

BRIEFING NOTE ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE STANDING ORDERS OF THE BRISTOL DIOCESAN SYNOD.

Introduction

As part of our ambition to make the Diocese of Bristol's Diocesan Synod more inclusive and engaging, and to reflect the changing methods of communication and use of technology, we have reviewed the Diocesan Synod's Standing Orders. In doing so we have also reviewed the Standing Orders from other Dioceses and discussed some of the proposed changes with colleagues both within the Diocese of Bristol and beyond. Given the length of the Standing Orders document, this note is drafted to give an overview of the proposed changes to the current Standing Orders ('SOs') (last amended November 2021) of Bristol Diocesan Synod as put forward by the Diocesan Registrar.

As a starting point the SOs are broadly similar to most other dioceses, however some dioceses have evolved their practice to better reflect the manner in which diocesan synods are also now a discursive as well as determining body.

Below are the proposed changes, along with a brief explanation to help the Diocesan Synod form a view. We have also prepared a paper which provides guidelines to accompany the Standing Orders.

Proposed changes

1. New SO10A

10A. The Chairs of the Houses of Laity and Clergy can only serve 3 consecutive terms as Chair and shall only be able to stand for election as Chair again after a further three year period has expired.

2. SO 21A – 21F

To enable virtual meetings, it is proposed to add a new standing order 21A as follows:

21A. A reference to a meeting of the Diocesan Synod includes a reference to a meeting which persons may attend, speak at, vote in, or otherwise participate in without all of the persons, or without any of the persons, being together in the same place.

21B. A reference to a place where a meeting of the Diocesan Synod is held, or is to be held, includes a reference to more than one place, including

electronic, digital or virtual locations, web addresses or conference call telephone numbers.

21C. *A person is to be regarded as present at a meeting of the Diocesan Synod at any given time if the person is at that time able to hear and be heard, and where practicable see and be seen, by the other persons present. For those members of Diocesan Synod who are not able to hear, see or make themselves heard, reasonable adjustments will be made on a per meeting basis to ensure they are able to full participate in meetings of Diocesan Synod.*

21D. *A vote, whether of the whole Diocesan Synod or by Houses, may be taken by such electronic method of voting as may be determined by the Bishop, the Chair of the House of Clergy and the Chair of the House of Laity acting jointly.*

21E. *A reference in these Standing Orders to being present at a meeting of the Diocesan Synod includes a reference to being present by electronic means, including by telephone conference, video conference, live webcast and live interactive streaming.*

21G. *Whether to hold a meeting virtually under these Standing Orders shall be determined by the Standing Committee on a case-by-case basis.*

This text is broadly the same as the Bishop of Bristol's Instruments enabling the same under the Church Representation Rules.

3. SO 32

Whilst SO 126a allows for electronic communications of papers etc, SO 33 refers to delivery of notice of business for Diocesan Synod being given 'in writing signed and delivered to the secretary by hand or by post'. There's a discrepancy between the two and it is suggested SO 32 be amended to read as follows:

Subject to standing order 24 notice of any business for a meeting of the Diocesan Synod shall be in writing signed and delivered to the Secretary by hand, by post or by electronic means not later than the period before the meeting which is specified in Standing Order 33

4. New 34A and 34B

34A. *Minutes of the meetings of Diocesan Synod shall be kept by the Secretary and shall be circulated to Diocesan Synod members following a meeting for any amendments/corrections to be noted. Any such amendments/corrections shall be notified to the Secretary no more than 21 days after the minutes have been circulated and the consolidated minutes shall be notified to the Diocesan Synod at its next meeting.*

5. New SOs 36A and 36B

36A. *The conduct of business of the Diocesan Synod shall be in accordance with these Standing*

Orders, and shall follow one of the following procedures:

i. *Formal debate, including amendments*

Function objective: decision making or expressing a collective opinion

ii. *Informal Discussion (for example, to collect ideas and comments which may include roundtable or small groups)*

Function objective: consultation and advising

iii. *Presentation which may be followed by questions and answers (for example, about*

developments and initiatives taking place in the administration and missional

work of the Diocese)

Function objective: to better inform the Diocesan Synod to perform its functions

iv. *For information*

Function objective: to ensure Diocesan Synod is fully aware of current issues within the Diocese

36B. *Subject to any legal requirement for a particular procedure to be followed (for*

example, consideration and formal debate on matters referred under Article 8 of the

constitution of General Synod), those submitting items for inclusion on the agenda

should indicate which procedure as outlined in Standing Order 36A is in their opinion

the most appropriate to be followed in any particular case, however the Chair,

taking into account any advice given by the Standing Committee, shall determine in each case the relevant procedure to be followed for each agenda item, or part thereof.

The purpose of this amendment is to clarify the differing methods by which Diocesan Synod may fulfil its statutory and broader policy function. It avoids confusion as to whether an item is a formal debate or is instead a presentation. It aids in good governance and full engagement by Diocesan Synod members.

6. SO 76

Amend to add after 'each such original question':

A member may indicate that a written answer to a question is acceptable, in which case the written answer shall be displayed at the Diocesan Synod, and shall be included in the Diocesan Synod minutes issued to members.

In practice this occurs but it enshrines that practice. It also helps to save time on the agenda.

7. New SOs 78A to 78G

A series of new SOs be added as follows:

78A. The President, in consultation with the Chair, shall invite one or more speakers to

present any item on the agenda allocated for informal discussion in accordance with

Standing Order 36A(ii).

78B. The Chair of Diocesan Synod will explain the procedure and timing to Diocesan Synod, including any

particular instructions for the small group (usually table) discussions which will

follow.

78C. Comments and/or ideas from Diocesan Synod members will be either invited from the floor

or collected in writing from each small group (usually table) at the Chair's discretion.

Where participation is invited from the floor, Standing Orders 37 and 38 will apply

and a time limit as determined by the Chair for contributions from the floor shall be observed.

78D. The President, in consultation with the Chair, shall invite one or more speakers to present any item on the agenda allocated for presentation followed by an opportunity for informal questions and answers in accordance with Standing Order 36A(iii).

78E. Following any presentation made under this Standing Order, the Chair may invite members of the Diocesan Synod to ask informal questions, which must clearly relate to the subject or content of the presentation, of the speaker or other people present identified by the Chair.

78F. The Chair in his or her sole discretion shall determine how to conduct the question and answer session as appropriate in the circumstances

This links in with the proposed amendment at 3 above to provide for specific rules for informal discussions and presentations and to provide clarity of process.

8. SO 80A

To add:

An elected, appointed or nominated member who fails to attend three consecutive meetings shall forthwith cease to be a member, unless, after consultation with the two Vice Presidents of Diocesan Synod, the President of Diocesan Synod determines otherwise. With these exceptions elected, appointed or nominated members shall comply at all times with the relevant membership requirements.

This may be felt to be somewhat draconian but is reflective of broader practice within the charity and corporate sector.

9. The final suggested alteration is not to SOs themselves but to suggest some guidance notes be appended to the SOs. These are designed to offer some clarification about certain elements of the SOs that can cause confusion. The suggested text is attached to this note.

Lee Coley
Diocesan Registrar
July 2023

Guidelines to Accompany the Standing Orders of the Bristol Diocesan Synod

Functions

Diocesan Synods were set up under the Synodical Government Measure 1969. Under the Measure their functions were defined as being:

1. to consider matters concerning the Church of England and to make provision for such matters in relation to their Diocese, and to consider and express their opinion on any other matters of religious or public interest;
2. to advise the Bishop on any matters on which they may consult the Diocesan Synod;
3. to consider and express their opinion on any matters referred to them by the General Synod, and in particular to approve or disapprove provisions referred to them by the General Synod under Article 8 of the Constitution.

The measure also stated that it was the duty of the Bishop to consult with the Diocesan Synod on matters of general concern and importance to the Diocese and S.4(5) of the Measure provided as follows:

The Diocesan Synod shall keep the Deanery Synods informed of the policies and problems of the Diocese and of the business which is to come before meetings of the Diocesan Synod, and may delegate executive functions to Deanery Synods; and shall keep themselves informed, through the Deanery Synods of events and opinions in the parishes, and shall give opportunities for discussing at meetings of the Diocesan Synod matters raised by Deanery Synods and Parochial Church Councils.

As we come to Diocesan Synod, some words from Pope Francis are helpful. He shares that synod “gives us the grace to move forward together, to listen to one another and to embark on a discernment of the times in which we are living”. He stresses that synod is not a parliament nor an opinion poll, but an expression of church: “if the spirit is not present there will be no synod”. Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us look at Jesus (Mark 10:17): First, he *encounters* the rich man on the road; he then *listens* to his questions, and finally he helps him *discern* what he must do to inherit eternal life. *Encounter, listen and discern* – these three verbs characterise the Synod. *Pope Francis*

In the light of this, we have set out below certain principles governing the conduct of all our meetings as Diocesan Synod:

1. All meetings must be conducted in a transparent, robust and fair manner in a spirit of Christian grace.
2. We are the body of Christ and will seek to work in a collaborative

and inclusive way at all times.

3. We are committed to upholding Synodical government as instituted by the national Church of England. Diocesan Synod Standing Orders determine membership, voting rights, election procedures, notice of meeting, committee procedures and General Synod business.
4. The Chair is responsible for the conduct of a meeting, but is accountable, and must be both flexible and responsive.
5. The Chair must strive to ensure a balanced debate – where everybody has a voice - and manage the business of the meeting, and speakers, to time.
6. Any subject being debated and its desired outcome must be clearly stated.
7. The Bishop's Council, as the standing committee of Diocesan Synod, is responsible for finance but is accountable to Diocesan Synod as “shareholders”. Diocesan Synod must receive the annual accounts, approve the annual budget and appoint auditors at the AGM of the DBF.
8. Diocesan Synod may not authorise or direct any expenditure without the agreement of Bishop's Council.
9. Items raised by Deanery Synods will take precedence in Agenda Planning, providing the Agenda Committee has had time to review it.
10. Private member's items will be reviewed by the Agenda Committee which will make an appropriate recommendation about moving the item forward to Diocesan Synod.
11. Members of Diocesan Synod may query the decisions of the Agenda Committee.

In addition to the above, we have set out below some explanations of how Diocesan Synod operates to offer some clarity:

1. Speaking in the Diocesan Synod (Standing Order 37)

In normal circumstances, the Chair will call only upon a member who has their hand raised and will endeavour to ensure that equal opportunity is given to those supporting and those opposing the motion and to those from different parts of the Diocese. A member who speaks should begin by announcing clearly his or her name and Deanery (or other qualification for membership of the Diocesan Synod).

2. Raising Points of Order (Standing Order 39)

A member who wishes to raise a Point of Order may interrupt another speaker to do so. The member interrupting should however indicate at once the number of the Order which they believe may have been breached and draw the attention of the Chair to the alleged breach by way of a question, e.g. "A point of order, Chair. Is the speaker not in breach of Standing Order 44, his or her speech having exceeded ten minutes?"

3. Procedural Motions

Points of Order should be clearly distinguished from Procedural Motions (Standing Order 58). A member wishing to move a Procedural Motion may not interrupt a speaker. They should stand in their place immediately once the speaker has sat down and, without waiting to be called, ask the Chair for consent to move the Procedural Motion they desire,

e.g. "My Lord President/ Madam Chair, will you allow a motion that the debate now be closed?"

4. The effects of the procedural motions are set out in Standing Orders 60 to 64 and should be studied carefully before a Procedural Motion is submitted by a member or allowed by the Chair. The Standing Orders do not allow a "reference back" as a Procedural Motion, but an amendment under Standing Order 51 may refer a matter to a designated person or body for clarification or further work. Under Standing Order 123 a resolution to approve the budget may be referred back to the Executive for further consideration.

5. It should be noted that, under Standing Order 59,

- (i) motion for next business, the closure, or a speech limit may not be moved on any question referred by the General Synod to the Diocesan Synod and
- (ii) a motion for next business may not be moved when an amendment or another Procedural Motion is under consideration.

6. Form of debate

Under Standing Order 45(a) every matter debated in the Diocesan Synod has to be moved by a member. The mover of the motion has (under Standing Order 43(iii)) a right to reply at the conclusion of the debate. No other speaker may speak more than once, except as may be permitted under Standing Order 43. This reflects the normal procedure for debate in the Diocesan Synod under which it rests with any who are not satisfied with a particular motion to introduce amendments or to speak and vote against the motion: there is no

obligation on the part of the Standing Committee or anyone else to take steps to see that arguments against the motion are presented to the Diocesan Synod. This procedure is a reminder that the Diocesan Synod is a body charged with functions which require it "to make provision for" certain matters and "to advise the Bishop" or "to express their opinion on" others. Members ought therefore to strive to reach a common mind and, as appropriate, to make clear decisions or to give positive advice.

7. Nevertheless, Standing Orders 43, 44, 45, 58 and 64 are not so restrictive as to prevent the adoption for particular occasions of the procedure generally known as the "structured debate", in which both the proposer and a designated "opposer" of a motion enjoy equal rights of presentation and reply. The Standing Committee believe that this procedure should be reserved strictly for use, at their discretion, in connection with a limited range of matters on which they judge it to be essential for the Diocesan Synod to have heard divergent views competently and fully expounded before they divide. In connection with any matter which the Council are persuaded warrants this exceptional procedure, they will arrange accordingly before the Diocesan Synod meets and, under Standing Order 43(v)¹, give their prior consent for the "opposer" to speak more than once, i.e. to have a "right of reply". They will also ask the Chair to exercise his or her discretion under Standing Orders 44 and 64 in such a way as to allow the proposer and the "opposer" the same length of time for reply.

8. Casual vacancies (Standing Order 9)

Members should know that a casual vacancy will occur in the following circumstances:

a. Diocesan Synod:

- (i) A lay member who ceases to be on the roll of any parish in the Deanery loses his or her seat. However, if on the roll of another parish in the diocese, they can keep the seat if **BEFORE THE VACANCY OCCURS** the lay members of the Standing Committee of the electing Deanery Synod so resolve.
- (ii) A clergyperson moving to another Diocese loses his or her seat. A clergyperson who retires loses his or her seat unless they continue to hold a prebendal stall in the Cathedral and remains within the Deanery that elected them. If a clergyperson moves to another Deanery (i.e. continues to work in the Diocese) they lose their seat unless **BEFORE THE VACANCY OCCURS** the clerical members of the Standing Committee of the electing

¹ If the proposed amendment to SO 43 is approved

Deanery Synod resolve that they may retain their seat.

b. Standing Committee

A member elected by the Diocesan Synod loses their seat if they cease to be a member of the Diocesan Synod or on the election of their successor.

9. Questions

An order paper will be provided at each meeting of the Diocesan Synod detailing questions asked and the replies, if a written answer is being given.

10. Informal debates and presentations

The Standing Orders provide for different forms of debate to reflect the different tasks in front of Diocesan Synod as well as the need, on occasion, to have a meeting which receives information rather than a traditional formal debate on an issue. The Standing Orders allow for different types of debate to be used in Diocesan Synod and for those proposing business to have a role in determining which type of debate is best suited for the proposed topic.

11. The Standing Committee will plan the business of the Diocesan Synod accordingly and ensure that members are suitably advised of what is proposed and any consequent requirements.