



Rules for Deanery Synods

These rules were approved by Diocesan Synod on 6th June and are effective from 1st July 2026.

Preamble

A Deanery Synod is the part of the national synodical structure that is situated between the PCCs of the deanery and the Diocesan Synod. It is a body which is representative and deliberative, a body which appoints and elects, which may receive motions from the PCCs in the deanery and pass motions to its Diocesan Synod, which may receive actions from Diocesan Synod or General Synod and may provide a forum for its members and others to act. It is meant to be sufficiently representative so as to command the confidence of its parishes and mission communities and sufficiently skilled as to be competent in its business.

A Deanery Synod is a legal entity and, as such, it is regulated. However, under English law, a Deanery Synod does not enjoy charitable status and is an unincorporated body. This means a Deanery Synod cannot hold property, may not enter into contracts and should not seek to employ staff directly, although it may wish to set up a bank account. Some Deanery Synods may wish to establish a charitable or corporate body or trust. If so, it should seek advice from the Archdeacon as a first step and will need to consult the Diocesan Secretary and Diocesan Registrar in due course.

The Constitution and Functions of Deanery Synods are set out in Section 5 of the Synodical Governance Measure 1969.¹ Schedule 3 of the Measure is known as the Church Representation Rules (CRR) and Part 3 of the CRR deals with the detail of how Deanery Synods run. In the latest edition from 2025, CRR 26 (1) states that ‘a diocesan synod must make rules for the deanery synods in the diocese’. CRR 26 (2) – (7) then goes on to state what must be encompassed by those rules, including the provision that ‘subject to the rules, a deanery synod may determine its own procedure’.²

The ‘Rules for Deanery Synods’ for the Diocese of Exeter need to be read in conjunction with Part 3 of the CRR. It is for each deanery synod to draw up its own Standing Orders, which are to be in accordance with these rules and the relevant provisions of the CRR.

I. The Roles and Responsibilities of the Deanery Synod

The Synodical Government Measure states:

“The functions of a deanery synod shall be—

- a) to consider matters concerning the Church of England and to make provision for such matters in relation to their deanery, and to consider and express their opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest;
- b) to bring together the views of the parishes of the deanery on common problems, to discuss and formulate common policies on those problems, to foster a sense of community and interdependence among those parishes, and generally to promote in the deanery the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical;

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/1969/2/section/5>

² <https://www.churchofengland.org/more/policy-and-thinking/church-representation-rules/church-representation-rules-online-part-3>

- c) to make known and so far as appropriate put into effect any provision made by the diocesan synod;
- d) to consider the business of the diocesan synod, and particularly any matters referred to that synod by the General Synod, and to sound parochial opinion whenever they are required or consider it appropriate to do so;
- e) to raise such matters as the deanery synod consider appropriate with the diocesan synod:

Provided that the functions referred to in paragraph (a) hereof shall not include the issue of any statement purporting to declare the doctrine of the Church on any question."

II. The Houses of the Deanery Synod

1. There shall be two Houses, namely the House of Clergy and the House of Laity.
2. The House of Clergy shall be chaired by the Area or Rural Dean (hereafter referred to as the Rural Dean), who is appointed by the Bishop of Exeter following consultation with the clergy and lay chair in the Deanery.
3. The House of Laity shall be chaired by a layperson (who shall be a communicant member on the electoral roll of a parish or institution within the Deanery, who shall be over eighteen years of age and shall be elected by the lay members of the Deanery Synod). This person shall be elected from the current lay members of the Synod, including those co-opted by the House of Laity.
4. The two Houses may meet separately at the request of the Chair or of three members of either House. Such meetings may be held within the context of a Deanery Synod meeting with the agreement of both the Chairs.
5. The Clergy of the Deanery also meet as a Chapter. Where such Chapter meetings are designated to be formal meetings of the House of Clergy this must be clearly notified to members in writing (at least seven days' notice must be given of such a meeting).
6. When lay ministers (Readers, Church Army officers and others) are invited to Chapter meetings they remain voting members of the House of Laity and may not vote when a Chapter meeting is a meeting of the House of Clergy.
7. Where Houses meet separately, the Chair will determine whether they invite observers or hold open meetings.

8. Where a casual vacancy occurs among the Deanery's representatives on Diocesan Synod then a meeting of the relevant House shall be held to elect a new member(s) to Diocesan Synod.

III. Membership of the House of Laity

1. The membership of the House of Laity shall comprise communicant members aged sixteen years and upwards from the following categories:
 - a) **Parochial Representatives:** Each parish shall elect its lay representatives for periods of three years at its annual meeting based on the number on their electoral roll. The scheme of representation shall be as agreed by Diocesan Synod every three years.
 - b) **Mission Initiative Representatives:** Each mission initiative subject to a Bishop's Mission Order and with a scheme of representation approved by the Diocesan Synod shall elect lay representatives for periods of three years at its annual meeting based on the provisions of the scheme of representation.
 - c) **Institutional Representatives:** Any institution which has a priest acting as a Chaplain and is designated by the Bishop may appoint one lay representative.
 - d) **Cathedral Representatives:** A Cathedral with a scheme of representation approved by the Diocesan Synod shall elect lay representatives to a specified deanery synod according to the provisions of the scheme.
 - e) **Ex-Officio:** Members of the General Synod and Diocesan Synod who reside in the Deanery.
 - f) **Lay Ministers:** Church Army Officers and other lay people holding the Bishop's licence to work in the Deanery or who hold a Diocesan or inter-deanery responsibility and are appointed by the Bishop to serve on the Deanery Synod.
 - g) **Co-opted Members:** The House of Laity may co-opt up to three members who shall be full members of the Synod except that they are unable to vote in elections to Diocesan or General Synods.

(In choosing co-optees, the House may wish to consider individuals with particular expertise or to give a certain group a voice in Deanery business).

2. No person (other than co-opted members) may be a member of more than one Deanery Synod.
3. Elected, appointed and co-opted members shall normally serve a three-year term, commencing on 1st July following the triennial elections. Members may serve more than one term. Members filling a casual vacancy shall serve from the moment of their election to the conclusion of the triennium.

IV. Membership of the House of Clergy

1. The membership of the House of Clergy shall comprise:
 - a) **Parochial Office Holders:** All clergy beneficed in or licensed to any parish in the deanery whether priests or deacons, stipendiary or non-stipendiary.
 - b) **Mission Initiative Office Holders:** All clergy licensed to a mission initiative supported by a Bishop's Mission Order in the deanery
 - c) **Institutional Office Holders:** All clergy holding the bishop's licence and licenced to an institution in the deanery. They will include Chaplains to the armed forces, hospitals, prisons and educational institutions.
 - d) **Cathedral Office Holders:** the Dean, the Residentiary Canons and any other qualified office holder of the Cathedral shall be members of the deanery synod of the deanery in which the Cathedral is situated.
 - e) **Ex-Officio:** Members of General Synod and Diocesan Synod who reside in the Deanery.
 - f) **Clergy with Permission to Officiate:** Representatives are elected to serve from and by clergy with permission to officiate and who are resident in the deanery or who have worshipped in the Deanery for at least six months. A scheme for the representation shall be approved by the Bishop of Exeter every three years. There shall be one representative elected for every ten clergy with permission to officiate or part thereof.
 - g) **Nominated Members:** Other clergy with the Bishop's Licence who are nominated by the Bishop which could include clergy with Diocesan or inter-deanery appointments who live or work for substantial parts of their ministry in the Deanery (provided that no clergy in this category can be nominated to more than one Deanery Synod).
 - h) **Co-opted Members³:** The House of Clergy may co-opt up to three clergy who shall be full members of the Synod other than as acting as an elector in elections to other synodical bodies.

(Such co-options could include retired clergy, clergy who live but do not work in the Deanery, and clergy with permission to officiate who are not retired).

V. Meetings of the Deanery Synod

1. The Synod shall meet at least twice each year.
2. a) Meetings of Synod can be held either:
 - (i) in a fixed physical location with attendance at that place by Members;
or
 - (ii) in more than one place ('remotely') by the use of electronic digital or 'virtual' locations, web addresses or conference call numbers; or

³ Co-opted members may be a member of another Deanery Synod

- (iii) by a combination of these methods.
 - b) Any reference to a meeting of the Synod includes a reference to a meeting which persons may attend, speak at, vote in, or otherwise participate in without all of the persons, or without any of the persons, being together in the same place.
 - c) A person would be considered to be present at a meeting of the Synod if they are able to hear and be heard, and where practicable see and be seen, by other members by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcast, live interactive streaming or other similar methods.
- 3. Normally dates for the year shall be fixed at the last meeting of the previous year.
- 4. If the dates are not arranged for the year ahead then members should have one month's notice of any meeting of the Deanery Synod except in emergencies (see clause 8 below).
- 5. All minutes, agendas and papers should be dispatched at least seven days before a meeting (by electronic means where possible). Business not listed on the agenda will not normally be discussed, but in exceptional circumstances permission may be given by the Chair.
- 6. The Quorum shall be one third of the members of each House including co-opted members. Members may not appoint alternatives if they are unable to attend.
- 7. Anyone with a particular interest in any matter of business must first declare the nature and extent of that interest when speaking.
- 8. Emergency meetings may be called at the request of the Rural Dean, the Lay Chair or six members of the Deanery Synod (including at least two members from each House). Emergency meetings shall require seven days' notice.
- 9. A financial report shall be approved annually by the Deanery Synod and the Standing Committee shall give a report on each occasion after it has met (see section VIII for the functions of the Standing Committee).
- 10. The separate Houses shall meet when required to elect/appoint representatives and in other instances if convened by the Chair or at the request of one third of members.
- 11. Minutes of meetings shall be sent to the Secretary of each PCC in the deanery as a matter of formal record. Parish representatives shall normally report to their PCC after every deanery synod meeting.

12. The Synod may designate all or some of its meetings to be open. The Chair shall decide whether those attending such meetings shall be allowed to speak. In respect of meetings of the whole Synod, people may be invited to attend as observers on either a temporary or permanent basis
13. Votes in the Synod shall be by a show of hands and shall require a simple majority of those present and voting. If necessary then the Chair may have a second or casting vote. In a meeting held remotely (in full or in part) a vote, whether of the whole Synod or by Houses, can be taken by such electronic method of voting as may be determined by the Rural Dean and the Lay Chair acting jointly (or one of them if the other is absent or incapacitated).
14. On an instruction from the Diocesan Synod, the General Synod or where nominations are required from a specific House there shall be a vote by Houses.
15. If voting is required in an election (other than to General Synod) then the simple majority method shall be used.
16. Subject to these rules, the deanery synod shall regulate its own procedure

VI. Officers

1. The Officers shall comprise the following⁴:
 - a) The Rural Dean
 - b) The Lay Chair
 - c) A Secretary elected by and from the members of the Synod, including those who have been co-opted.
 - d) A Treasurer elected by and from the members of the Synod, including those who have been co-opted. If no suitably qualified member is willing to be nominated, a treasurer may be appointed by the Synod from outside of its membership solely to carry out the necessary functions.
 - e) A Chapter Clerk appointed by the Rural Dean
 - f) If there is an Assistant Rural Dean then they shall serve as a Vice Chair of the Synod and the House of Clergy
 - g) The House of Laity may decide to elect one or more Vice Chairs from the membership of the Synod or by co-opting an individual who shall act as a Vice Chair of the Synod and the House of Laity.

⁴ For the Rural Dean, Lay Chair, Secretary and Treasurer separate role descriptions are available and these set out in more detail each officer's responsibilities and functions in relation to the operation of the deanery synod.

In selecting Vice Chairs the House of Laity may wish to appoint the past Chair, someone who is likely to succeed as Chair or someone who will assist the Chair by taking on responsibility for specific tasks.

2. The Rural Dean and the Lay Chair shall be joint chairs of the Deanery Synod
3. Where Officers are elected rather than appointed this election shall normally take place at the first meeting of the Triennium.
4. The Rural Dean and the Lay Chair shall agree between them who shall chair each meeting of the synod or particular items of business on an agenda.
5. The Lay Chair, Secretary and Treasurer shall normally continue in office until the conclusion of the meeting at which their successor is elected or appointed. If the office holder ceases to be a member at the end of the triennium, they shall only continue in office until the end of the first meeting of the new triennium. Other functions set out in the Church Representation Rules (for example in relation to elections) will continue to be carried out by the existing office holder in the period between the end of the old triennium and the conclusion of the first meeting of the new triennium. If necessary in these circumstances, functions may be carried out by one office holder on behalf of another, for example the Rural Dean or Lay Chair on behalf of the Secretary.

VII. Links with the Diocesan Synod and the General Synod

1. Each Deanery Synod shall be allocated a 'link' representative from among the members of the General Synod from the Diocese of Exeter (who may or may not be a member of the deanery synod in their own right). The Synod should normally have a report from the General Synod at each of its meetings. This could be a report on the last meeting(s) or an outline of the agenda and key items for a future meeting.
2. Members of the deanery Houses of Clergy and Laity who are the elected representatives of the deanery synod on the diocesan synod should also have a regular opportunity to report as above.

VIII. Standing Committee

1. The Committee's role in the Deanery is:
 - a) To plan a programme of meetings for the deanery synod and prepare the agenda for each meeting
 - b) To initiate and develop plans for mission and ministry within the deanery
 - c) To monitor the development and application of any Deanery Plan

- d) To consider the use of deanery funds
 - e) To support the Rural Dean and Lay Chair in their roles within the deanery and diocese and to receive reports from them about matters concerned with the deanery
 - f) To monitor attendance of those serving on their Synod, Committees and Diocesan Synod
 - g) To undertake such other tasks as are delegated to it by Diocesan Synod
2. The membership shall comprise:
- a) The Rural Dean and the Lay Chair (one of whom shall normally be the Chair)
 - b) The Secretary and the Treasurer of the Synod and, by agreement, the Chapter Clerk.
 - c) Not more than 2 clergy and 2 lay members elected from Deanery Synod
 - d) The Committee may co-opt other members (Deanery Synod shall determine the maximum number of such co-options which could include ecumenical representatives, or those with particular skills).

IX. Amendments

The Bishop's Council and Standing Committee shall review these Rules once every three years and shall invite comments from all Deaneries via Rural Deans and Lay Chairs on amendments or additions that should be made. Revisions will be subject to approval by Diocesan Synod.