

BISHOP'S COUNCIL & STANDING COMMITTEE

Update for Diocesan Synod March 2024

This note summarises the recent work and decisions of the Bishop's Council & Standing Committee (BCSC) since November 2024 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.

Housing Management Review

At our January meeting we received a report from a Working Party who had been reviewing the management and maintenance of our clergy housing provision. The Group had identified a number of challenges in our current approach in terms of workloads, availability of contractors, tendering, compliance with ecclesiastical legislation, and the increased breadth of expertise and capacity needed to address Net Zero.

Having reviewed a range of options the Working Party recommended that we explore outsourcing the management and maintenance of our houses to a third party agent. The Group noted that whilst only one other diocese currently takes this approach, this was common practice for organisations with large property portfolios.

We unanimously accepted this recommendation and have instructed the Diocesan Team to begin detailed negotiations and tendering processes with two potential external partners.

Clergy Stipends 2024

At our March meeting we voted for a 7% increase in clergy stipends from April 2024. This decision follows our Three Year Budget Aspiration to increase diocesan stipends in line with the recommended national stipends benchmark.

The increase from 5% (in our original budget) to 7% was made possible due to a national reduction in clergy pension contributions of 2% which was announced at the end of last year. We hope this increase will help to slightly ease some of the financial challenge many of our clergy face.

We have also agreed to carry out a review of salary increases for WDBF employees later this year. In recent years we have made substantial necessary cuts and savings within the Diocesan Team. We now need to ensure that we continue to properly support and care for this vital area of our diocesan family. Further details will be shared with the Council later this year.

Consultation on new Bishop of Southampton

At our January meeting, we considered and approved a submission to the Dioceses Commission seeking permission to replace the Bishop of Southampton. Due to the meetings dates of the Dioceses Commission this submission was urgent and therefore approved by the Bishop's Council in our

capacity as Standing Committee of the Diocesan Synod. We hope to hear the response from the Diocese Commission in the near future.

Diocesan Loans Fund Review

At our January meeting we considered a detailed report from the Diocesan Finance Committee proposing some changes to the operations of the Diocesan Loans Fund. These recommendations were accepted (with one amendment) and will now be implemented.

The recommendations include winding up the practice of the WDBF borrowing funds from PCCs, reducing the interest rates the WDBF charge to PCC, and capping potential increases if interest rates increase unexpectedly. At the same time, we have agreed a small new fund to provide small, short-term loans to PCCs undertaking work to help them reach Net Zero. A more detailed briefing of these changes will be made available to PCCs in the coming weeks.

Portsmouth & Winchester Diocesan Board of Education Charitable Incorporated Organisation

We have been informed by the Charity Commission that our application to register the Joint Diocesan Board of Education as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) has been successful and came into effect on 1 February 2024. The Board is working closely with the Director of Education and his Team to ensure all the necessary changes are implemented in a timely and compliant manner. We look forward to this exciting next stage in the shared working between our two dioceses in this vital area of ministry.

Upcoming Elections to Diocesan Synod

Synod members will be aware that the current triennium ends this year. We will therefore be starting the election process for the next 3 years over the Summer, with our new Synod starting in November 2024. We will then start the processes for electing new Chairs of the Houses and members of all relevant Synodical committee.

Before the formal election process begins, we ask that all Deaneries be encouraged to pray for the elections, and that we might have willing, gifted candidates able to offer their time and experiences to help address the broad range of complex decisions required in the running of our diocesan community.

Response to feedback around the use of the website and more accessibility

In the past we have received feedback on the diocesan website, asking that it be made more user friendly and accessible. As with any website this remains an ongoing task, as technology and guidance on usability changes and improves. We are however pleased at the progress the Comms Team have made in the last 12 months, and hope that the site is now more useable and engaging for all.

March 2023