Questions and Answers under Standing Order 69

11th October 2025

Question from Mrs. Ann Pangbourne (Ottery Deanery) to the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter

With respect to the figures produced on the PLF consultation

Q1 listed only 48 who considered themselves to be "very familiar" with the PLF process and Q5 listed 44 or less who had read any of the resources available before the meeting.

Given that lack of familiarity with the subject, in answer to

Q6a 21 said they did not understand the basis of the proposals being made.

Q6b On Pastoral Reassurance: 23 said they wanted an entirely different solution.

The figure 23 is repeated on the other sub- questions within Q6 on Pastoral Reassurance and it is left to guesswork as to whether this was the same or a different 23.

And Q8

41 either felt Pastoral Reassurance was not needed or was insufficient.

Again we are left to guess whether those voting are those who were "very familiar" with the LLF process to date, or who had read the resource material.

In the light of these responses and the unease I hear of, regarding the workability of Devolved Episcopal Ministry, would you ask the House of Bishops to ensure that any proposal being brought to General Synod as part of the LLF initiative should include the right for clergy to be licensed and lay people to be confirmed by a bishop whose understanding of Scripture and the historic teaching of the Church, on the matter of marriage and of same sex relationships matches their own?

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

I am not able to "ensure" that there will be "a right for clergy" but at the House of Bishops meeting between 6th-8th October three different models of pastoral reassurance were considered (covering areas such as licensings and confirmations among other things) and at the forthcoming meeting in December a recommendation will be made by the House of Bishops which will go to the General Synod in February 2026 for endorsement or otherwise. There was also recognition at the House of Bishops that the degree of provision and pastoral reassurance needed to be proportionate to the degree of change envisaged by the House of Bishops, a degree of change which at the October meeting appears to be so modest as to not at this stage need formal pastoral reassurance.

Supplementary question from Mrs Ann Pangbourne (Ottery Deanery)

I apologise if my initial question was badly phrased, it was not about pastoral reassurance nor about the change to come but about the degree of change that has already taken place. I speak to many clergy and laity who want to remain in the Church of England but under the oversight of bishops whose understanding of scripture and the historic teaching of the church matches their

own. So may I with due respect, rephrase the question and ask ‘would you ask the House of Bishops to make every effort to secure this path for them and so provide at least some way forward?’

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

Thank you, Ann. I think that the House of Bishops is at present talking about this. What I can give you is an undertaking that they will discuss it very seriously and very carefully at their next meeting. At the present time my reading of it is that the Prayers of Love and Faith that we already have are such that there is not envisaged to be a code of practice but if there are additional items on the table, there may be a code of practice and it’s the code of practice that will actually be about accommodating different perspectives and different bishops and different licensings and different confirmations.

Question from Mrs Ann Pangbourne (Ottery Deanery) to the Diocesan Secretary, Stephen Hancock:

Is it possible that, in future minutes, the number present at the meetings of Diocesan Synod could be recorded, alongside the apologies? In the last minutes this had a direct bearing on the statistics of the PLF consultation, and were not easy to accurately estimate.

Response from the Diocesan Secretary

Yes, in future it would be possible to count the number of members present from the signing in sheets and the total number can be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The accuracy of the number will therefore depend on members having signed in on arrival. It is notable that some members may, on occasion, leave before the end of the meeting and there is therefore no way of capturing variations in the number of members present for individual items.

Question from Mr. Mark Alexander (Newton Abbot Deanery) to the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter

When the Living in Love and Faith consultation closed in April 2022, 6,400 people had submitted a response - representing 0.97% of the Church of England at the time (the CoE's average weekly attendance was 654,000 in 2022 (Statistics for Mission 2022)).

In Exeter Diocese, how many submissions were made to the LLF process, and what percentage do they represent of our average weekly attendance in 2022?

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

The Living in Love and Faith working group worked hard from January to the end of April 2022 to ensure as many churches and individuals as possible knew about the Living in Love and Faith course and accompanying survey and had the chance to engage with them. We ran the course three times on Zoom and these sessions were well attended. In addition, we published a powerful video conversation between two Devon clergy about their hopes for the future around LLF. We heavily publicised the LLF survey and were gratified that Exeter Diocese had 403 responses, the third highest number for any diocese after Chester and Oxford and the highest per electoral roll membership (177 per 10,000).

The AWA for 2022 was 17,600 so the percentage of AWA was 2.29%.

Question from the Revd. Carl Robinson (Christianity Deanery) to the Diocesan Director of Finance, Neil Williams

I have seen some recent good news that the central **LInC** funding (a lump sum given to each Diocese to support ministry in its **L**ow-**I**ncome **C**ommunities) is set to jump, from £91 million in the last three years, to £133.5 million over the next three years.

I understand that our Diocese will receive some of this £133.5 million, based on its demographic profile, and that in the coming years there will be increased expectation that each Diocese can then transparently share exactly **how** it is using that money to benefit the poorest communities - my understanding is that we need to be able to communicate this both amongst **ourselves** and also back to the Church Commissioners.

1. Could you please explain what our current approach to using this LInC Funding is, and how we plan to use the increase in funds in the coming years?
2. Is there any scope for a working group, of those of us working in these lowest-income communities, so that we can be part of the conversation around how this money can be spent in order to create the largest impact possible upon the ministry in our parishes, as we have on-the-ground experience?

Response from Mr. Neil Williams

Background
The Diocese of Exeter will receive a total of £1,604,377 in Lowest Income Communities Funding in 2026. This figure includes £375,276 of the additional funding identified in the question.

Element	**Amount**
Base level of Lowest Income Communities Funding	£1,235,562
Less data update adjustment for 2026	(£6,461)
Additional Lowest Income Communities Funding	£375,276
TOTAL FUNDING for 2026	**£1,604,377**

This additional funding is to be welcomed. The current expectation is that from 2026, each diocese will present an Annual Report to Diocesan Synod to show how this funding is currently being applied to support the Lowest Income Communities. We expect the first report to be presented to Diocesan Synod in either October 2026 or March 2027. However, we understand that the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board are considering what the 'light touch' reporting requirements should be at their meeting in October. This will be communicated to dioceses in due course and we anticipate that we will build our reporting on this basis.

Question 1
Could you please explain what our current approach to using this LInC Funding is, and how we plan to use the increase in funds in the coming years?

Response
The majority of the LInC Funding within this diocese has always been applied to reduce the Common Fund request, based on the level of deprivation within a parish. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is used to place each of our parishes into one of 13 bands, with Band A being

the least deprived. For each band below this a 'discount' of 5% is applied to the Common Fund request through the participant number element, i.e. Band B = 5%, Band C = 10%, etc. It is currently applied to all parishes with a score that places them in Band B or lower. It is worth noting that in this diocese, 30% of parishes are in Band A, 40% in Band B, 20% in Band C and 10% in Band D or lower. In the 2026 budget this accounts for £902,956 of the LInC funding.

The balance of the LInC funding is then effectively used to support our clergy deployment model. As this is based on the diocesan-wide clergy deployment needs, the LInC funding is not currently separately identified and applied. Our total Clergy Deployment budget for 2026 is £12,394,000 and if you apply the same assumption of 10% being in the most deprived communities, this would be £1.239m of cost. The LInC funding would be required to provide a level of support for these places, but we have never hypothecated the budget to this level.

In 2026 the additional funding will be used in the same way, until such time as a review can be undertaken. This is integral to a review of the current Common Fund methodology, and the Bishop's Diocesan Council considered this in January 2025 and indicated such a review would be appropriately scheduled for the second half of 2026.

Question 2
Is there any scope for a working group, of those of us working in these lowest-income communities, so that we can be part of the conversation around how this money can be spent in order to create the largest impact possible upon the ministry in our parishes, as we have on-the-ground experience?

Response
The background is that the 2026 budget has an Operating Deficit of £1.34m, and after the application of £0.5m of Total Return funding to support stipends, this leaves a Net Operating Deficit in 2026 of £0.84m. This includes the outcomes from the Diocesan Finances Review, one element of which is the increased LInC.

Lowest Income Communities Funding is currently an integral part of the diocesan budget, so any changes would need to be considered alongside this. If funding were to be applied in a different way, this would require a root and branch review of the budget, as to spend more in one area, would require less to be spent in another.

As part of the review of how LInC funding is used, we will need to speak to those working in our more deprived communities, although making changes to the existing budget structure will present significant challenges. Equally, the Common Fund Review in the second half of 2026 will need to consider similar challenges and I wouldn't want to pre-empt the outcome, as we will be undertaking a diocesan-wide consultation, as we did in 2018/19. We have certainly given a commitment to the National Church Vision & Strategy Team that the LInC funding currently applied to reduce the Common Fund request needs to be more focussed on our Lowest Income Communities.

Supplementary question from the Revd. Carl Robinson (Christianity Deanery)

I noticed that the budget we've just approved is potentially a stepping-stone budget and depending on the outcome of the SMMIB application there may be an opportunity to revise some things. I wonder at that point could we also please use that as an opportunity to revise or

at least talk about how that LInC funding is used, because from what I gather from your response I think something like 60% of parishes receive some of that LInC fund and even though they are in the top three as it were, least deprived categories. It would be good to have a conversation about that. I know Bristol diocese has a much more strategic approach; they use it very specifically for their most deprived parishes, and that's the spirit in which that money is given to us. I wonder if we could use that as an opportunity to unpick it from the rest of the overall budget.

Response from Mr Neil Williams

I think that's what we will need to look at. There is the Common Fund review which is due to happen in the second half 2026 of which LInC is intrinsically part of that and I think if we talk to other places there will be a wish to review. I think those dioceses that have managed to use the funding as a pot to do things were the ones who received extra money at a point where they could set it aside which we were not in a position to be able to do. So, I think you are quite right we've got to have the debate about it. We've got to be able to demonstrate, and we will have to bring a report to Synod at some stage in the process to show that in terms of how it is being applied to support those in the most deprived places. I think it still is one of those where you're starting here and need to get there, it's how do you get from one to the other without causing other unintended issues around the budget, but yes, absolutely.

Question from the Revd. Graham Hamilton (General Synod) to Mr. Neil Williams, the Diocesan Director of Finance

In Paper S 16 (DMPC Annual Report) four church buildings, closed for public worship, are listed as being vested in the Diocesan Board of Finance, during the 'use-seeking period' -

- Holy Cross, Highampton,
- St Petroc, Petrockstowe,
- St John the Evangelist, Sutton on Plymouth
- St Michael's, Honiton

What is the annual cost of insurance and upkeep for these buildings to the DBF?

Response from Mr. Neil Williams

Three of the church buildings have been formally closed and are in the 'use seeking period' – Highampton, Honiton (St Michael) and Petrockstowe. St John, Sutton-on-Plym has not yet been formally closed.

The insurance costs for 2025/26 for these church buildings is set out in the table below:

Location	**25% of Sums Insured Premium including tax**
St. Michael's Church (Property damage & Terrorism)	£17,151.85
St Petroc's Church (Property damage & Terrorism)	£11,570.30
Holy Cross Church (Property damage & Terrorism)	£5,463.09
St John the Evangelist's Church (Property damage & Terrorism)	£14,057.64
Total including Liabilities	**£48,242.88**

We receive a grant for 70% of the above costs from the Church Commissioners during the 'use seeking period', apart from St John's, Sutton-on-Plym where the DBF is currently paying 100% of the cost.

In 2024, other costs totalling £1,766.34 were incurred looking after the 3 closed churches. A further £12,327.57 was spent looking after St John's, Sutton-on-Plym.

Question from the Revd. Graham Hamilton (General Synod) to Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary

What legal obligation under Martyn's Law and practical advice is available to churches to prevent or reduce the risk of terrorist attack on places of worship?

Response from the Diocesan Secretary

The situation in respect of 'Martyn's Law' has been brought into sharp relief by the recent attack on a Manchester synagogue. The 'Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025' came into effect earlier in the year and it aims to enhance security measures in public venues across the UK to better prepare for potential terrorist threats. Churches, along with other places of worship, fall within its provisions. They are exempt from the 'enhanced' duty but those hosting events involving 200 people or more will have to comply with the 'standard' duty. For information about what the standard duty involves, please see Standard tier | ProtectUK. The requirements for standard duty premises are centred around simple, low-cost activities with costs relating primarily to time spent. There is no requirement to put in place physical measures.

We understand that the government will be publishing guidance specific to faith buildings, including churches, later in the year. Once this has been provided, we will share any updates with churches through Roots & Shoots. In the meantime, you may find the guidance on the Church of England webpage Safety and security in church buildings useful, along with guidance provided by the insurer Ecclesiastical: https://www.ecclesiastical.com/risk-management/terrorism/.

Question from Mr. Tim Hamilton (General Synod) to the Ven Andrew Beane, Archdeacon of Exeter

What are the editorial requirements for parishes and individuals to include news items and stories in Root and Shoots? Is there an agreed time-line for submitting articles to be included in the newsletter?

Response from the Archdeacon of Exeter

Roots and Shoots is published weekly, usually on a Tuesday or Wednesday. We don't have a firm submission deadline, but we prefer to have items for inclusion submitted by 5pm on a Monday. The broad categories for Roots and Shoots are: Need to know (important news and updates), Good to Know (courses, events, useful information etc), Show and Tell (stories from around the diocese, nice photos and videos etc). It is important to note that editorial decisions about which items are included and when rests with the Director of Communications and Engagement. It is also important to note that while we aim to reply personally to all emails and submissions to Roots and Shoots, and to include appropriate items in a timely manner, we are a small team with a big workload and only one full-time employee – so sometimes worthy items do unfortunately get missed. This is something we do our best to avoid. If anyone has feedback about Roots & Shoots or would like to submit an article or details of a service/event, please contact Chloe Axford on 07889 523776 or via email: chloe.axford@exeter.anglican.org

Question from Mr. Jonathan Porter-Goff (Christianity Deanery) to the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter

In the recent past, curates in training in a parish for three years had one *mid-week* day per month set aside for formal training input. This formal training has now changed from three to two years and the training day has been moved to a Sunday. Please can the Sunday training be moved back to a mid-week day or a Saturday, so that the trainee is able to spend more time worshipping with their church during this shortened training period?

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

Since arriving in the diocese and inheriting the (relatively recent) pattern of a training day on a Sunday there have been those who are very pleased with this pattern and those who are very unhappy with the pattern. So let me set out the reasoning behind the move to Sunday training as far as I understand it.

God has always called the whole people of God into ministry but over the last decades, with the reduction of stipend budgets, parish ministry has increasingly become a collaborative endeavour offered by self-supporting ordained ministers and lay ministers under the oversight of a stipendiary incumbent. It became apparent at the review of training in the South West (report by Andrew Village, Easter 2023) that SSOMs were being excluded from training under the previous pattern of mid-week events and it would have been difficult to declare that they had received sufficient training for the level of ministry and responsibility they were taking on. In addition, the new Exeter Ordination Pathway will significantly increase the number of SSOMs with the result that in 2026 stipendiary curates will be in the minority. It has been suggested that different designations of curates (assistant, incumbent) could be trained separately, but we do not want to contribute to a narrative of 'first/second class' clergy that has arisen in the past, and, more positively, we are aware that incumbency will increasingly be an oversight ministry and so those preparing for incumbent ministry will need to develop the skills and formation to work with very diverse teams of lay and ordained colleagues, and those colleagues will equally need to learn how to work with their oversight. Therefore, a policy decision was made that all curates would train together, at least for the first two years, where the focus would be the core of ordained ministry. Subsequently curates will receive training and formation leading towards the role they are likely to take on – incumbent/oversight, assistant, focal - and this will enable stipendiary curates to meet mid-week when their colleagues might not be available. This does not address SSOM curates who may be designated as potential incumbents, and preparing for incumbent roles, but these are infrequent and we will try to work with these curates on an individual basis.

A further element is post-licensing support for LLMs and this is being trialled by including them in those curate training sessions which are most relevant for their ministry. As with SSOMs, LLMs are more likely to be available at the weekend. The hope is that LLMs will contribute to the understanding of a mixed-economy of ministry.

We have had a trial year of training on a Sunday which for some has been received as a relief, and honouring of their other weekday responsibilities, but by others as a frustration for not being in the churches on a Sunday. Although weekend training does not guarantee all curates will be able to attend because of shift work, the greater proportion of curates will be available than mid-week.

In response to those with quite different views on this the proposal for 2026/27 will be that we move to a mixture of Saturdays and Sundays (weighted towards Saturdays), lifting some of the pressure off a Sunday, but appreciating that this will be a frustration for those who will need to negotiate Saturday commitments, an important day for those with young families.

Needless to say there is no perfect choice of day that will enable all curates to train together without inconvenience. Hopefully the value of training together to support the principle of collaboration and mutual learning will outweigh the inconvenience of rearranging other commitments for the 15 days or so over two years that curates are required to be together.

Question from Mr. Jonathan Porter-Goff (Christianity Deanery) to the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter

What provision will be made at the Diocesan Clergy Conference (June 2026) for those unwilling to take part in worship, or sit under teaching, from leaders they believe are leading the church into error, specifically in reference to LLF?

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

The topic of LLF won't be addressed by worship leaders or speakers at the diocesan clergy conference (as far as I am aware) and the aspiration at the conference is to provide clergy with teaching, worship and fellowship which is resourceful and encouraging for all ordained ministers, whatever their views on LLF. As such there will be no special provision for those with specific views on LLF.

Supplementary question from Mr. Jonathan Porter-Goff (Christianity Deanery)

The question to which I am asking a supplementary relates to the original question about the provision at the diocesan clergy conference next year for those who believe that the leaders are leading the church into error and the further question then I think I would address to the bishop, if I may, is this: I appreciate that avoiding unnecessary division at the clergy conference would be helpful but might some particular provision assist those who are struggling in conscience to attend or participate fully and ensure a higher level of participation and degree of collegiality?

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

I think my answer to that Jonathan is that I’m open to hearing more in terms of suggestions about how that might happen. Let’s have a conversation.

Question from Mr. Richard Buzzacott (Tiverton and Cullompton Deanery) to the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter

Regarding Item 12 on today's agenda, 'Annual Report of the Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee', this report comes as a deemed item, not for discussion.

However, the Budget paper item 8.3 says that the Bishop's Staff have discussed how to reduce the number of clergy posts from presently 165 to 130 in 2035 in a way that is fair and missional etc. The present four Archidiaconal Mission & Pastoral Committees' remits are restricted to their appropriate areas of the Diocese not an overview of the whole Diocese. They do not discuss the overall strategic deployment of clergy across the whole Diocese with regard to such things as demographic changes and need.

At present, virtually all their work is reactionary to posts becoming vacant in their Archdeaconry.

With the limitations of the present process how does the Diocesan Synod address these significant strategic changes?

Can there be discussion about this at the next Diocesan Synod?

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

The question rightly identifies that the four Archidiaconal Mission and Pastoral Committees, or AMPCs, have a specific, localised remit. They bring invaluable local knowledge to the implementation of pastoral plans, and we are deeply grateful to all who serve on them. However, the formation of diocese-wide strategy is rightly undertaken at a more senior level.

Your question references the Budget paper's mention of the Bishop's Staff's discussions on reducing clergy posts from 165 to 130 posts. **I should stress that my own view is that a reduction of clergy is a worse-case scenario and I have made it repeatedly clear that wherever possible we need to maintain and grow the number of stipendiary and SSOM clergy as we endeavour to grow the Church over the next decade. Nevertheless, we need to consider different scenarios and the 165 -> 130 is about prudent contingency planning, not goal-setting.**

The Bishop's Staff is the senior leadership team that supports the work of the Diocesan Bishop and that initiates strategic deployment conversations in response to the major financial and demographic trends facing our Diocese and different possibilities relating to such trends.

These strategic conversations are then brought to the Bishop's Diocesan Council which also serves as our Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee, or DMPC. It is this single, integrated body which holds the statutory responsibility under the Mission and Pastoral Measure for preparing diocese-wide strategies for my approval and, where appropriate, that of this Synod. This ensures a seamless link between the strategic oversight of the Bishop's Council and the specific legal duties of the DMPC. The AMPCs then work to implement these strategies at a local level.

Your question suggests that much of this work is reactionary, simply waiting for clergy to leave a post before any action is taken. I would frame it rather differently. It is a point of deliberate

diocesan policy to, wherever possible, time any significant pastoral reorganisation to coincide with a vacancy. This is not a sign of inaction; it is a sign of our commitment to two foundational Christian principles: pastoral care and financial stewardship. First, it is our profound pastoral duty to care for our clergy and their families. Effecting reorganisation during a vacancy avoids the personal and professional hardship that can be caused by making a priest's post redundant through what is legally termed 'dispossession'. Second, it is our duty as stewards of the resources given by the faithful of this diocese to avoid the significant financial costs associated with clergy compensation for loss of office. Every pound saved in that way is a pound that can be spent on mission and ministry across Devon.

This careful and principled approach does not mean a lack of proactive work. Far from it. As the DMPC's Annual Report, which is before Synod today, makes clear, there are numerous complex, multi-year reorganisation schemes currently in progress across the diocese. Furthermore, I can point to the comprehensive, nationally-funded review of mission and pastoral care across the entire City of Plymouth as a prime example of the proactive and strategic work being undertaken. That review, initiated by Bishop's Staff, is now being worked through by the Plymouth AMPC to ensure our structures are fit for mission in the 21st century.

Finally, you ask how this Synod addresses these strategic changes. This is a crucial question about our respective roles. The Synod's primary constitutional role is not to manage the executive details of individual pastoral reorganisation schemes, but to hold the DMPC and the Bishop to account, and to set the high-level strategic framework through its key decisions.

This Synod does this in two principal ways. First, by receiving and noting the Annual Report of the DMPC, as we are doing today, which provides a detailed account of this work for scrutiny. Second, and most powerfully, this Synod debates and approves the Diocesan Budget. It is the budget which sets the financial parameters and clergy deployment numbers that drive the very strategies we are discussing. The proper place for a substantive debate on the future shape of our clergy deployment is, therefore, during our considerations of the budget and members will recall doing so during our budget strategy discussions in both March and June Synods.

To answer your second question directly: 'Can there be discussion about this?' By engaging with and responding your question today, I trust I have enabled a degree of discussion and, I hope, brought helpful clarification. This very exchange is an example of Synod's oversight role in action.

I thank you again for the question. I hope my answer assures you, and all members of this Synod, that the strategic deployment of our clergy is subject to a robust, prayerful, and ongoing process, which seeks to be both missional in its ambition and deeply pastoral in its application. And please pray for the growth of our Christian communities and for the generating of leaders of those communities.

Supplementary question from Mr Richard Buzzacott (Tiverton & Cullompton Deanery)

I think my concern is that this is deemed item I was referring to and doesn't get discussed and there are strategic issues that don't seem to get full viewing through this diocesan synod. May I nudge towards maybe changing the agenda to allow strategic issues to be discussed a bit more?

Response from the Bishop of Exeter

I certainly hear your nudge. I think I've said before in this synod the critical nature of stipendiary clergy to church growth and the correlation thereof. I think was mentioned earlier by Christianity deanery as well, so this is an issue that we are cognisant of and engaging with in respect of our strategic discussions. So yes, I hear your nudge.