

## Coventry Diocesan Synod 20 June 2023 – Minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Synod, held on Tuesday 20 June 2023 at 6.45pm at St John's, Kenilworth.

*The meeting of the Diocesan Synod of the Diocese of Coventry, opened at 6:45pm under the Standing Orders 2009. The President, the Right Reverend Dr Christopher Cocksworth, the Bishop of Coventry, took the Chair.*

### 1. Welcome and opening prayer

Bishop Christopher welcomed Synod and expressed thanks to the PCC of St John's, Kenilworth for the use of their building.

**Worship** – led by the Revd Charles Higgins, chaplain to Diocesan Synod. Bishop John read Luke 13:18-21.

### 2. Notices and apologies for absence

House of Laity 10, House of Clergy 9 apologies received.

Geoffrey Cotterill was welcomed as Deputy Diocesan Registrar. Several new members have joined Synod, and a welcome was extended to them.

### 3. Minutes (DS 23-07)

The minutes of the Diocesan Synod meeting held on 25 March 2023 were **approved**.

#### Matters Arising

In the meeting held on 25 March 2023 a member highlighted that hidden disabilities can be more difficult to deal with. This member would like to emphasise further that hidden disabilities will need more care and attention as hidden disabilities are likely to interfere with communication.

### 4. Presidential address

Bishop Christopher read to Synod the letter that he had written to Clergy, DBF staff, DBE/DMAT staff, Cathedral staff and Churchwardens concerning the announcement made earlier in the day by 10 Downing Street that he is to be the next Dean of Windsor.

Reflecting upon the agenda for the evening, Bishop Christopher observed some key points in relation to Safeguarding, the financial challenges and the five-year financial plan, Our Shared Future strategic framework and the remarkable 'Alive 2023' event.

Bishop Christopher concluded by reflecting on his new book, *Mary, Bearer of Life*, and ended by saying, 'I will be with you for a few more months and you will remain, with Mary, in my heart and home as you – with her – are bound to Jesus and we are all bound together in him'.

### 5. Annual Safeguarding Report (DS 23-08)

Sarah Price, Diocesan Safeguarding Adviser, spoke to DS 23-08, emphasising that cases and monthly referrals continue to rise. There was a 37% increase in referrals in 2022 compared to the previous two years. An average of 14 cases per month could be attributed to Past Cases Review Part 2, increased living costs and a high-profile case. The increase in referrals can be seen as a positive in that, the system is being used and people are making referrals. There is a high percentage of adult referrals and these have generated case studies to use in training.

The increase in referrals is putting pressure on the team who are aware that due to reacting to referrals, they do not have enough resource to provide the level of service that is needed to support parishes with basic enquires and support. Additional resource has been provided via HR personnel which is helping, and a temporary worker is being instructed to help clear the backlog of DBS checks. There is a large backlog due to the DBS system changing renewals from every 5 years to every 3 years.

The Diocesan Safeguarding Scrutiny Group is fortunate to have Warwickshire Police as an external partner; however more members are desired along with a replacement for the temporary survivor representative member who has now left the group. The chair, Joan Beck, is currently contacting statutory agencies in an attempt to fill the vacancies.

In February 2023 it was hoped to roll out a domestic abuse training course, but this was delayed until June 2023 so that online and face-to-face options could be offered simultaneously.

The recent Bishop's Safeguarding Study Day was joined by Sarah Troughton and David Creese from the Diocese of Newcastle who ran a creative session called "If I told you, what would you do". Clergy have expressed how powerful this day was.

Questions:

*Why is DSSG membership recruitment a struggle?*

Statutory agencies are often at full capacity themselves and it can be difficult to find people with the time to volunteer for the group.

*Can the group continue to work?*

Yes, but more expertise and safeguarding knowledge from different situations will be beneficial.

*The Chair of the House of Laity, Mr Phil Sowards, took the chair.*

*Motion passed to suspend the standing orders, to enable Synod to meet as the CDBF Ltd.*

## **AGM AGENDA**

### **The Annual General Meeting of the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd**

As Simon Danks, CDBF Chair, was unable to be present at the meeting, a recorded introduction was shared:

The Annual Report & Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2022 were reviewed by the Audit and Risk Committee and Crowe, the appointed auditors. Additionally, they were scrutinised by the DFG and approved by Bishop's Council as the directors and Standing Committee, before a presentation to Synod as members of the Coventry Diocesan Board of Finance. This year was noted as being challenging owing to the migration of the accounting system from a server-based system to a new cloud-based finance system, whilst the finance team experienced significant staffing changes. Synod and parish colleagues were thanked for their patience and the finance team thanked for their perseverance under exceptionally difficult circumstances. It was highlighted that coming out of the pandemic, many were not prepared, and the cost of living crisis has brought further pressures to parishes and the diocese. In the 2022 budget, Parish Share should have raised £5.3 million, with the equivalent of 10 clergy posts being released from historic reserves. However, Parish Share income was £4.7 million and so more historic reserves were released, paying for 20% of our clergy in 2022. This pattern is being seen in 2023. Gratitude was expressed to the Investment and Glebe Committees for their continued work to ensure our reserves generate the best returns possible. Thanks were expressed to treasurers and lay chairs at deanery and parish level for grappling with financial challenges.

In terms of expenditure the most significant change since 2021 was the cost of improving clergy housing as the backlog from the pandemic is addressed, noting increased costs due to inflation. In 2022 £2.11 million was released from historic funds (page 27). Despite this release of funds, the deficit of the year was £921,000. Investment funds reduced by £4.5 million in 2022 which, with the deficit, means overall funds were reduced by a little over 5%. Work has started in response to the financial situation. Parish Share accounts for 80% of income and there are on-going conversations regarding the long-term financial plan. The DBF are in the fortunate position of having a healthy set of reserves and a number of financial models have been drafted in order to create discussion on the pathway to a sustainable financial position whilst we retain support for all DBF commitments including supporting clergy, the cathedral, DBE, and reaching Net Zero. The set of principles for the financial plan will be shared with Bishop's Council soon and this will pave the way to sustainability.

These principles will be worked up into a comprehensive plan, there are still significant questions to be addressed and prayers were requested.

**6. As the members of the Board of Finance, Synod were asked to consider the following items:**

- i) The minutes of the AGM held on 21 June 2022 (DS 23-09) were **approved**.
- ii) The Chair of the DBF proposed that:
  - *“The Annual Report & Financial Statements for the year ended 31 Dec 2022 be received” (DS 23-10)*  
**Approved**

Questions received by Steve Lee and Jacqueline Ladds:

*With reference to the principle risks on page 6, the accounting system/controls are listed first: can we rely on the accounts? Are there changes? What was the cost for the resources to put matters in order? Were the changes at the top necessary/or were they the cause?*

We are as confident as we can be with the accounts. Crowe and the DFG have met separately from DBF staff and Crowe would not have signed off the accounts if they were not confident. It was a challenging process and took a greater amount of time than expected. Going forward, stronger controls are being implemented such as daily bank reconciliations.

Interim staff had to join us. The finance team have been under-resourced for a long time, suffering with high sickness rates and high staff turnover, and there has not been the capacity to develop and change. When Steve Lee was appointed as interim Director of Finance, team capacity was the number one concern and so an extra resource was permitted followed by another to focus on TfC as a separate entity. As an estimate this cost is in the region of £30,000 but this is mitigated as we no longer use a consultant that was costing £10,000.

This annual report ended in December 2022, 6 months ago, and we are now in a very different position. 2022 was a very challenging year with high sickness rate and the Director of Finance leaving. The legacy system was very old and out-dated and so we needed to move to the new cloud-based system. Doing this for the Cathedral, DBF and TfC simultaneously whilst experiencing the challenges within the team is not something that will be done again. It is a testament to Steve Lee and the team that they have ‘pulled back’. Yes, interim support is costly and this is not perfect but we are working to improve. The DFG are thoroughly scrutinising costs. The risk remains due to the ongoing work.

Bishop Christopher reflected that summer 2022 was an anxious time, as losing the Director of Finance when moving to a new, more complex accounting system was a significant risk (a decision made before Jacqueline Ladds was in post). It was a major ask to move all three entities at once, yet Jaqueline kept a cool head and Steve Lee did an immense amount of work to get us here today, all of which was overseen by Simon Danks.

- *“The appointment of Crowe UK LLP, auditor of the company, shall be renewed until the next Annual General Meeting, and that the Directors be authorised to fix the remuneration of the Auditor.”*

**Approved**

**DIOCESAN SYNOD AGENDA**

**7. Diocesan Board of Education – update**

April Gold, Diocesan Director of Education, shared the joys of the recent Alive Praise Party including a film clip of the event, and she elaborated on the Alive report paper distributed in advance of the meeting.

The event exceeded all personal expectations. During a vibrant set, the singer asked for the children to stop and listen to God. The whole place fell silent and some knelt, with not one steward left standing. The event came in under the budget of £220k, with a final cost of £190k, (equating to £19 per child). The event was free to enable any child to attend and the legacy lives on as attending schools were provided with free resources. The event was funded from the sale of a farm which was purchased as part of a Victorian school Endowment left by Lucy Price of Baginton Hall. The next challenge is to obtain funding for future events as the dream is to hold this event every 3 to 4 years so that every child could attend before leaving primary school.

### *Standing Orders reinstated*

#### **8. Diocesan Board of Education Annual Report & Financial Statements (DS 23-11)**

The Chair of the DBE, Chris Edwards, introduced and moved the motion *“that the Report and Financial Statements of Coventry Diocesan Board of Education for the year ended 31 Dec 2022 be noted.”*

Unanimously **agreed**

Chris Edwards highlighted that the Archbishops’ Council stressed the importance of church schools to young people and the CofE in 2021 and that this is still true today. They are a significant opportunity within our diocese and legacy, and we must invest in the future. Chris paid tribute to the impacts of Alive 2023. It was confirmed that the finances had been accepted by Crowe and noted that achievements included the strategic working with schools, inspiring others school groupings. He requested prayers for new schools. Chris noted that education is a challenging sector where CofE schools must remain distinctive and we must continue to create opportunities for schools to enable mission within the diocese. The service level agreement which schools buy into continues, and this includes Head Wellbeing. Our young people are coping with difficult situations and we are providing the resources to help. The Beacon Project will produce a full report in due time. The DBE finances are in the black and Chris thanked April Gold for leading another successful year.

Questions:

*Can you provide some insight regarding the church, home, school triangle?*

The CofE need to recognise the unique position of church and home. We have put a next steps book into homes through Alive. We need to encourage churches to see schools as worshipping communities and enable both to thrive. We know they go to each other, but we need to look at the triangle and look where to invest, worshipping communities are not just in the church building.

*The Chair of the House of Clergy, the Revd Claire McArthur, took the chair.*

*Motion passed to suspend the Standing Orders (under SO 50) to allow a discussion to take place.*

#### **9. Our Shared Future – strategic framework (DS 23-12)**

Andy Waddams spoke to DS 23-12 and highlighted the headlines from the listening report, emphasising that although we are now looking to implement the results into the strategic framework for 2024 as we enter the budgeting phase, we are still listening. The honest feedback produced the major headlines of: Children and Families Work being a major opportunity with a need for staffing; Specialist Support, help is needed with HR and safeguarding; Church Buildings are a source of stress, running and maintenance costs are a struggle; Growing Leaders, raising volunteers as well as training them. This is reflected by the top three desired areas of support for 2024: Church Building, HR and Safeguarding. Our next step is to ensure that we formulate the 2024 strategic framework in response to the major findings and increase awareness of the support available from the diocesan offices.

## Questions:

*With regard to increasing specialist support such as HR, we do not want to be inventing for ourselves, is there a plan to share with other dioceses and share the costs?*

This has happened before and in other dioceses. The DBF will continue to look at the feasibility of shared working with other dioceses.

*Will these messages be presented at deaneries so deaneries understand that you are listening?*

We will increase awareness of support and we will work on the areas that are not there.

*Will there be a costing so that budgeting this complements the strategic framework?*

That is the plan.

## Observations:

*This is representative, you have been listening, well done.*

*We have recently experienced specialist support for our church sound system, this was brilliant but is going as it was part of the Serving Christ Project. Could this please be kept?*

*We have more support than we are aware of, people who have gone through projects should help other, I have been helping with net zero, we need to network to help.*

*Standing Orders reinstated***10. Questions received under Standing Order 69**

Four questions were received and written responses provided in DS 23-14. There were no supplementary questions.

**11. Papers to note**

DAC annual report **(DS 23-13) noted**

**12. Date of future meetings**

The date of the final 2023 meeting is Saturday 18 November (morning).

Bishop Christopher highlighted that it was Bishop John's final Coventry Diocesan Synod after serving for 18 years as Bishop of Warwick and 4 years as curate at St Peter's, Hillfields. Bishop Christopher thanked Bishop John for his years of service to the Diocese and paid tribute to his long and fruitful ministry. He then invited Bishop John to give the blessing.

**Bishop Christopher closed the meeting at 9:11pm.**