

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD ON Saturday 22 May 2021
Via video conference starting at 9.15am

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, Revd Canon Adrian Daffern, Revd Martin Dale, Mrs Sue Freestone, Ven Dr Alex Hughes, Canon Simon Kershaw, Mrs Elaine Levitt, Mrs Diana Lucas, Mr George Lynn, Mr Martin Macfarlane, Mr Steve Mashford, Revd Canon Anna Matthews, Canon Peter Maxwell, Ven Hugh McCurdy, Revd Canon Nick Moir, Revd Canon Alison Myers, Revd Carol Nicholas-Letch, Canon Janet Perrett, Dr Arvan Pritchard, Mrs Sarah Robinson, Revd Canon Simon Talbott, Mr Stephen Tooke, Canon Tim Walters.

In attendance: Canon Paul Evans, Ms Rebecca Boswell, Mrs Sheena Bridgman, Revd Dr Hannah Cleugh, Mr Adam Evans, Mr Adam Halsey (haysmactintyre), Mr Geoffrey Hunter, Mr Martin Kenward, Revd Allan Landall, Ms Olivia O'Neil, Mrs Lorraine Orbell, Mr Andrew Read, Revd Janet Sutton

Dwelling in the Word was led by the Bishop of Huntingdon

Apologies were received from Mr Francis Burkitt, Mr Rob Needle and Canon Lizzie Taylor.

The **Minutes** of the Bishop's Council meeting on 24 March 2021 were agreed and signed.

Matters Arising: There were no matters arising.

Bishop's Business: Bishop Stephen advised that he had received a letter of sincere thanks from the Bishop of Newcastle for the part-funding of two curacies, Miriam Jones and Sion Hughes Carew, in the Diocese of Newcastle.

Business of the Diocesan Synod: The Chair of the House of Laity, gave a brief resume. An additional informal meeting of newly elected Diocesan Synod members will be held in person to discuss Living in Love and Faith.

Business of the Diocesan Board of Finance (EDBF): Revd Canon Brian Atling (BA) advised that projection of a deficit close to £1m continues, particularly as investment income is slow to return. It was hoped to have had a balanced budget for 2022, but the anticipation is that 2022 will remain in deficit for a third year in succession. BA stated that, in order not to build in a structural deficit, it is essential to keep tight rein on all expenditures and to aim for a balanced budget in 2023. All major costs are being interrogated, and streamlined or postponed where possible. Steps will necessarily be taken to eradicate deficits in future years.

Adam Halsey, Senior Partner of haysmactintyre (EDBF auditors) was invited to comment on the audit and its process. The virtual audit of the Diocesan accounts was satisfactory - recommendations for enhancements of internal controls have been made, with the majority already implemented by the Finance Team.

He was pleased to present a clean report to Bishop's Council acknowledging the generosity of parishes in maintaining the levels of Ministry Share. He observed that this position would only be for a limited length of time, particularly where parishes' reserves have been used for these payments.

He advised that 2021 will continue to be a more challenging year, which will be reflected in 2022 Budget. There has been no prop-up funding made available to the Diocese from the central church bale out funds.

Following this satisfactory audit, he signed off the Diocese of Ely as a going concern with adequate cash reserves to meet obligations as they become due. The Diocese's reserves policy is set out in the Annual Accounts.

Mr Halsey added that, in his opinion, although the Diocese of Ely is in a satisfactory financial position, it does have all the required resources to deliver the strategy in the short term, and that further generosity would be needed to meet this, or projects curtailed. Balancing the present situation against future plans is the current challenge, together with considered and consistent communications across the parishes and Diocese. The Diocesan Secretary agreed that a paper would be prepared to show the adequacy of funding for the strategic plan.

Mr Halsey concluded that the Annual Accounts 2020 represent a true and fair view and commended them to Bishop's Council for signing after some minor typographic corrections had been made.

BA thanks haysmacintyre and the Diocesan Finance Team for the conclusion of a complicated, virtual process.

It was agreed that the Trustees Report (as part of the Annual Accounts) would be developed for future years to ensure that the Diocese's complex financial holdings could more easily be seen in context by those reading the documents.

Motion - This house accepts the 2020 Statutory Report and Accounts

Proposed Revd Canon Simon Talbott Seconded Mr Donald Ashmore

The motion was passed unanimously

Breakout groups then discussed the 2022 budget and feedback was collected

EDBF Risk Position 2021/22: George Lynn, Chair of the Audit Committee, explained the role of the risk register, and the acknowledgement that it should be a dynamic document allowing for mitigation of risk and reporting back to Bishop's Council (Trustees) who are the owners of those risks. This allows the Diocese to focus on higher level risks with the greatest impact. The Diocese is much better placed to manage operational risks than in previous years.

Dr Arvan Pritchard was thanked for his contributions.

Clergy Wellbeing Group - Terms of Reference: Bishop Dagmar announced that the procedures and Terms of Reference for the Clergy Wellbeing Group (formerly the Clergy Wellbeing Forum) were being updated. It will make recommendations and report to Bishop's Council, starting in Autumn 2021, with a list of wide-ranging objectives which will encompass embedding wellbeing into daily culture and implementing the Clergy Covenant.

Changing Market Towns - Interim assessment of progress: Revd Canon Mike Booker (MB) introduced his presentation which reflected on the Ely2025 strategy which was initiated in 2015. See slide show attached.

He introduced a case study from All Saint's Church, Walsoken, led by Revd Allan Landall with Olivia O'Neil, Operations Manager.

Breakout groups discussed points from the presentation; what might assist future decisions across the Diocese, new engagement during lockdown in local communities, has home working affected the local area, what could or might re-start after lockdown, new activities and what might not continue.

Following MB's resignation, the appointment for his successor is underway. Bishop's Council formally thanked MB for his wide-ranging contributions

Living Ely2025: Deanery Development Planning - led by the Archdeacons. Comments from members of Bishop's Council on the circulated paper were invited to be sent to the Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech.

An engagement and communications strategy is to be prepared in order to inform all those in the parishes who will be involved. Council was invited to give specific feedback on two points to the Archdeacon of Cambridge: Who are the key stakeholders to enable Deanery Development Planning to be successful? What information needs to be provided to motivate and make the process effective? Small teams will visit parishes, deaneries, schools and communities to encourage, engage, invite comment and gather information.

Mission and Ministry: new structure and planned deliverables

Since July 2020, Andrew Read (AR) has been in post as Interim Director of Mission and Ministry as well as Director of Education. During this period Mission and Ministry has been reorganised under four Pillars which have been informed by future priorities and the use of existing vacancies, together with the integration of some education aspects with Ministry and Mission. EDBF staff Job Descriptions have been re-written and the budgetary spend through the lockdowns has been reduced (contributing to the reduction in the Diocese's deficit). Bishop Dagmar paid tribute to staff members in both Departments who, alongside EDBF colleagues, have worked under significant pressure through the pandemic.

The current situation where AR holds two posts is untenable and non-sustainable. It is proposed that the two existing vacancies be filled (a Families and Youth Adviser and a Schools Support Officer with Deputy Director of Education status), plus the appointment of a Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry (ordained).

The proposed change in structure, with comment from Bishop's Council, will then be considered by the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) for approval. Regular reviews of the operations will be expected.

In addition, there is a perceived need for a Director of Lay Ministry (a new post to be advertised in future when the financial situation permits), which role will also act as Deputy to AR and share the operational load. It is understood that, in order to cover the costs of this new role, other areas of strategic implementation must reduce.

Breakout groups considered the coverage, priorities and rationale of the four pillars for future need, the invitation to approve the appointment of new Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry and the advertisement of posts as outlined, as well as how to continue supporting parishes in their needs within realistic budgets. Feedback was given and noted by AR.

As a result of the working practices which have evolved during the Covid pandemic, opportunities exist (for all EDBF staff) to consider hybrid working, making full and better use of technology and new methods of carrying out their roles.

Proposal: That a Deputy Director of Mission and Ministry (ordained) is appointed at the earliest opportunity

Proposed: Bishop of Huntingdon

Seconded: Revd Canon Brian Atling

One abstention: Revd Canon Nick Moir

The proposal was passed by majority

Safeguarding: Ms Rebecca Boswell summarised her distributed paper.

It was acknowledged that Safeguarding is to be a standing item on future Bishop's Council and Synod agenda.

Diocese of Ely Environmental Task Group (DETG): Geoffrey Hunter (GH) gave a progress report (see slides attached). The General Synod Resolution to be Carbon Neutral by 2030 is presenting a considerable challenge. As a result, the DETG was formed (first meeting in September 2020) which currently comprises 8 individuals including 2 Diocesan Heads of Department. DETG will present at June 2021 Synod.

Questions were posed about the carbon neutral position of the Diocese owned houses, carbon offsetting and the anticipated relationships with parishes. GH reminded Council that baseline data is included in the REACHEly surveys.

Bishop Woodford House - future Diocesan accommodation requirements: Paul Evans (PE), Diocesan Secretary, spoke to the distributed paper, highlighting that King's Ely, who are already renting the former Retreat House and Conference Centre as their Medical Centre, have indicated their interest in leasing the entire Barton Road site. The Barton Road site is owned by the Diocese of Ely Religious Educational Trust (DERET), formerly the Ely Theological College Trust. The Diocese is a tenant of that trust. Leasing the whole site to King's Ely would provide a future income stream to DERET from which grants for (religious) educational purposes (including ministry) would be made.

The benefits of hybrid working have been investigated and discussed with 90% of the workforce being content to work from home, combined with meeting colleagues once or twice a week. Meetings are being conducted in a mixed way, a combination of video conferencing and in person. It is anticipated that mixed modes offered for training purposes will very likely reach more people per occasion and will permit access from the security and comfort of home. Many more people than assumed have embraced technology for a variety of purposes through the pandemic lockdowns, becoming increasingly competent.

The auditors have stated that access to funds in the Diocesan Pastoral Account, one of the Diocese's restricted funds, would be acceptable for the construction of a new office building, giving the Diocese an asset for the future while retaining the Barton Road site as an income stream for DERET. BA explained the funding situation for the purchase and construction of a new building, emphasising that there would be no cost to Ministry Share.

PE requested Bishop's Council's approval and permission to research opportunities, with a business plan to be brought back to the next meeting of Bishop's Council on 15 September 2021.

Approval was given by majority with one abstention - Very Revd Mark Bonney, conflicted as a Governor of King's Ely.

Diocesan Synod and General Synod elections: Diocesan Synod results will be known at the beginning of July. The timetable for General Synod elections will be published on the Diocese of Ely website and circulated once it has been finalised centrally.

Online hustings will be held for General Synod candidates by House where candidates are to be encouraged to demonstrate transparency in their motivation and purpose for standing. The online hustings are expected to probe candidates' stands on the anticipated issues to be debated during the forthcoming quinquennium.

Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee: the minutes for both Archdeaconry Mission and Pastoral Committees were received. There were no matters to be raised, there having been no meetings since February 2020. There were no questions.

The remaining papers on the agenda were deemed business.

The meeting closed with prayer at 4.15pm

Dates of next Bishop's Council meetings:

14 July eve

15 September eve

23 November eve