



**Diocese  
of Salisbury**  
Making  
Jesus Known

# General Election Briefing

“This briefing on key issues and pointers for our prayers has been compiled by the sector chaplains and others in the diocese. As people on the ground it highlights their current concerns and the areas of our common life which need addressing by any incoming government. I hope that this briefing will be useful to inform our local understanding of national issues, to help us question candidates standing for election, and to prayerfully reflect on our gospel values. There are many other themes, however these selected seemed particularly pertinent to our own situation.”

*Bishop Karen*

## EDUCATION



### What are the current issues facing the sector?

Funding and budgets. Teacher pay rises have not been and are unlikely to be fully funded leaving many schools facing a deficit budget. The School Estate is in a poor condition. Budget assumptions are creating more risk as we look to balance in-year budgets. Funding increases are not covering the increases in costs.

Funding of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities provision, especially around the significant deficits held by local authorities which are stifling work to support the most vulnerable children we serve.

Student absences. Since Covid and home learning, student attendance at school has decreased at Bishop's Wordsworth. Nationally, 19.4% of pupils were persistently absent in the Autumn 2023/24.

Staff shortages. Recruiting for teaching posts across the sector, in STEM such as Physics and Maths but across the entire curriculum is becoming increasingly challenging. Often there are no applicants for a specialist teaching job. 4 out of 10 teachers leave the profession within 10 years of qualifying. Numbers joining the profession will not meet the numbers leaving.

Student mental health. Because of the pressure on CAMHS (Children and Young Adult Mental Health Services) it is becoming harder and harder to signpost even serious cases into expert care. A mental health crisis, amongst staff, children and parents. Particularly in relation to children, we are seeing increasingly heightened levels of dysregulation and challenging behaviours. Provision to meet these needs is greatly restricted – limited external support; no access to specialist provision; limited approval of special needs funding; lack of skilled staff to manage.

Wider impacts of societal challenges are being felt keenly in families across the schools. Schools are often parents' only gateway into local services and this is increasingly the case. We are seeing a significant uptick in aggression and complaints as people become frustrated about a lack of access to services. High stakes accountability and inspection regime also adversely impacts wellbeing.

### What are the key questions?

- ? Which of your policies show that you truly value education?
- ? What are your plans for funding education – teacher pay, SEND and buildings / estates?
- ? When will we settle into a solid-state in terms of academies/maintained sector? i.e. when will all schools become academies so trusts and local authorities are clear about their roles and can be funded appropriately to meet those needs?
- ? How are your parties going to address the student loan system, both in terms of the interest rate and the amount of loan available for students for living costs? This at present is unlikely to even cover their basic accommodation and is making Higher Education less accessible to students and increasing anxiety / mental health conditions.
- ? What specific steps will you take to increase teacher numbers and retain teachers in the profession? How will you make teaching an attractive career choice? How can we create respect and value in the profession so that people want to stay and want to be leaders?
- ? Increasing numbers of young people are taking their own lives. The Papyrus charity that works to reduce young suicide estimates 5 young people end their lives every day. What specific strategies and funding will you put in place to improve access to mental health services?
- ? According to the government website, in the 2021 to 2022 school year, 49.8% of pupils in England got a grade 5 or above in GCSE English and maths. Before we talk about extending Maths to beyond GCSE level, what specific steps will your party take to improve this basic level and level up student opportunities?

### What can we be praying for?

- Young people who feel worthless and extreme anxiety.
- Senior leaders in school and especially those with responsibility for budgets and staffing.
- That education is valued as the basis from which our citizens grow, providing support and direction, as well as knowledge and skills, for our children and young people.
- For all those who work in education to feel seen and respected in this campaign period, not just as a political football.
- That those who work with children and young people feel empowered to speak up and ask questions of those who can affect change
- That spending commitments to support schools will be made and honoured.
- That hearing and responding to the voice of young people, and the importance of an education system which enables them to flourish, is central to manifesto pledges.
- That politicians will seek to hear and engage as Jesus asked us to, with the curiosity and open hearts of children, and respond as He asked us to – with love.

## HEALTHCARE



### What are the current issues facing the sector?

From [Nine major challenges facing health and care in England – The Health Foundation](#):  
*“Whoever is in government after the next general election will inherit a health and care system in crisis. The NHS is under extreme strain and many people are going without the care they need. [...] Grim data on access to hospital care reflect pressures right across the system – in general practice, community services, mental health, social care: everywhere [...] Public satisfaction with the health service is at an all-time low.*

*But the NHS was not set up to go it alone. Good health depends on a broader set of factors beyond health care, like income, employment, housing, and the range of public services on offer. Yet too many of these building blocks of health have deteriorated after a decade of austerity and the COVID-19 pandemic – particularly for people living in the most deprived areas. [...] Many people are out of work with ill health.*

*The NHS in England has been regularly reorganised...meantime, social care has been neglected by national policymakers. The adult social care system in England is a threadbare safety net, with state-funded support only available to people with the highest needs and lowest means. [...] Successive governments have promised to reform the broken system. [...] And a long line of white papers, independent commissions and even legislation on social care reform [have resulted]. But reform has been repeatedly ditched or delayed – and people and their families continue to suffer unnecessarily.”*

### What are the key questions?

- ? How will you reform the adult social care system to help people who cannot afford the care that they need?
- ? Many people find it difficult to access a doctor or a dentist, and end up going to the Emergency Department of their local hospital to get help. What is your plan for these essential services?
- ? Many people are out of work with ill health. What will you do to improve the health of UK citizens?

### What can we be praying for?

- God gives health as 'the strength for human life' rather than being the meaning or purpose of human life. Pray for those with good health to experience their health as the gift of God, and to share with and serve those in poor health.
- God offers his people a Sabbath rest. Pray for those who govern to create space for rest and respite for all.
- God searches out and seeks those in need. Pray for our health services to be able to seek out and serve those who cannot advocate for their own needs.

# POLICING



## What are the current issues facing the sector?

Funding is a major issue. Dorset is one of the lowest funded forces in the country and is facing having to find further significant savings. Whilst more demands are out on police forces, financial resources are being reduced.

The recent uplift in numbers was welcome but followed on from significant cuts. Retention of officers remains an issue particularly as many incoming staff see the job as short term rather than a long career.

Frontline officers face increased risk of physical harm and support is often some time away, as the scattered nature of rural areas and the demands on officers in the urban areas at times out-strip resources.

Officers often feel undervalued by the public, media and politicians

## What are the key questions?

- ? Assuming you want to see more police officers on the streets how will you resource this?
- ? How will you support officers to give them more protection (physical and legal) and make them feel more appreciated?
- ? What will you do to make all roles in policing a more attractive long-term career pathway?

## What can we be praying for?

- Wisdom for those leading the police and setting policies and priorities.
- Safety of officers who are often called to go towards danger rather than away
- Give thanks for all the emergency services who work for the safety and wellbeing of others

# CRIMINAL JUSTICE



## What are the current issues facing the sector?

The Criminal Justice System is seriously struggling, and it is only those who are called to attend court and those who work within the system who are aware of how very fragile it really is.

It is underfunded.

Criminal barristers are advised to undertake other legal work to cover their living costs.

Since Brexit, there is not the same co-operation between European Justice agencies, which has a direct impact on both defence and prosecution witnesses. One trial the other week has been postponed for a month.

There is a growing shortage of legal advisors, which means there are days when the magistrates courts are not sitting, so leading to a further increase in the backlog.

For the CJS to be 'victim centred'. It needs to remember that most victims want recognition and to see justice and rehabilitation for their offenders, rather than punishment.

## What are the key questions?

- ? What are your plans for adequately funding the criminal justice system?
- ? Will you consider abolishing short-term sentences, those of one year and under?
- ? What are your plans for addressing the backlog?
- ? Are you considering doing more work in the area of mediation and reparation?

## What can we be praying for?

- Some brave and innovative thinking which is concerned for both the benefit of the victim and the offender.
- Funding for in depth mediation and reparation work, as this way there can be true healing and redemption.
- The courage to re-think the current sentencing guidelines. Recognising our current sentencing is longer than other European countries and we lock up more people than other European countries.

# PRISONS



## What are the current issues facing the sector?

It is public knowledge that the criminal justice system is under strain, and prisons are almost full. HMIP are concerned about the physical state and overcrowding of some prisons. Drugs are an ever-present menace heightening the threat of violence and self-harm.

There is much good work in prisons, from employed, contracted and voluntary staff. But outcomes are damaged by things like housing shortage, lack of ability to support and intervene.

There have been 13 Secretaries of State for Justice, and more Ministers for Prisons since 2007. Most have served for around a year. This surely means that improvement and innovation is stifled. Many positive ideas for reform, such as giving Governors greater discretion with budgets, sentencing reforms, have not been followed through, and instability in staffing of prisons and probation have added to instability for prisoners.

## What are the key questions?

- ? What plans do you have for improving prisons, reforming the system to protect the staff and public, and reforming the justice system to improve outcomes for those coming to court?
- ? What lessons can we learn from other countries to reduce recidivist rates, and reduce the huge costs of offending/re-offending and maintaining prisons with such a high population of prisons?



### What can we be praying for?

- For the whole sector – for wisdom for managers and politicians, hope for prisoners.
- For families impacted. Prison officers and other contracted and voluntary workers who work with prisoners towards positive resettlement.
- The Probation Service and chaplaincy sector that supports and mentors' men and women (and their families) on release.
- Chaplains: and the calling and recruitment of people of calibre to work positively within the institutions. Specifically for Christian witness to the transforming power of Christ.
- Give thanks for the witness of prisoners who have encountered the grace of God in their lives and for their protection in the face of temptation.
- Give thanks for the many volunteers who support the work of chaplaincy (e.g., Prison Fellowship, local churches)

# IMMIGRATION



## What are the current issues:

Immigration has for many years been on the political agenda and so it is inevitable that with the General Election approaching policies around small boats, Rwanda and the asylum backlog will be heavily debated. Immigration will always be a complex process however the heightened political element has further compounded these complexities and behind all the politics and policies it is vulnerable people who are suffering. Measures to prevent illegal migration are important however, the current process means that it is almost impossible for anyone to seek asylum in the UK by any legal route. Locally we see the vulnerable people behind the policies; vulnerable people who have fled war, conflict and persecution, people who are just looking to live in a country where they are not in danger.

**Lack of Legal Advice:** The decision to place the Bibby Stockholm Barge in Portland Harbour means that hundreds of asylum seekers are being housed in an area that is not properly equipped to meet their needs. There is a significant lack of legal advice in Dorset, with the nearest lawyers based in Southampton access to this essential advice and support is significantly lacking. When having to be interviewed by the Home Office those seeking asylum have to travel to places like Plymouth, Cardiff, Portsmouth, London and other places. When they get there, it is often a Zoom meeting or the equivalent, and then sometimes there is not a suitable translator available.

**Mental Health:** There is a significant need for mental health provision for refugees and asylum seekers including, those being housed on the Bibby Stockholm Barge. Many refugees and asylum seekers have fled their home countries due to war, conflict, or persecution and for some the trauma has resulted in PTSD or has had a detrimental effect on their mental health in other ways. The length and uncertainty of the asylum process alongside the housing conditions on the barge further exacerbates mental health problems. Many of the men we meet locally are suffering from anxiety, depression or other mental health issues and access to basic mental health provision is limited. Access to psychological treatment for trauma appears to be unavailable.

A Transient population. These seeking asylum are moved at moment's notice. This has caused great stress and the inability to establish any local relationships. Dorset doesn't offer accommodation if asylum is granted, therefore any support offered locally, or any connections comes to a sudden end when people move or are moved on. This also is detrimental to one's wellbeing.

### What are the key questions?

- ? How can you ensure the rights of those seeking asylum in the UK are respected?
- ? How best can you identify and implement solutions to accommodation needs, access to physical and mental health? Education and employment?
- ? How will you assist the local community to ensure effective, ethical, and respectful integration.
- ? What will you do to help reduce the length of time the asylum process takes? How can this process be made faster and how can you ensure that people are able to integrate with the community while they wait for their decision?
- ? Will you eliminate the concept of illegality of those who enter the UK by other non-traditional means?

### What can we be praying for?

- For those countries where there are injustices that lead people to take the decision to leave.
- For justice in the asylum system in the UK.
- For the creation of bridges and not walls. Access to support and creation of new forms of resettlement.
- For a comprehensive physical and mental health screening process, before people are moved, particularly onto the barge.
- That we can show the love of Jesus to the stranger and the foreigner.

# RACIAL JUSTICE



## What are the current issues:

Sanctuary spaces for Travellers/ Romany/ Gypsy communities

Migration

Health inequalities (post Covid and maternal health in particular)

Contested heritage/Reparations for slavery

Climate justice/fair trade

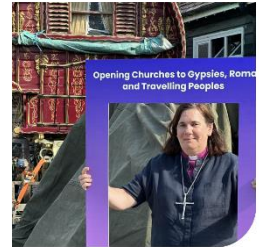
## What are the key questions?

- ? What will you do to make sure that people seeking refuge in the UK get a swift and fair decision.
- ? Will you consider allowing those waiting a decision to work legally to prevent their exploitation.
- ? Migration is often assumed to be about people of colour, what are your plans to reduce racism alongside your intentions to reduce migration.
- ? What is the figure the government allocates for international development that is being spent within the UK? Will your government ensure that money spent in the UK is not described as money given for international development?
- ? What will the government do to increase climate justice globally and support fair trade thus creating greater opportunities and reducing the economic and climate drivers for migration.
- ? Does your government plan to make it easier for migrants working in the health service and armed forces to be joined by their families.

## What can we be praying for?

- Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Psalm 39:12
- Help us O Lord to see in the face of the stranger and the other, especially those with whom we disagree, the face of a neighbour and your beloved child.
- Teach us to choose justice when serving our neighbour. Give us courage to act, compassion when we react and a willingness to pay the cost of sacrifice so that your kingdom may come.

## MINORITY GROUPS



### What are the current issues:

Lack of access to suitable Traveller sites

Lack of educational opportunities

Poor mental and physical health

Extreme racism

General crisis in housing provision, eg discharged prisoners being given tents and sleeping bags, as are those asylum seekers given leave to remain

### What are the key questions?

- ? What are you planning to do about the homelessness crisis?
- ? What are you doing to encourage local authorities create safe and culturally appropriate Traveller sites?
- ? Will your party invest in mental health provision?

### What can we be praying for?

- For compassion
- For the regeneration of civil society
- For the courage to speak out against injustice

# HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING



## What are the current issues?

There is a widespread assumption behind the reasons people become homeless, most notably that street sleeping is a 'lifestyle choice'. This 'one theory' concept denies people's stories, circumstances, agency and humanity. Which in turn makes it easier to dismiss as an issue. The number of people rough sleeping has increased **by more than a quarter** for two years in a row.

The next government is set to inherit a deepening housing emergency. [Sharp increase in rough sleeping and child homelessness: the next government cannot afford to ignore the housing emergency | Shelter](#)

## What are the key questions?

What are your plans to combat:

- ? The Social Housing crisis
- ? Private rent increases and lack of housing stock
- ? The cost-of-living crisis that pushes people into rent arrears
- ? The lack of funding to local councils who are forced to make tough decisions between repairing the roads, keeping leisure centres open and providing accommodation to families and single people who've found themselves homeless – often with complex additional needs.

## What can we be praying for?

- For the men, women and young people, including babies affected by the housing crisis.
- For charities like Alabare, Shelter and Routes to Roots supporting the homeless

## FAMILY LIFE



### What are the current issues?

Cost of Living – food poverty, energy poverty

NHS access

Mental health & well-being – online well-being, isolation

Eco worries

Transport for young people

Affordable family activities

Farming stress, weather and change in the subsidies

### What are the key questions?

- ? How are you going to organise services and incomes in a sustainable way?
- ? How can we meet our huge issues with creativity and fairness? How can we partner in this?

### What can we be praying for?

- For people to feel included and a society in which everyone has part to play in creating a good and fair community & economy that meets peoples basic needs.

# CLIMATE



## What are the current issues?

The power of the fossil fuel lobby is diverting attention from the climate crisis. The fossil fuel energy sector untruthfully promotes the idea that we can't afford to go down the green energy route

Those who speak out about the climate crisis are being silenced or ignored.

## What are the key questions?

- ? What is your commitment to responding to the climate crisis
- ? What is your policy on fossil fuel exploration? Will your party pledge not to issue new licences for new Gas and oil fields?
- ? Will you make it easier for renewable energy projects to become reality? Will your party promote land-based wind farms? Solar?

## What can we be praying for?

- That all will put people and planet before money.
- That the church will be braver in standing up against the injustice caused by the use of fossil fuels.
- That we all take responsibility and not see the climate crisis as somebody else's problem



## FARMING AND AGRICULTURE



### What are the current issues?

At present, due to Environmental Land Management Systems (ELMS), where farmers are encouraged through Grants, to plant trees and wildflowers, there is a huge concern among the industry that National Food Security is being diminished. British farmers produce only around 56% of our food. They see huge imports from Australia, New Zealand, and other countries, thereby reducing their value as an industry.

There is massive uncertainty throughout the whole of farming at present. Due to: Bovine TB, weather, financial worries, post Brexit issues, implementation of new grant schemes instead of subsidies when farmers will receive less, succession planning, huge increase in costs of fertiliser, fuel and feed over the last three years. Taking into account all the above, mental (ill) health in farming is rife at present. Farming has the highest rate of male suicide of any profession in the UK.

### What are the key questions?

- ? Will the next Government support the farming industry to combat the fear of food insecurity?
- ? What will the next Government do to combat huge mental (ill) health in the farming community and therefore reduce the suicide rate?

### What can we be praying for?

- The whole of the farming industry
- That any successive Government will change things and take a common sense and pragmatic approach to the problems in the farming industry.

*Thanks to: Jo Woodd, Lead Chaplain to Salisbury Law Courts, Katie Fitzsimmons Diocesan Director of Education, Mark Lacey, Chief Executive Officer Diocese of Salisbury Academy Trust, Stella Wood Chaplain Bishop's Wordsworth School, James Taylor, Lead Chaplain, University Hospitals Dorset NHS Foundation Trust, Tim Gomm, Rector of Portland, Revd Jo Haine, Rural Dean of Weymouth and Portland, Beatriz Brooks, commissioned Lay Pioneer, Dave Rees, elder at Weymouth Baptist Church, Rachma Abbott, Racial Justice Adviser, Anthony Oehring, sessional Anglican Chaplain, HMP Guys Marsh, Gill Turner-Callis, Chaplain Alabare, Lorna Johnson, Growing Faith Team, Jonathan Herbert, Chaplain to Gypsy's and travellers, Hilary Bond, Christian Climate Concern, Richard Kirew, Chaplain to Salisbury Livestock Market, Richard Hancock, Rural Chaplain, Simon Evans, Lead Chaplain to Dorset Police.*