

WORCESTER DIOCESAN SYNOD the First Session of the Eighteenth Synod

St George's Church, Kidderminster
at 7pm on Thursday 11 November 2021

Opening prayers were led by Rector of the Kidderminster East Team, David Hildred.

Bishop Martin welcomed Shari Lewison-Frisch as the **Children's Society Ambassador** for our diocese and together the synod prayed for her work.



The record of the meetings of the Synod and the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited held on 28 June 2021 were approved.

Colin Butler raised a question under Standing Order 71:

“In the judgement given earlier this year concerning the installation of a gas heating system in Top Church, Dudley, the Chancellor indicated a preference for sustainable heating systems and that a case would need to be made before carbon systems would gain approval. Given that the cost of installing ground source and air source heat pump systems is likely to be prohibitive for many parishes, what alternatives are available, acceptable and affordable?”



Archdeacon Robert Jones, as Acting Chair of the DAC, responded by saying that the boiler at Top Church was approved because it was delayed due to the pandemic and the application had been made before the General Synod's statement. The Chancellor made clear that in all future applications, alternatives should be considered and as a diocese we are committed to helping parishes to achieve this. [Read the full response.](#)

Colin followed up his question to ask that decisions are made as speedily as possible because these are challenges currently being faced at parish level.

The results of **elections in the houses of Laity and Clergy** were announced. Clare Lording was elected Chair of the House of Clergy with Katryn Leclezio as Secretary and Hugh Richards was elected Chair of the House of Laity with Nick Stephens as Secretary.

As Bishop John is currently on sabbatical, Bishop Martin gave the **Presidential Address**, thanking everyone for standing to serve on Diocesan Synod. He reflected on the pandemic, some of the issues being discussed during this synod meeting and his pilgrimage of prayer and hope. [Read the full address](#)



The Diocesan Secretary, John Preston led a short **induction to Diocesan Synod**, seeking to equip members to contribute well, and to make the most of the opportunities that arise from membership of the Synod. This included practical information as to when members will receive papers and how they can ask questions.

Some 'top tips' were shared by members of synod from their past experience. This included making sure you introduce yourself when you come to speak and not leaving it to others to say what you are thinking. It was suggested that members should use the opportunity to speak to different people from across the Diocese, pray before attending and think about how best to share the information with others.



As the Children's Society Ambassador in our diocese, Shari Lewison-Frisch presented the charity's '**Good Childhood Report**'. [See her slides](#) She explained that this is the tenth year of the report, which looks at the wellbeing of young people between the age of 10 and 15. The Children's Society ambition is to overturn the decline in children's wellbeing. The 2021 report showed a decrease in children's happiness in relation to their appearance, friends and school, although there was no change in how young people felt about family and home.

The report also looked at children's experiences of Covid-19 and how they've coped with the pandemic following the lifting of the 2021 lockdown. It suggested that most children seem to have coped well, although more needs to be done to help children to catch up educationally. Here is a small proportion who have found it harder and would benefit from support.

Shari reported that there should be clear priorities for improvement around the areas of friends, appearance and school and we must all take children's concerns about the future seriously and address them. However, despite the challenges, seven in ten children are optimistic about the future.

The Children's Society is calling for the Government to come up with a bold and ambitious plan with three key pillars:

- Intervening early to stop abuse and neglect
- Tackling child policy
- Responding to children's emotional health concerns through open access, community services.

However, there was no additional money for this in the Chancellor's recent budget.

Shari asked for Synod members to help by reading the report and looking to see what could be done in their local area. She encouraged members to take an active role in the work of the Children's Society.

Members had the opportunity to discuss the issues in small groups and offer any responses. Director of Education, Tim Reid, highlighted some resources that his team and other dioceses have produced, and Bishop Martin highlighted the Online Harms bill currently going through Parliament - a number of bishops are encouraging MPs to be courageous in how we protect young people online.

Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance (DBF), Andy Todd, presented the **2022 DBF budget** for consideration and approval on behalf of the Bishop's Council and Standing Committee. [See his slides](#). He said that this was not about approving the 'right' budget, but rather one which balances hope, prudence and realism.



The 2022 budget shows a deficit of £261k with both income and expenditure lower than in 2021. In 2021 the Parish Share request was £5.774m. In 2022, the Ministry Share requested will be £5.447m (a drop of 5.7%). Andy explained that realistically, we know we won't achieve full Share, so are budgeting for a receipt of £4.611m (between 2019 actual receipt of £4.825 and 2022 actual of £4.430m). The balance of the budget also includes some additional contributions from benefices whose Ministry Share is reducing, along with planned use of reserves and Lowest Income Community funding.

The budget incorporates a 2% increase in stipends and wages (there was no increase in 2021).

Andy commended the budget to synod and there was an opportunity for questions. These included the reasons behind setting a deficit budget rather than trying to aim to break even (Andy explained that we are recognising uncertainty and trying to be realistic) and whether the stipend increase would translate to House for Duty priests? (John Preston confirmed that the housing allowance would also rise.)

Andy moved that:

“This Synod approves the budget presented by the Bishop’s Council and Standing Committee for the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited, which provides for expenditure of £8,240,779 in 2022, and leading to a budgeted deficit on general operations of £261,556.”

This was carried with one abstention.

The meeting moved to be a general meeting of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd to consider the following **resolution on the 2021 DBF budget**.

Andy Todd, Chair of the DBF, moved that:

“The Company hereby approves the budget of the Worcester Diocesan Board of Finance Limited for 2021, as approved by the Diocesan Synod in its immediately preceding business.”

This was carried unanimously.

Thanks were expressed to Andy, John Preston and Helen Archer-Smith (Diocesan Director of Finance) for their work in preparing the budget.



The meeting once again became a meeting of the Worcester Diocesan Synod.

Tim Reid, Director of Education introduced a **new scheme under the DBE Measure**, which was agreed by General Synod in 2020 and needs to be implemented by Jan 2023 at the latest. This sets out the continuing need for dioceses to have a Diocesan Board of Education (DBE).



Bryan Allbut, Chair of the Diocesan Board of Education, set out what the change means for our DBE, explaining that the Board had explored a number of different options and had voted unanimously to become a Statutory Committee of the DBF. This fits with the way the DBE currently works and removes the need to set up a completely separate organisation.

He then moved the motion that:

“This Synod approves the scheme for the Diocesan Board of Education as outlined in paper DS (21)18.”

This was carried unanimously.

Thanks were expressed to Tim and Bryan and the whole DBE for their work with our schools.

As part of our **Growing as Kingdom People vision**, The Diocesan Secretary, John Preston and Diocesan Lead for Transformation and Change, Archdeacon Nikki Groarke, explained recent decisions taken by Bishop’s Council that will seek to support parishes to become healthier and more sustainable during these extraordinary times.

John began by introducing two funds to help us address the issues we set out in our Open Conversations, as well as help parishes as they recover from the pandemic. He said: “Treasurers talk about reserves being for a rainy day...it’s definitely raining! The diocesan team have been looking at how we can use reserves to help parishes and we’re also grateful to parishes who have been using their own reserves to pay parish share.”



John explained that a change in the law has enabled us to draw more money from our investments, while still ensuring that the investment is maintained for future generations and Bishop’s Council has agreed that we can access £3.1m to be spent over the next five years. Bishop’s Council and the Resources Committee have both thought through the hard question of how we spend these additional funds – what is the best use of the money? [Read more about this on this paper.](#)

John set out two areas where we want to focus use of reserves:

- Supporting healthier churches - helping parishes to develop plans to help wider engagement and provide more ministry in our parishes.
- Enabling churches to move towards more sustainable patterns of ministry and enabling our lower income communities to afford stipendiary clergy.

There will be a £4.6m **Ministry Support Fund** to support sustainable ministry. This will specifically help parishes who are struggling to meet their Ministry Share and will be created with Lowest Income Community Funding, contributions from parishes able to afford to pay additional share, some diocesan reserves and £0.5m freed up from our investments. Parishes will be able to apply annually – guidance will be available shortly.

In addition to this, we are creating a five-year £4.05m **Healthier Churches Fund** using £2.5m freed up from investments and the remainder of the Lowest Income Community funding. Parishes will be able to apply for funding for projects to help make a difference in reaching out in their community and bring more people to faith. There will also be help for parishes wishing to apply.



Archdeacon Nikki then outlined a new scheme to provide support parishes through a programme of “**Mission Accompaniers**” – people parishes can invite to help them formulate and implement their plans for increased health and sustainability.

She explained that she is often asked what a healthy and sustainable church looks like. The answer is that it is often very different in different contexts. Mission Accompaniers will provide bespoke support for parishes to help work out what being healthy and sustainable looks like in their particular setting. This won’t be more employees or a new ‘middle management’ in the Diocese, but people who will work directly in parishes to enable, support, equip and resource them. [Read more about Mission Accompaniers on this paper.](#)

There were a number of questions and comments from Synod, including the accountability for grants awarded – how will we measure success? How can we ensure our Resourcing Churches continue to be involved in these plans? Please can we make sure that there are some stories of growth communicated to deaneries?

Synod was closed with prayer from Bishop Martin.

Date of next meeting: Saturday 5 March 2022 at 9:30am

