

BISHOP'S COUNCIL & STANDING COMMITTEE

Update for Diocesan Synod March 2023

This note summarises the recent work and decisions of the Bishop's Council & Standing Committee (BCSC) since November 2022 and is shared with the Diocesan Synod for information. **This update does not include Council business that will be covered elsewhere on the Synod agenda.**

Synod will be invited to raise questions at the meeting.

The Council has met twice since their last update, in January and March, with two additional votes via email for urgent items.

Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee Business

DMPC business continues to be at a very high level as pastoral schemes arising from the 2021 Diocesan Resilience plans are worked through.

On 17 November, the Church of England Mission & Pastoral Committee held a special hearing in Southampton to consider representations against three of our proposed schemes.

The Committee found in our favour for two of the schemes (albeit with one being amended) but we still await the final decision on the third. We have raised our concerns with national team at this unacceptable delay.

Refurbishment of Old Alresford Place

In January, we considered options for the refurbishment of Old Alresford Place following the decision to return the Diocesan Offices there.

The Team had prepared three options for our consideration with varying degrees of cost and works to be completed. After discussion, we opted for the tier 3 proposal. Whilst this was the most expensive, it would include the most extensive environmental works which we feel are a priority.

At the time of writing we hope the Diocesan Office will be able to return to OAP by April 2024.

Stipends & Salaries Review

In January we reviewed the stipend and salary increases for 2023. Whilst these had been previously approved by Synod as part of the Budget (in June 2022), we felt that the changing economic and cost of living content meant the 3% agreed increase needed to be revisited.

As part of this review we noted that the 3% increase would lead to Winchester clergy having the lowest stipend levels in the South East. Having considered various options, we have now agreed to a 7% increase for 2023. This will be communicated to all stipendiary clergy next week.

This will come with an additional cost to the budget of around £150,000 pa. We are working with the Diocesan Secretary to identify savings and efficiencies to help offset this amount.

Diocesan Financial Framework

Under the leadership of the Chair of the FMG, we have been considering a new Financial Framework for our Diocese. This will support and enable the development of our triennial budget, whilst also looking further ahead.

The Framework has 4 core strands:

1. Financial Management – We are reviewing (assisted by an external consultant) the structure and resources committed to our financial management, to ensure our daily operational activity is robust, complaint and outward looking.
2. Financial Governance – We will seek to improve and develop our Financial Governance, expanding the remit of the Finance Monitoring Group (re-launching it as the Diocesan Financed Committee), strengthening its membership and giving it greater responsibility for drafting budgets and financial strategies.
3. Financial Reporting – We are agreeing a range of new reporting and monitoring resources for the Bishop’s Council, Synod and wider diocesan community. We are aiming for greater clarity and communication on our financial operations to help clergy, parishes and church members feel engaged and informed.
4. Financial Planning – We are seeking to agree (with Synod) Dioceses Budget tests, aspirations and commitments. Further information to follow soon!

Carbon Net Zero 2030

Following the launch of the Church of England’s Net Zero fund (£190 million over the next 9 years) and the Next Zero Route Map, our focus on this vital area now needs to increase.

We have now applied for and received the first £15,000 to help us build capacity to develop our Net Zero Plan. This will be brought back to Diocesan Synod for approval in November this year. Once our plan is approved, we are then able to access additional funding and resources.

In the meantime we continue to strongly encourage all our PCCs to engage with the Net Zero resource from the Church of England, complete their annual Energy Foot Print Tool, and to register for the Eco Church awards. <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/church-england-environment-programme>

Parsonages Board Business

In March, in our capacity as the Diocesan Parsonages Board, we considered a request from an incumbent for their benefice house to be replaced over concerns of its suitability.

The role of Parsonages Board is a statutory one. Most of our routine duties are delegated to the Diocesan Property Working Group but from time to time need to consider high level issues.

Diocesan Team

We are pleased to share the news that the Ven. Jean Burgess will be joining us in early Summer as **the Archdeacon of Bournemouth**. We were delighted to hear that we had such an exceptional field of candidates seeking to help serve and lead our diocese in this vital role. Members of the Bishop’s

Council and Diocesan Synod worked closely with Bishop Debbie and others in the recruitment process.

Across the wider diocesan team since Synod last met, we have seen the departure of the Director of Finance, the Stewardship Adviser, and the Digital & Parish Comms Adviser. We wish them all well in their new roles.

As posts become vacant, the Diocesan Secretary is carrying out in depth reviews of the role, exploring alternative options, structures and ways of working. We continue to work with the executive Leadership in ensuring our employed team are appropriately resourced, supported and meeting the needs of our diocese.

Nominations Committee

In March, we received a proposal to create a Diocesan Nominations Committee. This had been prepared in conjunction with the Deanery Lay Chair's Forum who would take on this function. We hope this approach will become an asset to our diocesan governance structures – helping to identify, discern and seek suitable individuals to serve in the breadth of roles needed to lead and govern our decisions.

WDBF & BCSC Membership

We were disappointed to hear that no candidates stood for the casual vacancy for a Lay rep on Bishop's Council.

This was discussed at the informal meeting of the House of Laity on 23 February. Those present requested that the election process be re-started at the March Synod meeting. They also requested that members of the Diocesan Team be given a clear mandate to actively seek candidates for the Bishop's Council (either elected or co-opted). The meeting felt it was important to give explicit permission for this to avoid any perception that the Diocesan team were attempting to 'control' the membership.

We hope and pray that people will feel called to serve on our Committees, and that the creation of our new Nominations Committee (above) will assist with such vacancies in future.

At our March meeting we considered two related matters, considering two applicants for the role of Chair of the WDBF and a possible co-opted member with relevant skills and experience to join the board. We hope to make a formal announcement of these two appointments at the Synod meeting.

Application to the Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board

Earlier this year the new Church of England Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board (SMMIB) began its work. The Board is responsible for managing the range of national CofE funding streams to support diocesan mission strategies. As Synod will be aware, we have previously made successful applications to the Board's predecessor (the Strategic Development Fund) to support our Benefice of the Future Programme, Church Planting Strategy, and other project strands.

In March we reviewed a draft application to the SMMIB for a possible submission to their June meeting. This application has arisen following close working between our Diocesan Team and members of the national Diocesan Support Team. It seeks to maintain the missional momentum of our previous applications, building on the positive strands that are already underway.

We have agreed that our Diocese is not currently in a position to launch a major new mission strategy. This is something we will need to review and refresh once our new bishop is in post. We cannot however risk delay seeking any further investment from the national team until that work is completed, as it would jeopardise the progress, pipelines, and opportunities that we are already seeing.

This new application will therefore be seeking funds to help invest in two projects:

1. Growing Rural Parishes Programme (GRPP)

Building on the knowledge and experience of the Benefice of the Future pilots, GRPP will seek to work with up to 9 rural benefices over the coming years, offering capacity grants, active learning sets and training events to help develop successful and sustainable Benefice Ministry Teams. Rural Benefices will be able to apply to join the programme each year.

2. Parish Revitalisation & Renewal Partnerships

Initially focused on our major conurbations of Southampton and Bournemouth, the PRRP is a collaborative model for supporting parishes to reverse decline, serve their community, and start a journey towards growth and sustainability – both missional and financial. The project will use the gifts and capacity within our network of Resource Churches to work in partnership with local parishes, to support revitalisation and renewal. The exact nature of each partnership will, we expect, be as diverse as the parochial contexts we serve.

We hope to provide Synod with a more detailed update on the progress and learnings of our existing SDF projects in the near future.

March 2023