EXETER DIOCESAN SYNOD

A meeting of the Exeter Diocesan Synod
held at County Hall, Exeter on Saturday 11th October 2025 at 10.00

Minutes

Introductory worship

The Bishop of Exeter in the chair

1. Welcome and apologies
   New members the Bishop of Crediton, the Right Revd. Moira Astin, the Revd. Heidi Budden and the Revd. Jax Tilbury were welcomed to the meeting. Mr. Costa Nassaris, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer & Head of Safeguarding, and Ms. Emma Kemp, the Diocesan Net Zero Carbon Officer, were also welcomed in support of items 5 and 9 respectively.

   Apologies were received from 15 members of the House of Laity and 17 members of the House of Clergy. 76 members were in attendance at the meeting.

2. Notices
   - Notice was given of the death of Mrs Helen Young in mid-September. She had been Lay Chair of Holsworthy deanery since 2016 and a member of Diocesan Synod since 2012.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting of Diocesan Synod held on 21st June 2025
   Paper S/09/25

   The minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2025 were approved without amendment.

4. Presidential address

   The full text of the Presidential address is available at https://exeter.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Bishop-Mike-presidential-address.pdf

The Chair of the House of Laity in the chair

5. To receive the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel annual report **Paper S/10/25**

   Mr. Costa Nassaris, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer & Head of Safeguarding, in the absence of the independent chair of the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel (DSAP), introduced the Panel's annual report. He noted four key areas for further consideration: a significant increase in casework along with associated upgrading and standardisation of recording mechanisms (that will in due course also apply to historic cases); a significant increase in the number of DBS checks being processed and where relevant acted on; concerns about and on behalf of Parish Safeguarding

Representatives, of whom so much is required and on whom an increasingly complex burden of responsibility rests; a change in the DSAP's dominant mode of operation, to increase its ability to scrutinise the work of the safeguarding team rather than just provide advice and a reporting mechanism. Although each of the above represented a major challenge, especially given the constrained resourcing environment, it was noted that they were in some ways the product of success and a changing culture (increased reporting, a more vigilant local context, a desire for improved local quality assurance and an increasingly impactful oversight arrangement).

In discussion clarification was sought concerning the need for some people to apply for multiple disclosures at different levels and for different workforces, which was thought to be expensive and inefficient. It was noted that dioceses were bound by the governing legislation and national safer recruitment policies. The existence of the Update Service was noted but it was limited in scope (eg it could not be used for clergy who work from home) and would lead to a loss of diocesan oversight (leaving parishes with the sole responsibility for decision making about and responding to blemishes). This latter risk might be able to be mitigated if all parishes were making full use of the safeguarding hub for quality assurance purposes. It was also noted that it was not legal to ask for a single check at the highest level to cover all workforces 'just in case'; it was a requirement in each case that there be clear justification arising from the role for the 'exempted question' to be asked.

Concerns were also expressed about the pressures being placed on local volunteers, particularly Parish Safeguarding Representatives. With increased training requirements mandated nationally and more stringent administrative processes (including the use of the parish safeguarding hub), it was felt there was a risk that volunteers would increasingly be put off or overwhelmed. It was noted that there was evidence of strain within the community of PSRs; assistance was offered from the safeguarding team but capacity was limited and their priority had to be casework management (primarily in respect of church officers and secondarily in respect of other people who raised a concern or made an allegation or disclosure through the church's reporting mechanism even though the events were not taking place within the community of the church). There was an inevitable tension between the national impetus to drive up local standards (impelled by national safeguarding failures and reviews), and the capacity of the local churches to meet those increased requirements. It was also noted that increasingly multi-parish benefices were looking to key individuals to cover the PSR role across several parishes; there were felt to be advantages in this specialisation of functions but it was important that the role was not held 'in name only' in some of the parishes and that succession plans were considered, in order that the loss of the key individual did not lead to a breakdown in safeguarding arrangements across a wide area.

In terms of training, it was noted that there was significant overlap being experienced between church-based training and that offered elsewhere (in the NHS or schools, for example). On the one hand the commonality was thought to be indicative of an equivalence of practice and standards between different organisations, meaning a sufficient quality of training could be ensured and sustained (with context-specific casework examples illustrating points of difference). On the other hand, the lack of distinctive theological motivation and approach, was felt by some to be a missed opportunity. Again, the courses were mandated nationally and the scope for variation was very limited.

Finally, further advice was requested in respect of pastoral visiting where signs of abuse were discovered (particularly domestic abuse); the thresholds operated by secular organisations were different from each other and from the church. If the Local Authority's Adult Services thresholds were high, there would be a tendency for reporting to happen through the church's mechanisms instead, even though the circumstances did not relate to the life of the church. It was noted that there were multi-agency safeguarding co-ordination arrangements in place and it was possible for one organisation to report and raise a concern with another, but this was no guarantee that action would be taken. In such circumstances, the pastoral visitor could only monitor the situation informally and report any worsening of the circumstances through the available diocesan channel.

6. To receive the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2024 **Paper S/11/25**

Mr. Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, noted that the Executive of the Diocesan Board of Finance had approved the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statements, that they had been received by the Annual General Meeting of the Diocesan Board of Finance and that they were now for receipt by the Synod.

In the absence of any discussion, the Annual Report and Consolidated Financial Statement for the year ended 31st December 2024 were duly received.

7. To approve the diocesan budget for 2026 and to consider indicative financial planning for 2027 – 2028 **Paper S/12/25**

Mr. Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, and Mr. Neil Williams, Diocesan Director of Finance, introduced the diocesan budget for 2026 and indicative financial planning for 2027 and 2028. They noted the formative influence of the May and July meetings of the Bishop's Diocesan Council and the June meeting of the Diocesan Synod in the drafting of the diocesan budget. Since those meetings a relatively small number of changes had been made in the light of updated information and there was a great deal more clarity available (for the most part arising out of the July group of sessions of General Synod) concerning the national financial context and how that would impact the Diocese in 2026 and thereafter. In particular the outcomes of the Diocesan Finances Review had been a combination positive and negative impacts from a diocesan perspective. For 2026 there would be a net benefit of £840k, but the majority of that sum was a form of transitional relief that tapered strongly over subsequent years. Longer term the impact for the Diocese would be closer to neutral, albeit there would be benefits realised in other areas (eg clergy stipends, lowest income communities, theological education institutions). The neutering of the 'Hereford Diocesan motion' at General Synod (itself approved by the Exeter Diocesan Synod) meant that more fundamental reform of the financial architecture of the Church of England had been placed on the back burner.

Mr Williams then noted the areas of the budget that had changed since the Synod's June meeting. The position in regards to participation numbers had been confirmed as slightly lower than anticipated and broadly neutral. The question around the evidence for the need for an inflationary 'catch up' for central diocesan staff (in line with that provided for stipendiary clergy) had been investigated. Analysis indicated that there was an issue in relation to some but not all posts and accordingly it had been possible to reduce the allocation in the budget and still retain a parity of approach. Most notably, however, the application for substantial grant funding from the Diocesan Investment Programme from 2026 had yet to be determined. It was anticipated that the submission would seek in the region of £20m of national investment in the Diocese over a 6-year term (plus some temporary support funding), with the purpose of resourcing new strategic interventions to help the Diocese to grow and, as a consequence of that primary objective, to help it to move towards financial sustainability. The outcome of the application would be announced at the turn of the year; if successful, the full effects would be felt from 2027 but would still be sufficient in 2026 for the annual budget to be reviewed in year. If unsuccessful, mitigation would likely be required from 2027 onwards.

In summary therefore, the budget for 2026 was proposed to increase by 5.1% over the previous year, with stipends rising by 10.7%. The projected operational deficit would be reduced by planned property sales and the application of 'total return' accounting as previously agreed, leading to a net deficit of around £840k. It was to be noted that, with the circumstances as currently understood, it was likely that the deficit would increase in 2027 and 2028 as some cost increases were felt in full (eg the rise in the clergy stipend) and some temporary sources of funding fell away.

In discussion, additional information was requested in relation to the decoration of clergy housing and it was agreed that this would be provided in writing outside of the meeting. Information was also requested on aspects of the 'structural' deficit, particularly in relation to the number of parishes not paying the full cost of their stipendiary clergy through the Common Fund. It was noted that this was one of the issues that would be picked up as part of the planned review of the Common Fund scheme of assessment, scheduled to commence in autumn 2026. Confirmation was sought, particularly in the light of the exceptional proposal contained within the budget in relation to the 'catch up' in clergy stipends, that although clergy members clearly had an interest in the outcome, there was no legal conflict of interests that would constrain their ability to vote. It was confirmed that this was the case, by long established precedent.

Mr. Frampton then moved the following motion:

> 'This Synod approves the Diocesan Budget for 2026 as set out in Paper S/12/25 and notes the indicative budgets for 2027 and 2028.'

In debate members expressed support for the continued attempt to encourage and resource initiatives intended to result in growth. It was noted that deficit budgeting had become something of a pattern over the last 5 years and that this would have to be brought to a conclusion as assets were depleted; resourcing for growth would then have to come from other sources, including the Common Fund, which in turn would require parishes to have a fuller understanding of the reality of the financial situation.

It was suggested that new measures be considered that might incentivise a growth mindset, for example setting a 'stretch' target for Common Fund collection that if achieved would be turned into a direct benefit to parishes (such as the appointment of additional clergy). At the same time concern was expressed about the demise of the 'Hereford motion' and the continued culture of national control and oversight of the wider financial settlement.

The relationship between the diocesan budget and wider strategic considerations was raised as an issue of concern, as was the lack of information before the Synod concerning the application to the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board. It was suggested that an opportunity had been missed for the Synod to spend more time in more detailed consideration of the application and its implications as they related to the Diocesan Vision and Strategy and its delivery vehicle, the Diocesan Budget (albeit that the budget itself could not properly make assumptions about the outcome of the application). Concern was also expressed about the nature of the relationship between the Diocesan Board of Finance and the PCCs in the Diocese, which were discrete charities with their own objects; it was suggested that serious consideration be given to the responsibilities of charity trustees if they thought that the charities' objectives were insufficiently aligned.

Under Standing Order 63, the President of the Synod then required that a separate vote of each House be taken on the motion.

In the House of Bishop and the House of Clergy, the motion was approved unanimously. In the House of Laity it was approved by a majority, with 2 members voting against and 3 abstaining.

The Chair of the House of Clergy in the chair

8. To receive a report from General Synod **Paper S/13/25**

The Revd Preb. Rosie Austin introduced the report from the July 2025 Group of Sessions of General Synod, which had been prepared by the Revd. Canon Professor Morwenna Ludlow. She noted the principal legislative business that had been undertaken, including the final stages of the National Church Governance Measure and the Redress Scheme for those who have suffered abuse in a church context. Finance also loomed large, with three major strands all under consideration (the outcomes of the Triennial Funding Working Group, the Diocesan Finances Review and the 'Hereford Motion' on the redistribution of Commissioners Funds, which had previously been passed by Exeter Diocesan Synod). The latter was passed but only after very heavy amendment; it was expected that there would be further such discussions over the next 3 years. Steps were also taken to historic reductions in the value of clergy pensions.

Other important business included changing the licensing arrangements for military chaplains, a debate on the Assisted Dying Bill and the removal of 'Issues in Human Sexuality' from the process of discerning new candidates for ordination and replacing it pro tem with a requirement for candidates to live in line with the 'Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy'.

9. To receive an update on progress towards the adopted Net Zero Carbon target

Paper S/14/25

The Ven Jane Bakker, Archdeacon of Plymouth and Chair of the Diocesan Environment Working Group, introduced a progress update on work towards the Net Zero Carbon (NZC) target. She reminded members of the national and diocesan processes that had been followed over the last 5 years, noting that at this point the aim was to implement the Diocesan Action Plan, drawn up in accordance with the National Routemap, and thereby implement the synodically-agreed reduction in diocesan carbon emissions by 90% by the target date of 2030. All this was set in the context of the 5 'Marks of Mission'. Over the past year, some national funding had been released (although it had been subject to delays) and this had enabled some grant-funding to reach parishes (for example through subsidised energy audits and the 'Give to Go Green' scheme, which was match funded). A substantial amount of work had been carried out to clergy housing, to improve its energy efficiency, and there was work in hand in relation to glebe land and church schools (although the withdrawal of national government funding from schools' decarbonisation projects had slowed progress). The EXTRA partnership with the Diocese of Truro was working well and parish data collection via the Energy Footprint Tool (EFT) was know rising again, having fallen during the period when there was no diocesan NZC officer in post. The reporting rate, of 54%, was significantly behind the national routemap's target of 90% (which if continued in the long run could impact the ability to apply for national grant funding, for which it was a pre-condition, and which was expected to increase significantly in the second half of the decade). Other routemap metrics were also being tracked and RAG rated; in most areas the rating was 'amber'.

In terms of challenges, as had been noted on previous occasions, there were a limited number of areas of activity under the control of the Diocesan Board of Finance (offices, housing and work-related travel being estimated at about 17% of the overall footprint). Much more extensive were the activities that were under the control of another legal body (including PCCs) but that might be subject to diocesan influence; in the long term these were perhaps of greater importance. It was also noted that increased reporting of energy usage data (which was a necessity) would also lead to some of the other metrics being adversely affected.

These challenges notwithstanding, the commitment to and delivery of action in relation to the target was a 'good news' story, demonstrating a desire to serve and to see justice done both locally and globally. It was also attractive to younger generations, who might engage with their local church in order to help with driving forward the change that they very much wanted to see in their community and in the world at large.

In discussion members provided examples of the ways in which the Energy Footprint Tool was proving difficult to use or could be otherwise improved. These included energy suppliers being unwilling to provide relevant information in the form required, as well as its exclusion of highly relevant behavioural factors (for example, car-based travel to services, which could easily out-strip the carbon footprint of the building itself). It was noted that a process was being developed to enable EFT data to be shared but that the process involved the collation of information at national level. In the set-up phase this was taking longer than hoped (the data for 2022 and 2023 only recently having been published) but it was expected that it would speed up in future.

It was noted that the Diocesan Net Carbon Zero Officer was available to assist parishes with the operation of the Energy Footprint Tool, as well as the gathering together of examples of energy supplier issues in order to build a case for wider change in supplier practices.

10. To approve the scheme of lay representation to deanery synods and to receive an update on elections to the General Synod in 2026 **Paper S/15/25**

Dr Ed Moffatt, the Diocesan Electoral Registration Officer and Head of Governance, introduced the proposed scheme of lay representation to deanery synod for the forthcoming triennium. He noted that the scheme had been considered by the Bishop's Council and recommended for approval by Diocesan Synod. The scheme itself was the same as the for the current triennium and would be based on the electoral roll figures for 2025 which had been subject to a full renewal process (which happens once every 6 years) rather than the more normal revision process. Some 75 parishes were still to submit their electoral roll figures for 2025 but the estimated diocesan total electoral roll was in the region of 18500 – 19000, a reduction of around 15% since 2019 and commensurate with reductions in other attendance / participation metrics. As a consequence, there would be lower parochial lay representation on deanery synods for the next triennium.

The following motion was then moved from the Chair:

> 'This Synod approves the scheme of lay representation to deanery synods as set out in Paper S/15/25'

In debate it was noted that the scheme of representation, which was drafted in line with the provisions of the Church Representation Rules, represented a compromise between the representation of parishes and the representation of the number of people in those parishes (as represented by the parochial electoral roll figure). It was suggested that, under the influence of earlier editions of the CRR, the compromise that had been reached was too much in favour of the parish units, to the extent that this resulted in a representational unfairness towards lay people in larger parishes. It was acknowledged that there could be different understandings of what might be thought to be 'fair and appropriate' in the provisions of the scheme and that it would be possible for a future iteration of the scheme to be balanced differently whilst still remaining in accordance with the Rules as currently expressed.

The motion was put to the vote and approved by a majority.

11. Questions

For the text of the questions and answers, as well as supplementary questions and answers, see Appendix A.

Deemed Items

12. To receive the Annual Report of the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee
Paper S/16/25