EXETER DIOCESAN SYNOD

A meeting of the Exeter Diocesan Synod
held at St Matt's Church, Lower Summerlands, Exeter EX1 2LJ
on Saturday 6th June 2026 at 10.00

Minutes

Introductory worship led by Mr. Christopher Rogers

The Bishop of Exeter, the Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, in the chair

1. Welcome and apologies
    - Apologies were received from 9 members of the House of Laity and 13 members of the House of Clergy.

2. Notices
    - Thanks were expressed to Mr. Neil Williams, attending his final meeting in his capacity as the Diocesan Director of Finance (before moving to new part time role of Head of Mission Community / Parish Support whilst retaining the role of DBF Company Secretary). Mr. Ian King, who was welcomed to the meeting, will take over as Director of Finance from 1st July.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting of Diocesan Synod held on 21st March 2026

Paper S/08/26

The Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter, introduced the draft minutes of the meeting held on 21st March. He noted that one minor amendment to the March minutes had been approved by the Chair after the circulation of the draft minutes with the Notice of Business for this meeting.

The minutes were approved on a show of hands.

4. Presidential Address

The text of the Bishop of Exeter's address is available here

5. Promulgation of Amending Canon 44

The Bishop of Exeter gave notice that, at its February 2026 group of sessions, the General Synod resolved that Amending Canon No. 44 be made, promulged and executed. Amending Canon No. 44 amends Canon C 8 to include provision for the exercise of ministry by Armed Forces chaplains.

6. To consider the 2027 Budget Strategy **Paper S/09/26**

Mr. Giles Frampton, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, set out the process that would lead to the approval of the Diocesan Budget for 2027 and noted that the item would provide the opportunity for members to have formative input into the key assumptions and determinants that would shape the budget.

Mr. Neil Williams, the Director of Finance, then summarised the process to date and set out the current position on the most important factors that contributed to the budget, as well as some questions for consideration, as set out in the paper. He particularly noted areas where changes were being considered (for example the proposals for the creation of the church planting designated fund) and also where the Diocesan Investment Programme funding award (and the conditions and assumptions associated with it) would have an impact, for example in terms of projected growth in numbers of participants. There were several factors where close monitoring of developments would be required, whether in terms of externalities (such as inflation) or in terms of internal performance. Finally he reminded members of their earlier policy decisions that were not being fully implemented for financial reasons; the attribution of the benefits arising from the adoption of Total Return accounting for the Diocesan Stipends Capital Fund to clergy stipends, rather than to clergy housing, meant that it was increasingly difficult to see the Diocese's Net Zero Carbon commitments and targets being met by 2030, and therefore there may be a need to implement carbon offsetting as detailed in the diocesan action plan.

Mr. Ian King, the Director of Finance designate, then provided an explanation of the newly expanded sensitivity analysis section within the strategy. He noted that the budget contained an underlying structural deficit of around £2.4m, before the specified application of assets to reduce it, and that the strategic decision had been taken (as evidenced by the application for and receipt of Diocesan Investment Programme Funding) to seek to move towards a balanced budget by increasing income rather than decreasing costs. He noted that if growth (which was expected to lead indirectly to increased giving) were not to be achieved in the number of participants as a result of all of the actions undertaken, the deficit could be expected to worsen substantially in the medium term (assuming no change in the underlying conditions, such as the financial arrangements arising from the relationship between the Church of England and its constituent dioceses). He noted that the budget strategy was built on a relatively positive set of projections and he highlighted the more negative scenario set out within the paper for comparative purposes. There was, in particular, a high degree of sensitivity around participation assumptions.

In discussion clarification was sought on the latest diocesan participant data (including via the national 'Statistics for Mission' data gathering exercise). It was noted that granular data is published on the diocesan website, along with data relating to Common Fund contributions. The reporting process for participant data for 2026 (which would be used in the calculation of the total and parochial Common Fund request for 2027) was due to start shortly. This would also be used to inform monitoring and reporting on the impact of the Diocesan Investment Programme funding and would be factored into the Common Fund Review process commencing before the end of the year. It was suggested that information relating to clergy deployment also be added to the website alongside the participant and Common Fund data.

Clarification was also sought on the relationship between the total number of stipendiary clergy posts, the budgeted number of stipends and the vacancy factor, and also on the number of clergy working in employed roles with the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF). It was noted that the vacancy rate for budgetary purposes was 12%, and that this was on the basis of recent recruitment experience rather than a target to be achieved. Clergy in DBF roles were not included in stipendiary clergy deployment calculations but reported under the relevant DBF functions.

Concerns were expressed about shaping the budget around a positive base case scenario, especially one relying on a significant improvement in key metrics and when the sensitivity and associated risks of under-performance were as significant as they were. It was noted that a great deal of work had been done to underpin the Diocesan Investment Programme funding application, both in relation to existing trends in participation and the quantum and timing of growth that had been projected. Even so, there were risks in the delivery of the strategy; although they should be weighed in the balance against the risks of taking a substantially different approach (such as a reduction in expenditure, for example to the existing level of income, and the associated decrease in activity that would result). It was also noted that if successful, the approach being undertaken would lead to a balanced budget within a sustainable timeframe but that that outcome would be subject to many influences, including those not within the control of the DBF.

Other issues raised included the remit of the proposed church planting fund, the issues arising from the disposal of capital assets (including houses and church buildings), the need to exert pressure for the release of national Church of England funding to achieve the Net Zero Carbon by 2030 target, the achievability of the projected increase in participation rates, the potential to extend a culture of tithing and the possibility of a new national funding settlement for dioceses.

Members were then invited to discuss in small groups the questions addressed to them in the paper concerning the key assumptions to be included in the budget strategy.

After the small group discussion, a plenary feedback session was held and members submitted written feedback. Support was expressed for being faithful in seeking growth in participation, albeit with more information needed about how that could be achieved on the ground given the widely differing financial circumstances that applied and different local experiences of growth and decline. It was suggested that the proposed planting fund take on a wider remit, to encompass revitalisation contexts as well new housing areas and to be available for posts as well as the development of facilities. Similarly, support was expressed for some continued resourcing of work to move towards the Net Zero Carbon target, even if that was achieved through the way in which expenditure was directed in other budget areas rather than through a dedicated funding stream. Finally, it was thought that there was a need to inculcate a culture of trust and a willingness to see resources re-distributed to where the need was greatest, supported by sustained teaching on generous giving.

7. To consider the Diocesan Prayer Strategy **Paper S/10/26**

The Right Revd. James Grier, Bishop of Plymouth, noted that 'Growing in Prayer' had been located at the start and the heart of the Diocesan Vision and Strategy since its inception. However, in comparison to the other two elements ('make new disciples and serve the people of Devon with joy') it had received relatively little direct attention. Even if prayer should and did underpin every other area of activity, it would still be the case that to grow in prayer required focus, intention and resourcing (in terms of the prioritisation of time, if nothing else). All disciples, regardless of the length of their Christian journey, could with encouragement and guidance develop a prayer-filled life that would motivate and provide impetus for their service and witness to others.

Consideration was therefore being given to a range of activities to do with prayer that could benefit from increased attention. These included focusing on particular periods in the year (four, one-week periods) during which individual and collective prayer would be given explicit and particular priority in the life of the Diocese. These weeks of prayer would fit in with the seasons of the church year and accordingly would have different themes and characteristics. Furthermore, encouragement would be given to building up the practice of intercessory prayer in local churches, with the many volunteer leaders of intercessory prayers (in services of worship and in other contexts) being invited to participate in an intercessory prayer network. It was hoped to facilitate a culture of intergenerational peer learning and support that would recognise and affirm people in their own contexts.

In discussion, members queried the timing of the diocesan weeks of prayer, especially as they did not necessarily coincide with the Church of England's own national initiatives in this area. It was noted that some initial work had been undertaken with schools to explore when the weeks could most helpfully be timed from their point of view. The existing activities undertaken by the Mothers' Union in relation to intercessory prayer were also noted and it was suggested that there were opportunities for partnership working to be explored. Finally, it was noted that although particular emphasis had been placed on intercessory prayer, it would also be important to incorporate other types of prayer into the network's activity, including confession, repentance and thanksgiving. It was noted that all of these aspects would need to be present for ministry and mission activity to be truly 'undergirded' by prayer.

8. To approve amendments to the Deanery Synod Rules **Paper S/11/26**

Dr. Ed Moffatt, the Head of Governance, introduced the triennial review of the Diocese's Deanery Synod Rules and the recommendations arising from it. Of the three recommendations under consideration only one was substantive, arising as it did from the conjunction in 2026 of the triennial election process to deanery synods and the quinquennial election process to the General Synod, with the membership of the former largely making up the electorate of the latter. This was the first such interaction between the respective electoral processes since a major revision of the Church Representation Rules in 2020 and an issue had arisen around the availability of the deanery secretary to carry out actions in relation to the General Synod election process at the start of July, right at the start of the deanery synod triennium. The Legal Office in London had advised that the Deanery Synod Rules be amended, if necessary, to cover the situation and accordingly a number of dioceses were making similar amendments at this time.

The Revd. Preb. Mike Partridge, Chair of the House of Clergy, then moved the following motion:

> 'This Synod approves the amendments to the Deanery Synod Rules for the Diocese of Exeter as set out in Paper S/11/16'

In the absence of any debate, the motion was put to the vote and approved nem con.

9. Questions

Questions and answers are available in Appendix A