

QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDERS

Diocesan Synod November 2022

Each questioner is entitled to ask two supplementary questions at the meeting. These will all be record and shared with Synod members.

Peter Hoadley, Eastleigh Deanery

1. To the Business Committee:

"I regret that at 80 years young, I do not wish to have to drive 30+ miles to Andover on a November evening to attend in person at Synod.

I feel sure that technology is available to enable me to, if not take a full part, i.e. voting, at least see and hear what is being said and the tenor of the meeting through a zoom connection.

I well remember that during the Covid lockdown a full synod was held totally online, which to my mind had the following advantages:-

1. The attendance was greater than the average at in-person meetings.
2. We were able to see and hear the full debate and vote.
3. We were able to split out into discussion groups.
4. There was no requirement to travel wherever in the Diocese you live.
5. The time commitment was greatly reduced by upto 2+ hours.

I am not suggesting that we should not have in person meetings, but would like to see a form of Hybrid so that, like me at this meeting, we could at the very least be able to see and hear the speakers from the rostrum. The technology exists viz, our meeting in lockdown, and probably, in the passage of time, has improved.

But there is another element to my request, that of our Diocesan credentials on our response to the declared climate emergency. Surely to have a proportion of members forced to drive in excess of 30 miles in some instances, cannot show our commitment to trying to reduce energy consumption let alone the cost to the individual member with rising fuel costs.

I am not trying to suggest that the present practice of rotating Synod between the two Archdeaconries is wrong but we should be trying to do that in a way which is environmentally friendly and does not disenfranchise members, who for good reasons are not able or prepared to travel some distance on a November evening.

I ask synod to concur and instruct the Business Committee to further consider providing suitable technological equipment to enable all members to attend either in person or virtually at all meetings."

We are grateful to Peter for raising this question. The Business Committee were able to spend some time considering this issue at our last meeting on 7 November.

The decision to hold this meeting in Andover was made following multiple requests from Synod members that we look at alternative venues to Bursledon, specifically in the north of the Diocese. Finding venues that are accessible, have sufficient parking, AV/IT facilities and flexible meeting space is not straightforward. We are always open to suggestions of new venues for consideration.

There is a clear place for online meetings as part of the decision making and oversight processes for our diocese. We seek to use these as much as we can, recognising the entirely valid points Peter has raised around accessibility and environmental impact. As of now, The Finance Monitoring Group, Investment Advisory Group, Safeguarding Strategic Panel, Property Working Group, Deanery Finance Chairs Forum and Education Resource Group all meet online.

We have learnt that hybrid meetings (whereby some attend in person and others online) are usually highly unsatisfactory. We have attempted a number of Bishop's Council meetings in this manner in different venues and the results have always been challenging. The technology and resource required to make such meetings function well should not be underestimated especially for a group the size of Synod. It would be feasible to stream some of presentations to Synod via Zoom, but without proper sound and camera equipment (and the staff to operate them) it would not enable members to fully hear debates, questions and feedback or have the opportunity to engage in the discussion.

Synod may recall that November 2021 we conducted a survey of all members asking for their preference around how we held meetings. A substantial majority (66%) of respondents indicated their preferences was for in person meetings, with only 2% saying their preferences was for zoom/online meetings. The remaining 29% indicated they would be open to a mixture of the two options. Looking at these results the Business Committee felt a strong steer to meeting in person. We also felt there has been a priority to help rebuild and strengthen relationships on Synod after the challenging period our diocese has been through. Our sense has been that relationships and mutual trust develop best when meeting together in person three times a year. We would hope that if members sought election to Diocesan Synod, they did so ready, willing and able to attend our meetings.

We would be open to holding fully online meetings in the future if the agenda lent itself to such an option, but we would currently expect this to be an exception rather than the norm.

In responding to this question, we note Peter's final sentence requests Synod to agree with his position and instruct us as the Business Committee to respond accordingly. We would like to gently remind all Synod members that Questions under Standing Orders are a mechanism for seeking information. They are not a means for starting a debate, seeking approval for a particular proposal, or requiring action. If you would like advice on how to get proposals on to the Diocesan Synod agenda please contact members of the Diocesan Team.