

## Resource 4: Interview Guidance

### Preparing for short-listing, informal visits and interviews – some thoughts for parish representatives

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#### A. Short-listing

- Don't be discouraged or seduced by the number of applications there may be to consider when they arrive. The number of applications is less significant than their quality and we are only looking to appoint one priest, the one called by God with the right gifts and experience for the benefice at this stage in its life and growth.
- Do look at them prayerfully seeking God's wisdom and discernment prior to the short-listing meeting, paying close attention to the PCC's profile and its stated 'needs'.
- It's good practice to create a 'grid' in which you list all the key aspects on the profile the PCC has said it is looking for in its next priest, with a column for each candidate in which you can record a 'score'. The Role Description will be useful too.
- A simple A, B, C ranking is often helpful. A = great fit, want to interview. C = poor fit, don't want to interview. B = somewhere in between, would value a discussion.
- Come prepared to discuss your views with other members of the panel, seeking to reach a common mind. Sometimes it is easy to agree names; at others, less so.
- As a rule of thumb, it is crucial in deciding whether to invite a candidate for interview to bear in mind the criteria you have identified in the profile. Whilst it may be disappointing only to have 1 candidate to interview (or maybe even none), if they don't fit your criteria everyone's time is wasted by inviting those who don't meet them.
- Make up your own mind! It's good practice to decide on your own 'score' **before** you discuss it with your parish representative colleague. Two heads are better than one!

#### B. Time in the Benefice prior to the formal interview

- After short-listing, the Archdeacon's PA (sometimes it will be the Patron) will contact all the candidates to let them know the outcome. Archdeacons will offer feedback if it is wanted.
- Those who have been short-listed candidates will receive an invitation to come for interview. The Archdeacon's PA will ask whether they plan to come with or without their spouse and whether they have any special dietary or other needs and will then pass this information on to you.
- The Archdeacon's PA will ascertain whether accommodation needs to be booked and let you know. This should always be somewhere not too far away and **never** with parishioners.

Candidates won't expect 5 star luxury, but it is reasonable of them to expect comfortable hospitality and a warm welcome. Expenses are borne by the parish.

- It is worth thinking about accommodation before short-listing and in some parishes, provisional bookings may need to be made.
- When meeting candidates remember first impressions are usually important, so everyone whom the candidates meet needs to be as warm, charming and welcoming as they can! Remember the candidates are trying to discern whether God is calling them to your parish as much as vice versa and these things do count!
- Normally, the spouse will be invited to visit, though parish representatives should remember that many spouses are in full-time employment and this may not be possible. It is especially important that parish representatives should keep an open mind and not subconsciously 'mark candidates down' because they are unable to meet the spouse.
- The same principle applies with regard to candidates who are single.
- Travelling expenses are the responsibility of the PCC.

#### **What might be included on an informal visit?**

(please remember this is a generic list and not everything will apply in every context)

- A look round the church building; hall and other plant; the Vicarage/Rectory
- Drive around the parish and immediate locality
- Location of Schools, GP Surgery, shops and other key places of interest or significance!
- An informal meeting with a few key people – the emphasis needs to be on **a few!** Candidates can only remember a finite number of names and faces! A simple meal works well with say, wardens, readers or perhaps one or two key members of the PCC [suggested maximum number of people is 6 or 7]. The informal visit is **not** an opportunity for a sneak pre-interview interview. The emphasis should be on **responding to the candidates' questions and concerns**, not on getting information or opinion out of them. It is definitely **not** a good idea for the candidates to meet all the PCC.
- It can be helpful to have 'designated drivers' to help transport individual candidates around the parish for their visit. Sometimes it works well to have a 'host' at each particular stopping off point, e.g. one in the Rectory, another in the church etc.
- For these key roles we suggest you choose those with good people skills, who know the parish well and can answer candidates' questions, and at the same time also be discrete and handle a process bounded in confidentiality.
- If there are paid members of staff eg. Curate, Youth Worker, Administrator, then it would be good for them to meet the candidates so that the latter can discern other aspects of the work and ministry in the parish (es). When there is a large staff team, time constraints will mean that it will probably be best to choose just one or two members of staff. However, it would be inappropriate for 'the team' to end up interviewing their potential boss and the emphasis again needs to be on **responding to the candidates' questions and concerns**.

- Time with clergy from the local ministry group (where this is in operation). This will give candidates an opportunity to find out a little about your situation from potential clerical colleagues. Again this should ideally be as informal as possible. We would not expect parish representatives to be present if this meeting takes place.
- It can be useful to make available various documents like:
  - Weekly notice sheet
  - Magazine
  - APCM reports
  - Accounts
  - Songbook / worship resources
- Please send a copy of the programme for the Informal Visits to the Archdeacon **as soon as possible** so we can advise the candidates ... and in your planning, don't hesitate to seek our advice about any ideas you may have.
- Don't make the visit too long (we suggest no later than an 8.30pm finish) and don't worry about 'gaps' in the programme ... candidates may well appreciate time to reflect on their experience.
- Some will have travelled a long way. Food and drink are important aspects of Christian hospitality and welcome! Please ensure that candidates have a hot meal at some point during the day.

### Three important principles:

- As far as possible, each candidate should be offered **the same experience** i.e. see the same things, meet the same people, similar length etc. Sometimes this means running the same programme for the candidates at different times. More often, the same programme runs in parallel with candidates doing the same things but in a different order. Again we are very happy to advise.
- As far as possible, parish representatives need to be as open as possible about the struggles and 'the darker side' of life in parish, as well as all the many joys and encouragements being experienced. Giving the candidates an experience which is **accurate** is far better than aiming to create a good impression, which may in the end prove to be a false or at least, over optimistic one!
- The whole process **must** be bound in confidentiality for the sake of the candidates. Papers must **never** be shared, nor names and other details divulged even to the most trusted of colleagues. Please simply use Christian names for the informal visit.
- ... and whilst not a principle, it's good practice to try to ensure that candidates have as little interaction with one another as possible. This helps the process feel less 'competitive' and reinforces the need for spiritual wisdom, prayer and discernment.

### C. Interviews

- Thought needs to be given to where they should be held. A private home is often much better and more welcoming and homely than a cluttered church hall!

- Please confirm the venue with the Archdeacon's PA **as soon as possible** so they can inform the candidates.
- Ensure that seating is comfortable, that there is adequate light, heat, ventilation, parking and coffee!
- Having someone to act as 'host' is really helpful so that the panel can be free to focus on their job leaving others to concentrate on the practicalities of looking after the candidates.
- A simple sandwich lunch should be laid on for the interview panel (but not the candidates).
- The Archdeacon's office will produce a timetable for the day and liaise with candidates and the panel re timings. It's best to block off the whole day.
- The same broad questions need to be asked of each candidate (though supplementary questions may differ). Parish representatives should aim to produce 6-8 questions and let us have them within a week of interview day, preferably in order of importance to the parish. Please prepare them with this in mind. **All must be linked directly** to the profile.
- The panel will gather for prayer, briefing and allocation of questions at the start of the day, sometimes as early as 8.30am (depending on how many candidates there are).
- After the final candidate has been interviewed, the panel will meet to make its decision as to which to recommend to the Diocesan Bishop for appointment. In theory, please note that we might decide that no candidate may be 'right' for your benefice, but we pray that this will not prove to be the case in practice.
- Later in the day, by arrangement, the Archdeacon will inform the candidates about the outcome and offer appropriate feedback, again at a mutually convenient time.
- The next steps will then be to arrange when the new priest will begin their ministry, house move etc ...

Further guidance on parochial appointments can be found at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/clergy-office-holders/clergy-appointments-adviser/guidance-on-parochial-appointments.aspx>

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