

Diocesan Code of Conduct for General Synod Elections 2026

Approved by Diocesan Synod March 2026

Preamble

The role of a General Synod representative is a key and important one in the life of the Church of England. Members of General Synod play a huge part in how our National Church is shaped and developed. It works through difficult and thorny issues that are key to ensuring the Church of England stays faithful to Christian teachings, whilst considering how that plays out in the context of our modern and evolving world.

The General Synod has its own guidance on conduct of its members at General Synod Meetings, which are based on the Nolan Principles of Public Life. Please see the links at the end of this document for further information.

There is much useful guidance for those thinking of offering themselves as candidates for General Synod, which can be found on the GS webpages:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/general-synod/synod-members-resources>

It is important to note that if you are thinking of standing as a candidate your views and standpoints on some thorny and contentious issues will be of great interest to the electorate of the Diocese as they make their choices on whom to elect. The Church of England has a broad range of views and whilst we hope that people will be respectful of differing viewpoints we know from experience that there are occasions where discussions can become heated and argumentative. We endeavour to espouse the Diocesan Core Values of Excellence, Respect and Integrity. However, our role is advisory, and we cannot enforce sanctions with respect to personal views and reactions to the views of others.

We hope that standing as a candidate will be a positive experience whether you are a member of the clergy or laity and we have set out below a guidance document to help the election process. We ask that you adhere to the guidance set out to help this election process to run as smoothly, equitably and painlessly as possible.

With our prayers and blessings to all who feel called to offer their candidacy in this election.

The Chairs of the Houses of Clergy and Laity

Code of Conduct

This Diocesan guidance document is intended to help those wishing to stand for election to this important role. Whilst it is for guidance purposes, compliance is strongly encouraged to ensure all parties – candidates and electorate, treat others fairly and receive fair treatment in return. Electoral regulations require a ‘level playing field’ for all candidates and Chairs of the Diocesan Houses (Clergy and Lay) will take care to avoid infringing that principle. However, the role of Diocesan Chairs includes ensuring all people are treated with respect and will be able to advise candidates or electors if there is any issue raised by their house with regard to disrespectful conduct during the election process.

In voting for General Synod members, it is important for clergy and lay electors to understand the views of the people for whom they are voting, how they fit into the bigger picture of the Church of England landscape and how they would work towards shaping it in the future.

Being called to serve on General Synod is a distinct and privileged calling. Your interaction with the national ruling body of the Church of England will shape how our national church evolves over the next 5 years. Those who vote for you would like to know about you and how you see the next steps for the national church. Knowing how you stand on key issues is important to their decision making with respect to voting for their representatives for the next 5 years.

Personal Conduct:

The Diocese of Exeter espouses 6 key values, rooted in the fruits of the Spirit, and it would seem reasonable and appropriate to use these as a basis for the code of conduct for candidates seeking election to General Synod.

1. **Generosity of Spirit:** Candidates need to be approachable, not thinking too highly of themselves or their own views and being quick to acknowledge the strengths and qualities of other people who hold different views.
2. **Respect:** Many, perhaps most, problems arise not out of what participants in the electoral process say about themselves, but what they say about others, particularly those with whom they disagree on issues that they regard as of great importance. Speaking about other people needs always to be marked by a high degree of respect in tone and accuracy in substance, so that the other person is not diminished in the process.
3. **Openness:** Voters need to trust that what you say is authentic, genuine and explicit in terms of your personal view on a given issue, so that they know where you stand on key issues. Declaring affiliations and memberships of networks and para-church groupings is regarded as good practice for candidates. Candidates may, of course, decide not to express an opinion on a given issue. However, please bear in mind that electors may infer a candidate’s view if they feel information has been intentionally withheld.
4. **Wisdom:** Candidates need to be able to listen to others, to reflect, to discern and to be open to new insights. If unexpectedly a discussion is becoming heated or personalised,

there is a responsibility on all involved to step back when a discussion runs the risk of causing serious hurt to either party. A commitment to strive to maintain unity in the Spirit and bonds of peace remains a core characteristic of Christian fellowship, even during an election.

5. Team working: Whilst General Synod Representatives are not delegates and are not compelled to reflect a 'diocesan view' or to reach a consensus, they do need to be on good terms and co-operate with each other, maintaining a flexible and constructive stance where possible. This approach can usefully be practised and modelled by candidates during the electoral process without compromising on key characteristics of the candidacy.
6. Honesty: Candidates should be honest about how their Christian faith guides their response to pertinent current issues facing the National Church and should be prepared to express their view openly and honestly to voters.

As Christian members of the Church of England, we do not always agree but we can listen and share our thoughts honestly, compassionately and with dignity for ourselves and for others. This requires both candidates and voters to accept that others are sincere, faithful and well-motivated in holding viewpoints that are different from their own; good disagreement (including agreeing to disagree) is an important element of the election process.

Further Guidance:

Data Protection:

Candidates' and electors' personal information must not be passed on to third parties, except where explicit permission has been given or where specifically required under the rules that govern the election process. Provision is made in the electoral rules for individuals involved in the election to decide whether and how particular aspects of their personal data are used in specified circumstances. Personal information, including contact details, that is used appropriately in the conduct of the election should not be used for any other purpose unless with express permission from the person / people concerned. Candidates who legitimately acquire personal information during the course of the election are required to dispose of it securely afterwards. All data usage must be compliant with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018, compliance is enforceable by law.

Confidentiality:

No assumption of confidentiality should be made where conversations and communications occur between candidates and / or candidates and electors. In some situations, confidentiality is implicit – e.g., when speaking to election officers or chairs of houses. If it is not clear that confidentiality is implied, when beginning a discussion where information shared is of a private or confidential nature, it is important to lay down the 'rules of engagement' e.g., 'Chatham House Rules' apply, prior to starting the conversation. It is important that any information circulated should be done with agreement from the parties concerned.

Marketing of Candidates:

- All candidates have the opportunity to provide an electoral address as part of the formal process. The electoral regulations apply to what these comprise and how they are circulated. Candidates are not obliged to produce such an address.
- Candidates may wish to produce and circulate other materials relating to their candidacy (potentially including email circulations, social media contributions, an audio-visual presentation etc). The number, style and content of extra communications is at the discretion of the candidate. However, it should be borne in mind that electors may not appreciate being overloaded by large numbers of communications from candidates, which may become counter-productive.
- In the past the Diocese of Exeter has held hustings, where members of the electorate are able to ask questions of each of the candidates. This is not a formal part of the electoral process and is not governed by electoral regulations. The Presiding Officer will decide after consulting the Bishop's Council whether a hustings will take place and what form it will take; this may utilise an alternative format (for example an on-line question and answer forum). Whatever the format every effort will be made to be fair to all candidates but because of the numbers involved this is not possible to guarantee in every regard (for example, all candidates would be invited to participate but not all may be available to attend). It is not compulsory for candidates to take part in hustings, nor can candidates be required to answer particular questions as this is solely their choice.

It should be noted that it is up to candidates to 'market' their candidacy and ultimately what they say about themselves or others cannot be constrained by Diocesan Officers or others involved in the process, such as the Diocesan Chairs of Houses. However, it should be borne in mind that the electorate may take a particular view based on what a candidate does or doesn't do with regard to the electoral process. It is equally the case that Diocesan Officers and the Chairs of the respective houses may only intervene formally in the case of the electoral regulations having been infringed. In some circumstances, a quiet conversation and informal advice may be offered in order to seek to defuse a situation that has arisen but in the end the responsibility rests with candidates and their supporters.

It should be noted that the law of the land still applies and major breaches (such as defamation or the mis-use of personal data) could still have legal consequences.

Further information and documents:

General Synod Code of Conduct: <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/gs-misc-1175-code-of-conduct-2.pdf>

Nolan Principles of Public Life: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>