

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON Wednesday 8 July 2020
Via video conference

Present: The Bishop of Ely (in the chair), the Bishop of Huntingdon, Mr Donald Ashmore, Revd Canon Brian Atling, Very Revd Mark Bonney, Revd Canon Mike Booker, Mr Francis Burkitt, Revd Canon Adrian Daffern, Revd Martin Dale, Mrs Sue Freestone, Ven Dr Alex Hughes, Canon Simon Kershaw, Mrs Diana Lucas, Mr George Lynn, Mr Martin Macfarlane, Mr Steve Mashford, Revd Canon Anna Matthews, Ven Hugh McCurdy, Revd Canon Nick Moir, Revd Canon Alison Myers, Mr Rob Needle, Revd Carol Nicholas-Letch, Canon Janet Perrett, Dr Arvan Pritchard, Mrs Sarah Robinson, Revd Simon Talbott, Ms Lizzie Taylor, Canon Tim Walters.

In attendance: Canon Paul Evans, Mrs Sheena Bridgman, Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh, Mr Adam Evans, Mr Jon Green, Mrs Lorraine Orbell, Mr James Owen, Mr Andrew Read

Dwelling in the Word was led by the Ven Hugh McCurdy

Apologies were received from Mrs Elaine Levitt and Mr Stephen Tooke. It is noted that Revd Jason Taylor has moved to Diocese of Gloucester.

The **Minutes** of the Bishop's Council meeting on 23 May 2020 were agreed and signed. **Matters Arising:** Currently around 50% of the Diocesan Office staff and Bishop Woodford House are furloughed, leaving an operational core working from home. Business efficiency is being successfully maintained with staff working from home. Staff are being properly governed and are working in a safe environment.

Bishop's Business: Bishop Stephen invited nominations for membership of the National Clergy Discipline Measure Panel (2 positions). He highlighted that the Diocese is in a serious financial position as a result of the drop in investment income, not in Ministry Share. The Diocese expects to show a £1m+ deficit at year end 2020. Grateful thanks are given to all those sustaining Ministry Share for their generosity. Investment income may be anticipated to return to pre-Covid levels at some point in 2022. Bishop Stephen encouraged prudence at all levels to protect the clergy and ministers in office, to support growth for vocations and to sustain the number of curates. Some Dioceses are in a considerably worse financial position.

The Diocese of Ely has pledged, in their next intake, to welcome a full complement of 9 ordinands. Seven of these Deacons will be taken by the Diocese of Ely, with a further two being funded by Ely for the Diocese of Newcastle.

A debt of gratitude was given to Revd Canon Linda Church on her retirement at end July 2020. All roles in the Department of Ministry and Mission are being reviewed. Andrew Read is acting as Interim Director and is already focussing on the areas of need, joining up mission and ministry in both schools and parishes.

The recruitment for the Growing Faith position has been halted.

Ely Diocesan Board of Finance (EDBF): Revd Canon Brian Atling (BA), Chair of the EDBF, advised that the Diocese is in a serious but manageable financial position. BA confirmed that the anticipated deficit at year end 2020 was in the region of £1m - £1.2m. The anticipated small reduction in Ministry Share has been offset by income received from the Government's Furlough Scheme. 24 staff have been furloughed (9 from Bishop Woodford House - BWH). He reported financial concerns about the viability of BWH referring to the independent report prepared by Canon Tim Walters.

The National Church had announced a £35m fund to support Dioceses in deficit. The Diocese of Ely plans to submit a claim for £650k grant to cover the deficit, but is by no means clear that this will be successful.

Cash flow is being carefully managed for 2020. Projections for the draft budget for 2021 are expected to be tight and it is anticipated that the situation could be managed through a programme of economies and a managed reduction in clergy numbers, capped at 104 (referred to Ven Alex Hughes paper later). BA expressed a preference that there should not be a deficit budget for 2022.

There has been a reduction in spending, Diocesan staffing levels are being reviewed. There will be a proposal for a zero increase in Ministry Share (recommended by the National Church), with a corresponding zero increase in clergy stipends and staff salaries.

Finance Committee recommended approval of the proposal to Bishop's Council to fund 9 curates (7 for Ely and 2 for Diocese of Newcastle)

Proposed: Revd Canon Brian Atling

Seconded: Revd Simon Talbott

Approved unanimously.

The Chair of the EDBF and the Diocesan Secretary were formally thanked for their work on the finances together with Mrs Lorraine Orbell, Financial Controller, and her team.

Bishop Woodford House, Retreat and Conference Centre (BWH)

Canon Tim Walters presented his report, previously endorsed by both Finance and Audit Committees. BWH is no longer financially sustainable as a provider of accommodation. A small profit was achieved in 2019, but lockdown and the Covid-19 coronavirus situation for 2020 means there would be no clientele through the last three quarters of 2020, which would result in major losses to the Diocese if no further action is taken. Paul Evans (PE) advised that negotiations were taking place with Kings Ely to take BWH as a dry hire for expansion of their sanatorium and the creation of an isolation unit for returning pupils effective August 2020. PE also advised that negotiations are proceeding with the Charities Commission to re-form the Trust which holds the freehold for the whole site. It is planned to form the Diocese of Ely Educational Trust - with the hope that this process will be complete by end 2020.

Bishop's Council were asked to approve the proposal to close the Retreat House and Conference Centre set out in Canon Walters' paper

Proposed: Revd Canon Brian Atling

Seconded: Canon Tim Walters

Approved unanimously.

Sustainable Deployment

Ven Alex Hughes summarised the contents of his paper recommending a temporary suspension/freeze of the clergy appointment processes as an emergency measure to support short-term financial management. Additional support to parishes in vacancy will be offered as an interim arrangement and he reassured Bishop's Council that no posts would be axed. Licensed clergy will be identified and invited to offer their services to these parishes.

Through departures and predicted retirements, total numbers of FTE clergy posts will be reduced to 104 and then capped for sustainability - with an actual budgeted operating figure of 96 to take account of vacancies. Further retirements or clergy moves out of the Diocese after reaching this cap will allow for appointments to be made.

The budget for 2021 is yet to be set. The financial situation is anticipated to be much clearer in September with regard to investment income and Ministry Share payments.

Motion 1

This Council confirms that all appointment processes must pause until 2021, with the exception of appointments to Market Towns, and requests the finance committee to draft the 2021 budget on this basis.

Proposed Ven Alex Hughes
Seconded Revd Canon Adrian Daffern Approved by majority

22 for : none against : 3 abstentions (Revd Canon Anna Matthews, Revd Canon Alison Myers, Mrs Sarah Robinson)

Motion 2

This Council requests the Archdeacons and the interim Head of the Department of Development (Ministry & Mission) to explore options to deploy non-parochial diocesan stipendiary/paid clergy and experienced stipendiary Title curates to provide interim support to vacant parishes. The Council would welcome additional initiatives to deploy SSM clergy and lay ministers on a similar basis

Proposed Ven Alex Hughes
Seconded Mrs Sue Freestone Approved unanimously

Motion 3

This Council alerts Deaneries to the need to produce new pastoral plans as a matter of urgency. In preparation for this work, it requests the Archdeacons to convene a group to produce specific guidance on the next phase of pastoral planning, ready for approval by this Council in September 2020. The task group should include two Rural Deans and four lay people.

Proposed Ven Alex Hughes
Seconded Ven Hugh McCurdy Approved unanimously

Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee: the Archdeacons advised that the next ADMPCs would take place in September and would be considering Deanery Plans

Diocesan Synod: The Chair of the House of Clergy, Revd Canon Alison Myers, and the Chair of the House of Laity, Canon Simon Kershaw, advised that the Diocesan Synod would be meeting twice in the autumn by video conference following the signed instrument by the Bishop of Ely authorising Synod members to vote formally.

General Synod elections will take place in 2021, which will coincide with the election of a new Diocesan Synod.

The meeting closed with prayer at 8.52pm

Dates of next Bishop's Council meetings:

2020: 24 September, 18 November

Dates of Diocesan Synod meetings:

2020: 7 October and 8 December