

Agenda ref	5.1
Report Title	Board of Directors, Bishop’s Council and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee Report (10 December 2024 and 25 February 2025)
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1. The Bishop’s Council, Board of Directors and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee met in person and via Zoom on 10 December 2024 and 25 February 2025.

2. The December meeting was the last of the old triennium and +VF extended her gratitude for the time, skills, and expertise each Bishop’s Council member had generously shared over the past three years. The new Bishop’s Council has undergone residential and in-meeting training this year to prepare them for their task ahead.

Governance

3. Council and the Board of Directors undertook their routine business of overseeing the Finance, Audit + Risk, and Diocesan Mission & Pastoral committees’ activities and decisions. In particular:

- Council elected Mr Richard Bacon as the Chair of the Vacancy-in-See Committee (VISC), and approved the appointment of Richard Leaman as the Secretary to the VISC. Bishop’s Council also co-opted The Revd Anjali Kanagaratnam, and Ms Abby Scott to the VISC.

- Bishop’s Council also elected Mrs Alison Rowe and Miss Eliana Pretorian (EP) to the Diocesan Board of Parsonage.

4. Council reviewed the constitution for a new charitable entity (a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, CIO) at their residential, and approved it formally at the February meeting. The next steps are to establish a shadow board, and begin to shape, and name, the entity.

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TC.T

5. Council received an annual report on Transforming Church. Together (TC.T) in December, and were briefed on progress to date in February, notably;

- Overall, the project remains on track, with shortfalls in the Volunteering and Racial Justice projects, Income Generation, and the essential underpinning parish share.
- It has been concluded that rather than offering TC.T resources to all parishes all at once, a more concentrated effort, in fewer places, may elicit better results. Council were briefed on the Archdeacons' plan for 4 parishes to receive targeted TC.T support over the next 4 months; Patchway, St Agnes, Kingswood/Hanham, and Westbury Park. The work will be known as Focussed Support Interventions (FSIs) and the aim is to support these parishes with intensive TC.T and DSS resources in order to generate forward movement, and also to be able to report to the National Church on this style of intervention.
- Council were briefed on the impending comprehensive stakeholder engagement exercise on the future of All Saints Corn Street, which will help to inform decisions on the future use of the building. The initial feedback should be available in July 2025.
- Council were briefed on the activities undertaken with TC.T to date:
 - New Mission Area in Chippenham in planning;
 - 46 clergy enrolled in coaching programme; very positive feedback
 - 130 churches have completed their energy audit; five £10k grants awarded, and 140 eco champions in post;
 - 24 churches received silver/gold Eco Church Award;
 - New Stapleton graft slow, but positive growth, in first six months;
 - New Eastern Swindon Villages planting curate ordained;
 - Attitudinal survey out now with over 350 responses collected;
 - Racial Justice strategy written and approved;
 - Rhythm of Life started; and
 - Church Teams Day held on 28 Sept.
 - New Racial Justice Lead recruited and inducted
 - Stakeholder Engagement for All Saints (Corn Street) underway
 - Sharesy Launched
 - 4 Growing Faith Chaplains in 2024
 - 1 Priority Church Network (PCN) Op Hub staff being recruited
- With the following outcomes to date:
 - Average weekly attendance increased from 8,610 base, to 8,820
 - Baptisms / Confirmations increased from 110 to 118
 - U18 attendance increased from 1,200 to 1,225
 - 10% increase of GMH representation in leadership & governance
 - £296k brought in by fundraising in the year
 - 35% reduction in Carbon emissions vs baseline

- 60% Churches are registered with Eco Church
- 75% Clergy reported positive wellbeing (vs 68% baseline)
- 200 people using Rhythm of Life as part of their discipleship
- Lay Worship Leaders, Pastors, Evangelists doubled in number
- 40% Clergy are meeting regularly with their coach

6. TC.T is approaching 'Stage 3' of the National Church investment. Consequently, a status report and funding proposal for the next stage is required. By the end of June 2025. The report, which will be reviewed by Bishop's Council, will reflect on the following key points:

- Key successes observed:
- Areas for further emphasis and expansion:
- Challenges encountered:
- Aspects that should no longer be prioritized for investment: and
- New potential areas for investment not previously considered

Minister's Wellbeing

7. Council were briefed on the recent Ministerial Wellbeing Surveys (Ordained and lay), by Jordan Ling and Stephanie Hayton. This is the second year and so we are able to begin to identify trends.

8. Overall, ordained clergy said they were 'weary but hopeful', and we are beginning to see the coaching programme bear fruit. They cited 'money' and 'overwhelming workload' as the main barriers to wellbeing.

9. 96% of LLMs in the Diocese of Bristol felt supported by their incumbents, whereas in other dioceses it has been as low as 40%. Despite feeling supported, some LLMs felt they needed more time with their incumbent. Most LLMs seem to be able to balance church life, family and wider life. Top results for the three words to describe how they are feeling were "relaxed," "positive" and "weary". It was noted that the following were areas of concern for LLMs:

- The decrease in volunteers;
- Covering services and pastoral issues during vacancies had been a considerable burden.
- Some LLMs felt that some clergy and parishioners viewed their ministry as second class and this was the most significant discrimination that LLMs felt.

Staff Wellbeing

10. The DSS have undertaken an Employee Engagement Survey, which was internally managed rather than conducted through an external consultant. Each directorate selected the questions they wished to include, and this survey will be conducted annually moving forward.

11. The survey received participation from the vast majority of staff, and the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with a 73% index rating. Directorates have developed action plans, which have been presented to the Senior Leadership Team.

12. Exploration is underway to create a standing employee voice group, designed to sense-check ideas and express concerns. This group would be a representative body, aimed at championing the perspectives of all groups in the now very diverse office, ensuring credibility and weight. This initiative has been very well received

Education

13. +Neil and the Director of Education have kept Council informed of progress with, and outcomes from, the 'DBAT Lessons Learned' investigation. The report that was presented at Bishop's Council by Ms Sian Hampton on 11 July 2024 has been shared with the Board of Education to take forward. +NW has reported that the schools that have been placed in different Trusts following the dissolution of DBAT appeared now to be in safe hands.

14. LT reported to Council that the Confederation of Schools Trust (CST) conference highlighted that financial support to assist schools with academizing was no longer available. Consequently, schools going forward would need to finance legal work to academize themselves. LT also reported that St Michael's Church of England School (Stoke Gifford) experienced a fire on 8 December 2024 and three of the first-year classrooms are out of use. Alternative arrangements have been made.

Safeguarding

15. Adam Bond has briefed Council on the recent independent Safeguarding Audit. Whilst there are a number of recommendations we will need to consider or take action on, the audit team stated our practices, relationship with parishes, and processes are amongst the best they have seen. Synod will be briefed on the key findings and actions in 2025 once the Diocesan Safeguarding Advisory Panel have reviewed and discerned the various ways forward. A number of the actions require National Church action before they can be implemented.

16. In parallel, General Synod have been discussing the Professor Alexis Jay report on the Future of Church Safeguarding which recommended two options:

- Continue existing in-house safeguarding arrangements, with external audit and scrutiny; or
- Have an external charity run safeguarding on behalf of the Church/Diocese.

17. Given the Makin report, which examined the Church of England's handling of allegations of serious abuse by the late John Smyth, and the subsequent fall-out, the second option received considerable support at General Synod, but was not passed. A full brief will be given later, in this Diocesan Synod.

DBF

Financial Audit and IT

18. Council were briefed in December that the 2025 Diocesan budget, and Parish Share, were significant concerns. The Government's budget, with regard to National Insurance Contributions, has added an additional £248k to the BDBF cost base for 2025, and £330k p.a. from 2026 onwards.

19. In an attempt to mitigate this, the archdeacons and Canon Richard Bacon have committed to working with a small number of parishes who had reduced their parish share but whose reserves had increased, to encourage them to give more. It is also hoped that the National Church may be able to provide some transitional relief going forwards, although this is unlikely to appear this year.

20. An urgent review of this year's budget is underway and, at some stage, decisions will have to be made about how we approach both our operating deficit more broadly, and our aspiration to reach financial balance by 2028.

21. [Haysmacintyre](#) are auditing our accounts for 2024, and the audit programme remains on track. Stephen Sheridan has made significant progress streamlining the Finance Department processes and IT, and the audit should be less stressful than last year.

22. Council have been kept updated on the DSS IT migration to a new service provider, and the recent move to Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) telephony, which allows parishes to dial direct to the right department in the DSS office. With some exceptions (for example, file sharing), difficulties remain, but overall, the move has been very positively received.

23. The Risk Register – and accompanying policies - have been completely overhauled, simplified, and approved by Audit and Risk Committee and Bishop's Council. Thanks were given to the SLT and Stephen Sheridan in particular.

Bishop's Council Induction and Residential

24. The new Bishop's Council started its triennium with an induction meeting on 21 January and a residential on 24-25 January 2025. These additional meetings were an opportunity for new and returning members to learn more about the role and responsibilities of Bishop's Council, as well as space for in-depth discussions on significant areas of work, including Racial Justice and engaging with under 18s. At the residential it was recognised that there is a significant pool of skills and experience within the Diocesan Synod membership and many members have indicated that they wish to do more. In order to enable and empower Diocesan Synod members to do more, a contact database with details of the House of Laity's skills and experience has been set up*.

Mission and Pastoral Committee work

Overview

25. In addition to noting several matters that are currently in progress, the Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee recommended two suspensions and considered one BMO.

26. There have been a large number of appointments at parish and deanery level over the last 5 months, all overseen by the DMPC. Broadly, the Diocese of Bristol is seen to be an attractive place for clergy to minister.

*Only House of Laity Members have access to the database and only the contact details and information of those who have returned consent forms have been shared. Members wishing to revoke their consent may do so by contacting the governance.support@bristoldiocese.org.