that it would be possible to develop an over-arching strategy for church buildings in the Diocese that would relate closely to the Diocesan Vision and Strategy. The Committee was also seeking a closer reporting relationship with the DMPC.

Mrs. Ford then requested that Mr. John Scott, Chair of the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches, be nominated to the Committee. This would help to strengthen the relationship between the two bodies as they discharge their respective functions.

Mr. Scott was accordingly appointed to the Church Buildings Strategy Committee.

10. To receive an overview of the recommendations of the INEQE safeguarding audit and to consider any urgent issues arising **Paper BDC/05/25**

Mr. Steve White, independent Chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP), reminded members about the external audit process of the Diocese's safeguarding operation, undertaken by INEQE. The outcome of the audit had been broadly positive and encouraging but there were nevertheless a substantial number of recommendations arising to consider and respond to. DSAP had decided to prioritise the recommendations, seeking to control the highest risks as the first priority for action, and thereby to manage the implementation process in an orderly manner. Neither were all of the recommendations able to be implemented unilaterally; some had regional or national elements that required wider co-ordination. Some recommendations were already being acted on (including seeking to appoint an additional member of staff to the safeguarding team, in order to increase capacity) and DSAP would discuss the highest priority recommendations at its next full meeting in March. This would include those relating to governance, to which the Council would need to give its attention at a future meeting. DSAP would need to focus on the recommendations over the next 12 months and thereafter would engage methodically with the 5 national safeguarding standards.

In discussion, it was noted that the implementation of the recommendations arising from the audit would need to take place alongside the existing full range of operational requirements including the provision of safeguarding training and casework management. Some concern was expressed at the structural division in the responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report and it was noted that the clarity and nature of the relationships between DSAP, the Diocesan Bishop and the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral would be a critical factor. It was also noted that in respect of some of the recommendations (e.g. 22 – 24), the issue was less to do with whether particular actions were being carried out and more to do with the delivery model.

Mr. White then noted that nationally the ramifications of the publication of the Makin Report were driving the consideration of how best to implement the recommendations relating to safeguarding in the Church of England as a whole, previously made by Professor Jay. Options would be put to the General Synod in February for decision and the outcome of the debate would have major implications for the delivery of safeguarding operations in dioceses. DSAP's preference was for a structural model that introduced fully independent oversight but retained local operational control (known as Option 3) but it acknowledged arguments both ways. Whatever the outcome, the significant legislative and operational change would result.

In discussion, on balance members expressed a preference for Option 3 over Option 4. However, it was noted that other factors, including the high degree of external interest in the decision, could easily lead to a different outcome. It was noted that the reputational damage that had been sustained from the publication of the Makin Report (and the failures identified within it) was very substantial and this was having a negative impact on the ground.

Finally, the Diocese's representatives on the General Synod would be offered briefings ahead of the debate including in respect of their legal responsibilities (as recently expressed in a letter from the Charity Commission). This would include the potential pros and cons of the various options available but the Council decided not to advocate for a particular outcome.

11. To give consideration to a motion to Diocesan Synod arising from the national review of diocesan finances

Paper BDC/06/25

Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary, reminded members of their previous discussion of the possibility of promoting, along with other dioceses, a motion to the General Synod to address the national funding settlement between dioceses and the national Church of England. He noted that events had moved faster than originally anticipated and the General Synod was

now scheduled to debate the motion at its February 2025 Group of Sessions (7 other diocesan synods already having passed it). In this context, there could be value in the Council having decided to schedule a debate of the motion at the next meeting of the Exeter Diocesan Synod, with a recommendation from the Council that it be passed; this then could act as a 'steer' to the Diocese's representatives on the General Synod who would be able to speak to the direction of travel in the Diocese and, if they were willing, to vote accordingly.

In discussion, members noted with regret some of the theological and cultural aspects of the situation as it currently stood; for example, the dynamics and transfer of power away from dioceses and parishes (and consequent supplication to a central church authority to access resources), the competitive nature of the strategic grant funding processes, the resource-intensive nature of the application processes and the constraints exercised nationally on the purposes to which such funding could be put. It was thought that the national culture of control was impeding the sustainability of the local church and significantly compromising the 'cure of souls' as it needed to be articulated differently in different contexts. A concern was expressed with the part of the motion that specified the Diocesan Stipends Funds as the appropriate recipients of the transferred funding, in part because of the way in which that would determine the purposes to which the funding could be put, in part because of the apparent under-performance of Diocesan Stipends Funds in investment terms in some dioceses, and in part because dividing the investment 'pot' could result in reduced investment performance. It was suggested that an alternative might be to increase the quantum of formula funding (such as Lowest Income Communities funding) to be transferred directly from national funds to qualifying parishes.

It was agreed to schedule the debate of the motion at Diocesan Synod with a recommendation that it be passed. It was also agreed to ask the Diocese's representatives on the General Synod to express support for the motion on the Council's behalf (with possible amendments to the motion in respect of sustaining existing investment performance and the mechanism of transfer to be determined on their merits). It was suggested that any counter-proposal to increase the amount of funding made available by application (to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board or equivalent) be resisted.

12. To give consideration to a consultation on the Common Fund scheme of assessment

Paper BDC/07/25

Mr. Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, reminded members that the last time that the Common Fund scheme of assessment had been reviewed had been more than 5 years ago, before all of the changes occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic and other macroeconomic shocks. That consultation had led to some relatively minor changes to the existing scheme, which continued to function satisfactorily but was not without difficulties. He noted that a new consultation would require resourcing (particularly in terms of staff time) at a point when there were many other priorities to be pursued and a view would need to be taken as to whether an improved collection rate was realistically achievable with a different scheme. There were also a number of other external factors that the evidence suggested could have a greater impact on EDBF finances than a change in the scheme of assessment (including the national funding arrangements following the Diocesan Finances Review, and possible structural and funding reforms resulting from the implementation of arrangements arising from 'Living in Love and Faith').

Mr. Neil Williams, the Diocesan Director of Finance, described some of the difficulties with the existing scheme, most of which related to the appropriateness of the use of the 'participants number' as a proxy for parish wealth and also the complexity of its calculation. One clearly identifiable issue was that the Common Fund itself remained poorly understood in parishes,

and the nature of the scheme of assessment appeared to be exacerbating that lack of understanding. High quality, personal, face to face communication was the key driver of improved understanding, whichever scheme of assessment was in operation.

In discussion it was suggested that one opportunity provided by a consultation exercise would be that it could complement and be related to the refreshing of the Diocesan Vision and Strategy and play a part in resetting the relationship between parishes and 'the Diocese'. It was noted that aspects of the existing scheme of assessment were not as clear as they could be and the view was expressed that it might be better if some of the most recent amendments to the scheme were reversed. That said, the existing scheme was thought to have a clear underlying theological rationale, which some of the potential alternative schemes might be thought to lack. In addition, it was suggested that a consultation exercise could become an unnecessary distraction from more important priority activity, such as in relation to the implementation of the Diocesan Vision and Strategy.

On balance, the nature of the scheme of assessment was thought to be less important and less urgent than a number of other related issues. Above all else, the quantum of funding that was needed was thought to be too high; it was suggested that this was a view held by all sorts of parishes (whether smaller, larger, net contributors to or recipients from the scheme, rural, urban and across the range of different traditions). It was also noted that there were significant localised pressures for all sorts of reasons, including those relating to the out-working of 'Living in Love and Faith', in respect of which different sorts of engagement would be required to address a credibility gap that had opened up and that in turn was constraining some local giving. Any beneficial changes in the national funding picture that led to a decrease in the financial pressure on parishes might have an impact in turn on both the quantum of Common Fund needed and the most appropriate scheme of assessment for the new context.

In the light of the discussion it was decided not to review the Common Fund scheme of assessment at this point in time but to give the proposal further consideration within 12-18 months. It was suggested that instead, in the short term, a listening exercise be carried out on a limited basis that would allow parishes in very different circumstances to hear from each other and, hopefully, to improve mutual understanding and compassion.

13. To approve a Joint Council scheme for the parishes of Black Torrington with Highampton, Clawton and Halwill **Paper BDC/08/25**

The Ven. Verena Breed, Archdeacon of Barnstaple, introduced the proposed full transfer joint council scheme (under Church Representation Rule M37) for three of the parishes within a wider, rural, multi-parish benefice. She noted that the scheme contained a provision such that any of the other connected parishes within the benefice could, if they wished, join the scheme within the next 12 months.

In the absence of any discussion and subject to some additional information being added to Schedule 1, the scheme was approved to take effect on 1st February 2025.

14. To nominate members to the Vacancy in See Committee **Paper BDC/09/25**

The Ven Andrew Beane, Archdeacon of Exeter and Chair of the Vacancy in See Committee, reminded members of the process that had already been undertaken to establish the membership of the Vacancy in See Committee. He then noted the provision in the relevant regulations for the nomination of up to four people to the Committee in order to secure an appropriate range of interests and balance within the membership.

The following people were then proposed by members: Rebecca Smith MP, Dr. Lystra Hagley-Dickinson and Mrs. Jenni Coats.

Having discussed the attributes of the people being proposed in relation to the Committee's existing membership, it was agreed that all of them should be appointed to the Committee.

It was noted that one vacancy remained for a nominated member. There was no requirement for the vacancy to be filled and no further names were proposed for consideration.

15. To receive the annual report of the Diocesan Church Planting and Revitalisation Group

Paper BDC/10/25

The Right Revd. James Grier, Bishop of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Church Planting and Revitalisation Group, introduced the Group's annual report and set its work in the context of the emerging strategic priorities. He noted in particular the Group's engagement with the formation of new parish ministry (for example in new housing areas) and the different ways in which the revitalisation of parish ministry, sometimes with the strong engagement of another parish, needed to be supported centrally. In particular, the formation of new parish ministry was resource-intensive and relied on the sustained efforts of a wide range of people, including specialist DBF staff. The Group understood this to be an important commitment to and articulation of the Church of England's self-understanding in respect of the cure of souls.

In the absence of any discussion, the annual report of the CPRG was received.

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

Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary, proposed the following items for inclusion on the agenda of Diocesan Synod at its next meeting on 22nd March 2025

- Minutes of the previous meeting
- Presidential address
- To consider the implementation of the Diocesan Vision and Strategy
- To receive a report from General Synod
- To consider a proposal to support a change to the national financial settlement
- To receive an update on an application to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board
- 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 meeting dates for Diocesan Synod and the Bishop's Diocesan Council for 2026
- Questions

In the light of the discussion of item 11 above, and the passage of business at the General Synod in February, it was noted that may not be relevant to proceed with the proposed motion on the national financial settlement.

17. To nominate a member of the Assets Group

Paper BDC/17/25

Mr. Bob Mills, Chair of the Assets Group, referred to the Group's terms of reference and the vacancies within its membership. He then proposed that Mr. Stephen Lamdin be appointed to the Group and described the expertise and experience that he would bring.

In discussion the gender balance and the range of specialist expertise and experience present with the membership of the Group were noted as being of continuing importance. A question was also raised about the recruitment procedure used for appointments to sub-committees and working groups.

Mr Stephen Lamdin was duly appointed as a member of the Assets Group.

Deemed Items

18. To receive a report from the Assets Group **Paper BDC/11/25**
19. To receive a report from the DBF Standing Committee **Paper BDC/12/25**
20. To receive a report of the financial situation at the end of December 2024 **Paper BDC/13/25**
21. To approve draft meeting dates for 2026 for the Diocesan Synod and BDC **Paper BDC/14/25**
22. To note documents sealed by the Diocesan Board of Finance **Paper BDC/15/25**
23. To note Trusts and funds for investment accepted by, or wound up by, the Diocesan Board of Finance **Paper BDC/16/25**