

Walking the Wessex Way

Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan 2025

“As this legacy of grace has shaped our past so it should shape our future too, as we walk the same path countless others have walked before us – a path of service, of learning, of growth – and of love above all.”

Bishop Philip
Walking the Wessex Way 2024

Developing a Shared vision

In 2023, Bishop Philip invited our parishes, chaplaincies, deaneries and synods to *Walk the Wessex Way* – a Vision for our Diocese, responding to our proud history and heritage to help shape our present and future mission and ministry.

The main task of making these things evident must fall to local Christian communities: there is only so much change that can be leveraged centrally. Nonetheless there are things that can and should be done from the diocesan ‘centre’. During 2024 therefore, the Bishop’s Staff Team (BST) considered their own response of the invitation in *Walking the Wessex Way*, expressing them as commitments: our commitments to the wider Diocese for this next season.

Appendix 1 offers description of what those commitments will be, with timescales identified where appropriate. However, it is important to stress that this is not a comprehensive list for action. The exclusion of an area does not mean it is not important: it may simply be that it is being delivered well and requires less intervention than others.

Opening a Consultation

Work on delivering these commitments is already underway. We know however that there is much more still to do, and greater resources and supported needed at a local level. We believe that this can best be achieved by applying for funding from the national Church’s **Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board** (SMMIB) later this year.

Developing a bid for such funding is no simple task – the SMMIB rightly expects detailed, coherent plans that will impact across our diocesan community. We now need to develop this bid, setting it firmly in the context of *Walking the Wessex Way*, aligned with national mission priorities, whilst honouring local parish and deanery aspirations.

We are now approaching a fork in the road that requires us to consider our next steps as a diocesan community. As you would expect, those of us called to diocesan leadership have spent time in prayerful consideration of how we might proceed.

We now wish to share our initial thoughts of what this strategic funding bid might look like with our wider diocesan community, seeking comments, feedback and responses to help shape the next iteration of our plans.

We do this in a spirit of openness and humility, with the only certainty being that our plans will develop and improve because of this process of consultation and shared discernment.

Where are we now?

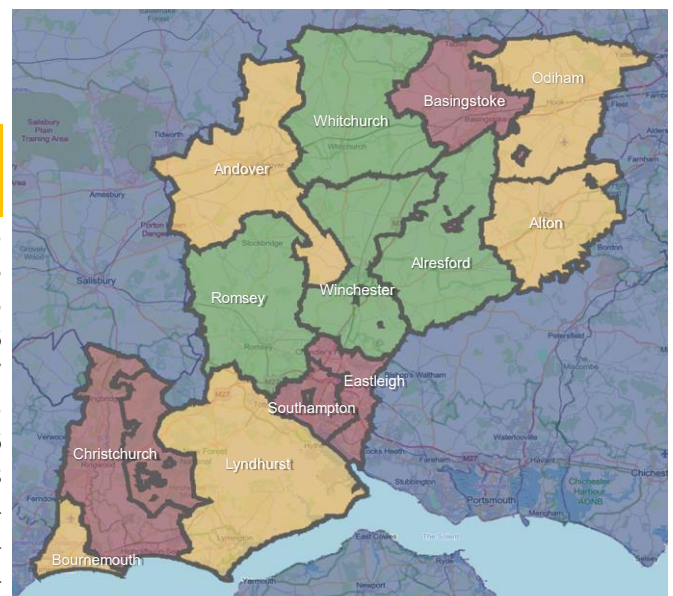
Our diocese has much to celebrate and give thanks for as our parishes, schools, chaplaincies and worshipping communities respond to their callings to serve, learn, grow and love. We must however also recognise with humility and courage the many challenges and pressures we collectively carry.

1. Attendance across our diocese continues to decline in most parishes and we are often not reflective of the communities we serve.
2. Decline in attendance leads to decline in volunteers, income and resources.
3. This in turn places further pressures on and reduces morale of, our clergy, lay ministers, church officers and volunteers.
4. Poor morale and limited resources reduce our shared capacity to consider new ways of fulfilling our vocation to serve and love our communities.

As would be expected in a diocesan community as varied as ours, this picture is not uniform as the diagram below illustrates:

Deanery Overview

Deanery	Pop.	Attendance per Capita	Child Attendance per Capita	Ministry Spend per Capita
Southampton	248,000	0.7%	0.5%	£3
Bournemouth	160,000	1.2%	1.1%	£5
Eastleigh	140,000	0.8%	0.5%	£5
Basingstoke	136,000	0.9%	0.5%	£6
Christchurch	114,000	0.9%	0.3%	£7
Lyndhurst	88,000	1.8%	0.5%	£13
Winchester	72,000	2.1%	1.3%	£16
Andover	71,000	1.1%	0.5%	£8
Odiham	57,000	1.9%	0.9%	£14
Romsey	47,000	2.0%	0.7%	£14
Alton	35,000	1.6%	0.5%	£14
Whitchurch	26,000	2.4%	1.9%	£20
Alresford	15,000	2.9%	1.0%	£31
Diocese	1,250,000	1.2%	0.8%	£8



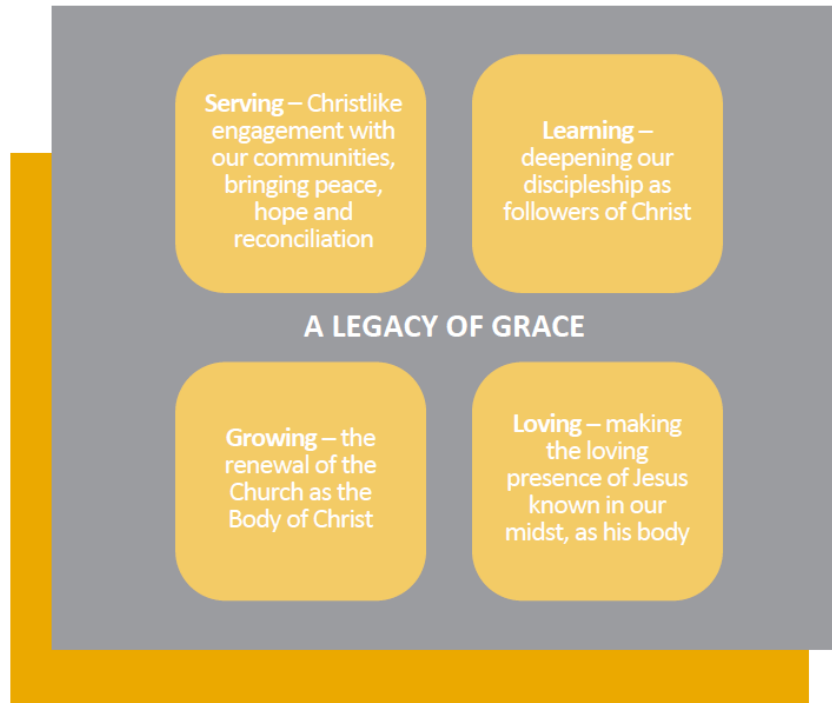
Key – Attendance per capita

<1.0%	1.0%-2.0%	2.0%+
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We are therefore called to understand our challenges, whilst building on the examples of hope and good news as we plan for the future.

Where do we want to get to?

In Walking the Wessex Way, Bishop Philip summarises his vision for a Christ-centred future for our diocese:



Making progress towards this vision, will require greater resource and sustainability across our network of parishes, chaplaincies, schools and local communities.

How do we get from here to there?

It is often said that a 'Diocesan Strategy' is an oxymoron due to the lack of direct control and authority Bishops and the Diocesan Team have over PCCs and worshipping communities. For many even the word 'strategy' holds negative connotations that feel at odds with the Gospel which calls people of faith to rely on God for the future. We wish to recognise and acknowledge the unease many may have when we discuss 'strategic plans' but, as those with responsibility (even if not outright authority) for leading our diocesan community, we feel we cannot abdicate our calling in this regard.

At its simplest, good strategy is simply good stewardship – using the resources entrusted into our care to help achieve our hopes and mutual vocation.

For some years now in our Diocese we have been on a journey to try and find solutions to some of our shared missional, ministerial and pastoral challenges. This work has been supported by national funding and resources. We've been encouraged to try new thing and take some risks. Some of these projects and pilots have worked well, others less so, but all have taught us valuable lessons for the future.

Building on this experience, supported by an external review of the first phase of our projects, and informed by a detailed 'Health & Vitality' review of all benefice data¹, we are now ready to look towards the next 10 years for our diocese.

It is this context that we offer '**Walking the Wessex Way – Strategic Mission & Ministry Development Plan**' as a possible way forward.

Appendix 2 offers a timetable for a Diocesan wide consultation programme over the coming months. This process of consultation will be intense and potentially challenging. As always, there is great value in seeking wider wisdom and perspectives. We must however be careful to manage expectations and acknowledge the very broad range of views and priorities that exist across our diocese and indeed nationally. In short, we cannot generate a plan that will be supported by everyone in every parish. To add to the complexity, we also have to give due regard to the requirements and priorities of the national Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board if we hope to receive a sizeable level of funding from them.

If, after consultation and discussion, these plans are supported by Diocesan Synod, we shall submit a funding application to the **Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board** at the end of the year.

¹ Copies of 'Going fast or going far? SDF Phase 1 end-of-programme external review' and Benefice Health & Vitality Dashboards are available to review at <https://winchester.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Going-Fast-or-Going-Far-Winchester-SDF-Phase-1-Evaluation.pdf> and by emailing parish.support@winchester.anglican.org

Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan 2025

Overview (101 Benefices)

Over the next 5 to 10 years we aim to provide proactive support and funding to 101 of our 127 benefices, seeking to improve the health and sustainability of our parishes, worshipping communities and chaplaincies as we learn, love, grow and serve our population.

Methodology

We will seek funding from the Church of England's Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Board to help fund and resource three strands to support our benefices:

1. **Benefice Development Programme**
2. **Growing Rural Parishes Programme**
3. **Serving Southampton & Believing in Bournemouth**

These benefice facing programmes will be supported and enabled by a range of other changes and plans at a Diocesan level (see [Walking the Wessex Way](#)), not least a commitment to further invest in Clergy welfare and support.

Initial, draft ideas for each strand of support are summarised on the following pages.

Objectives & Aspirations

Each of the three strands will have their own set of specific objectives, agreed and refined through consultation with diocesan stakeholders and national colleagues.

The following are offered as a high-level overview of potential objectives for the Investment Plan as a whole:

Over a 10-year period:

- A. The number of 'flourishing'² benefices to have increased from 19 to 30.
- B. The number of 'healthy, but...' benefices to have increased from 26 to 40.
- C. The number of 'struggling' benefices to have reduced from 47 to 37
- D. The number of 'in need of review' benefices to have reduced from 35 to 20.

Over the coming months we hope to offer a range of in person and online consultation events and workshops for as many members of our diocesan community as possible.

² Benefice categorisations based on Health & Vitality data. An increase in the number of Flourishing/Healthy benefices will require an increase in attendance (total), increases in financial sustainability, increases in the number of children/young people.

Benefice Development Programme

Overview (50 Benefices)

At key times of transition and opportunity in parish life, working in partnership with local leadership, to seek the mind, heart and will of God, to provide bespoke, collaborative support at benefice level.

Assessing the missional, financial and structural risks, opportunities and sustainability, to co-create **Benefice Development Plans**, backed up by dedicated ongoing support, advice, mentoring and funding.

Methodology

Drawing on the learnings and experiences of our current and previous Strategic Development Fund and Diocesan Investment Programme projects, national research and partner organisations, to develop a menu³ of costed potential support packages, interventions, training and tools to assist benefices in improving core areas of their health and vitality, with a particular focus on youth, children & families.

National funding for dedicated **Benefice Development Advisers** (*title to be confirmed!*) to be appointed to walk alongside benefices as they develop and discern their local plans, providing challenge, support, advocacy and expertise.

As we seek to develop these plans, we will be guided by the following principles:

1. **Based in prayer:** Our plans must start from a place of humility, placing our trust in Christ, seeking his guidance and wisdom in all we do.
2. **Bespoke:** At the foundation of the parochial structures, is the understanding that every community is different. Whilst challenges will be similar, the context, people and constraints will always create a unique mixture. Bespoke support is therefore always required.
3. **Evidence Based:** There is wealth of qualitative and quantitative data, statistics, research, and experience across the Church. We must ensure our plans and priorities must be considered and challenged through this base of knowledge.
4. **Co-created:** Local clergy, ministers and laity are the experts on their communities. Leaders and peers in other benefices have vital relevant experience and knowledge. The Diocesan team bring a range of expertise and perspective. It is our belief and experience that only by mixing all these expertise together can we truly create sustainable plans, based in detailed local knowledge, peer-group learning, supported by wider experience.
5. **Resourced:** Plans without resources are just documents. To bring about the scale and speed of change and development we seek, all benefice plans will require resource – people, financial, and experiential. Each plan will be fully costed, with dedicated expert advisers identified to support the local team in the implementation and delivery.
6. **Times of Transition & Opportunity:** Leading change in the Church is hard. It is our belief that using times of significant transition and opportunity in benefices, as springboards for wider change planning, provides the greatest chance of success. Wherever possible, we will seek to develop Benefice Development Plans at points of change and transition in benefice life (vacancies, pastoral schemes, demographic changes etc.)
7. **Prioritised:** The need for support is greater than our capacity to respond. We will therefore prioritise those where both the need and potential is greatest. Within this we will unashamedly prioritise investment in benefices and plans that will most support ministry to children, young people and families.

³ A draft 'menu' is offered in **appendix 1** as illustration of the types of support packages that might be on offer.

8. **Structurally Aware:** The structures and legislation of the CofE are not designed to facilitate or enable top-down imposed change. Experience shows that where change is forced rather than invited (even for the best possible missional reasons) the damage to all involved can be long lasting. We are therefore committed to working within this reality, recognising that perspectives within the Church are so divided on so many issues that we can never please all. All benefices will therefore be given a right to opt-out of the programme if they so wish.
9. **Flexible:** The future is uncertain. Our plans are not always God's plans. We must ensure adaptability and flexibility are baked into our plans to allow us to respond to changes contexts, challenges and priorities.

Objectives & Aspirations

Aspirations to be drafted – these will need to arise from an iterative process drawing on the diocesan wide consultation alongside conversations with the national Vision & Strategy Team. Some ideas have been offered below to illustrate the type of objectives that might be sought.

Over a 10-year period:

- A. 50 Benefices to have engaged in the Benefice Development Programme.
 - B.
 - C.
 - D.
 - E.
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Growing Rural Parishes Programme

Overview (15 Benefices)

As a diocese where 80% of our parishes are rural, 60% of our Common Mission Fund and 64% of our parochial fees arise from rural parishes, any strategic mission plans must include our rural areas. As we seek to address the missional challenges of our whole diocese, rural ministry remains a key and vital element of the whole.

In 2018 We launched a pilot programme called **Benefice of the Future (BoF)** supported by the Strategic Development Fund (SDF). The thesis of this initiative was that large rural benefices could flourish and sustain, whether made up of a number of villages, or centred on a market town. It began with a pilot to explore what interventions would enable this. Although the results did not meet our initial optimistic objectives, the impact remains highly positive and encouraging. In 2023 we received further national funding to develop the working into the Growing Rural Parishes Programme for a further 3 cohorts (9 benefices).

This programme continues to prove beneficial, popular and informative and so we plan to seek further funding over the next 5 for the 15 remaining benefices years that would qualify for the Programme.

Methodology

Each year eligible Rural Benefices will be invited to apply to join the GRPP. A clear statement will be shared setting out the support and investment a benefice in the programme will receive, along with the expectations and commitments required from those who choose to participate.

A small Panel led by the Archdeacon of Winchester will review applications and agree which three benefices should join in any given year. Factors such as missional potential, sustainability, openness to change and current leadership will be considered.

A dedicated Project Manager will work with each benefice to carry out an initial assessment and scoping of potential, areas for improvements and opportunities. This work will then be developed (in partnership with the benefice leadership team), to create a bespoke action and growth plan over the first three years. A budget of £35k per benefice (over the 3 years) will be offered to invest in operational infrastructure, training, communications and branding, and administrative support.

As well as the bespoke support and investment, each benefice will need to participate in regular active learning sets with colleagues from other benefices – pooling ideas, learnings, and progress. In conjunction with the GRPP we will seek to continue growing a pipeline of ordained leaders with training and experience of operating within rural benefices.

The Growing Rural Parishes Programme will work with benefices to deploy and use some or all of the following tools and approaches to help facilitate this cultural change:

- a. Provide dedicated support for the Benefice the leadership team
- b. Give the whole congregation the confidence to try new things
- c. Encourage the development of new lay leaders
- d. Use improved IT and branding to make the churches more efficient and attractive to the 25-45 years age groups
- e. Support the administration team – this often includes the use of church management software (CMS). This in turn reduces pressure on the leaders.
- f. Share learning from churches who have already done it
- g. Develop projects which benefit the whole community where the church is based

Objectives

Over the next 5 years we will seek to work with the remaining 15 benefices that would be applicable for the Growing Rural Parishes Programme

1. Each Rural Benefice will develop a Benefice Ministry Team of lay and ordained, stipendiary, salaried and voluntary members sharing in the leadership, discipleship, care and formation of the Benefice.
2. The rate of decline in size of Worshipping Communities in each benefice will slow, stabilise and then move to growth over the three-year programme.
3. We will see an average of 10 new lay vocations (LLM, LLW, BCM, BPP) in each benefice, leading to 90 additional authorised lay ministers across our diocese at the end of 5 years, increasing total ministry provision, delivered in a contextual, and financially sustainable mode.
4. We will see at least 3 people coming forward for ordained self-supporting ministry from across the 9 benefices over the duration of the programme.
5. The growth of sustainable rural training contexts for curates, helping to grow a pipeline of clergy equipped to lead large rural benefices in our diocese and across the country.
6. Benefices will commit their own funds to take over the ongoing costs and investment in their local mission and ministry at the end of the initial funding period.
7. At least one new successful children, families or youth ministry will be launched in each benefice, leading to at least 10 new children per benefice joining the worshipping community in the first 3 years, shifting the age profile and leading to longer term sustainability. A learning community will be developed, managed by an experienced practitioner, to distil learnings and findings to be shared more widely across rural communities.

Serving Southampton & Believe in Bournemouth

Overview (36 Benefices)

In recognition of the scale of the missional opportunity across our two biggest conurbations, we will seek to run dedicated projects to help grow the combined missional strength of our parishes in Southampton & Bournemouth.

Principles

Building on the principles of the **Benefice Development Programme** but recognising the complexities and inter-dependencies of the specific contexts, **Serving Southampton & Believe in Bournemouth** will seek to offer similar bespoke support whilst also ensuring that synergies and cross parish boundary opportunities are not missed.

Methodology

The Bishop of Southampton, supported by two dedicated Programme managers, will work closely with clergy and parishes across Southampton and Bournemouth to develop deanery wide mission development plans based on local, diocesan and national learning and experience.

Plans will seek to resource and inspire individual parishes and benefices, whilst also ensuring that opportunities for social and civic impact across parishes boundaries are not missed.

Areas for revitalisation will be explored, considering options for new worshipping communities, church plants, or simply strengthening investment in existing mission and ministry.

Objectives

*Aspirations to be drafted – these will need to arise from an iterative process drawing on the diocesan wide consultation alongside conversations with the national Vision & Strategy Team. The following are offered for illustrative purposes and ‘borrowed’ from **Inspiring Ipswich**:*

Over a 10-year period:

- To engage and involve all benefices and parishes across the deaneries of Southampton and Bournemouth.
- To help make contact with 15,000 new people across the city/town
- To help 7,500 people explore faith
- To help 1,500 to worship with us at least monthly
- To help start 25 new worshipping communities

Appendix 1

Walking the Wessex Way - The Bishop's Staff Team's Response

This section summarises the Commitments from the Bishop's Staff Team in response to Walking the Wessex Way. By necessity it is a document that is under regular review, being tweaked and updated as our context and challenges change.

It is shared for information and does not form part of the formal consultation process. That being said, the BST always welcomes any feedback and reflections on these commitments and their support for local church communities.

Serving:

As a Diocese we are committed to be valued partners in working with and for our local communities, the county of Hampshire and our part of BCP⁴, and the wider Communion, learning from them and sharing the love of Jesus in deed as well as in word.

In that context too we will do all we can to safeguard the integrity of God's good creation.

To that end we will:

	Commitment	Timescale	Resp.
1.	Ensure that key diocesan leaders are trusted partners with civic authorities, consciously occupying the 'public square' in partnership with them.	Ongoing	BST
2.	Review and refresh our Communion links ensuring they are properly mutual and that learning from them is disseminated well across the diocese	Mid 2025	World Mission Group
3.	Continue to develop and then deliver our creation care strategy, supporting parishes, schools and worshipping communities to achieve Net Zero Carbon	2030	Diocesan Environment Group (DEG)
4.	Commission a strategic review of our Church Buildings, seeking to develop a Diocesan Church Buildings' Strategy which balances the needs of our communities, against available resources, heritage concerns, and environmental commitments.	2026	Dio Sec

⁴ Bournemouth Christchurch & Poole

Learning:

As a Diocese we are committed to ensure that we are engaging effectively in ministerial formation and attending to clergy well-being for a faithful and fruitful Church in the changing landscape of the third decade of the 21st C.

We are committed to learning how our culture may be shaped by the gospel so it is inclusive of all.

To that end we will:

Commitment	Timescale	Resp.
5. Establish a Mission and Ministry Council and Team, under the oversight of the Bishop of Southampton, to enable ministerial formation and development (including CMD) especially in the five areas identified in the <u>A Theological Framework for Ministry Development in the Diocese of Winchester</u> *need to put this on website and make this a link*	Easter 2025	+Soton. Head of Mission & Ministry
6. Action the recommendations of the clergy well-being group to maximise clergy well-being <i>by Easter 2025</i> and repeat the survey	January 2026	Archdeacon of Winchester
7. Review of our approach to disability and inclusion issues and address priorities	April 2025	Diocesan Secretary
8. Appoint a Diocesan Adviser in Women's Ministry	March 2025	Archdeacon of Bournemouth
9. Deliver our Racial Justice strategy (adopted by Synod in November 2024)	Ongoing	Bishop's Council Racial Justice Forum
10. Depending on the above consider the establishment of an 'Enabling all-church' council chaired by a member of BST	<i>Christmas 2025</i>	Bishop's Council

Growing:

As a diocese we are committed to reverse the tragic decline in children and young people from the life of our churches, taking full advantage of the gift that our Church schools are to us.

Recognising that abuse is antithetical to the gospel and to human flourishing we will also do all we can to mainstream good practice in safeguarding into the life of the Diocese.

To that end we will:

Commitment	Timescale	Resp.
11. Receive the recommendations and KPIs of the 'Growing Younger' working group and ensure they form part of the <i>Diocesan Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan</i>	Complete	Growing Younger Working Group. BST
12. Ensure there is 100% compliance in safeguarding training for church officers <i>by Easter 2025</i>	Easter 2025	Independent Safeguarding Panel
13. Further develop a programme for the support of Parish Safeguarding Officers	<i>Easter 2025</i>	Independent Safeguarding Panel

Loving:

As a diocese we are committed to ensure that God’s Church is the best that we can be, expressing, through our parishes, chaplaincies and schools, the loving presence of Jesus in our midst.

To that end we will:

	Commitment	Timescale	Resp.
14.	Refresh and renew our approach to prayer as a Diocese	January 2026	BST
15.	Discern and develop a Diocesan Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan for wide consultation, and national funding, seeking to improve and grow the missional and financial vitality and sustainability of our benefices and worshipping communities.	March 2025 December 2025 (submit bid)	BST
16.	To keep under review our allocation and deployment of all ministerial resources, ensuring as far as possible a just and fair allocation of resources across the very varied demographic landscape of our diocese to ensure that all of 1.25m people have access to a vibrant, loving local church	Ongoing	BST Diocesan Mission & Pastoral Committee
17.	Ensure careful stewardship of our financial resources, growing income to help sustain our mission	Ongoing	Bishop’s Council
18.	To continue to grow, refresh and develop the support the Diocesan Team provides to parishes, volunteers and ministers, developing our online library of resources, annual training programmes, and general support to help parishes respond to their changing contexts and statutory obligations	Ongoing	Bishop’s Council

Appendix 2

Timetable for Diocesan Consultation and Bid development

Date	Group	Notes
9 January	BST Residential	BST to consider and propose some initial ideas and plans for Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan 2025 (SMMIP 2025).
20 January	Bishop's Council	Draft plans presented seeking approval to commence consultation process.
5 & 6 Feb	Informal meetings of House of Clergy & House of Laity –	Presentation of initial ideas with chance for live feedback on proposals and draft plans.
Mid Feb	Clergy, BCSC, Deanery Teams, Diocesan Synod, LLMs.	Draft plans and consultation documents to be shared with key lay and ordained stakeholders, including invitation to share feedback at the following events.
Feb to 31 March	All stakeholders	Series of online meetings, workshops and focus groups to receive feedback on proposed plans issued at end of January
3 March	Bishop's Council	Early feedback from consultations to date to be shared.
12/18 March	Clergy Breakfast Briefings	Interactive update for clergy on consultation feedback and proposals
???	National Vision & Strategy Team	Update on proposals and feedback. Share current thinking and iteration, testing against national criteria and expectations.
20 March	Diocesan Synod	Update on progress and timescales.
1 April	BST	Review all feedback received.
May	Diocesan Team/Vision & Strategy Team	Draft final proposals, plans and SMMIB application.
9 June	Bishop's Council	Revised plans shared with Bishop's Council, seeking approval to take to Diocesan Synod.
25 Jun	Diocesan Synod	Strategic Mission & Ministry Investment Plan 2025 presented to Synod, seeking approval to submit to SMMIB for approval and funding. Pack to include detailed responses to feedback received, noting how the processes has shaped and informed the final plans.
September	National Vision & Strategy Team	Diocesan funding applications submitted in advance of December meeting.
December	SMMIB	Board meets to consider proposal and reach decision. <i>Diocesan Secretary has a sleepless night.</i>
Late December	SMMIB	Decision communicated to Diocesan team

Appendix 3

DRAFT Benefice Development Plan Sample Menu

Support	Duration	
Parish Revitalisation Programme	3	
Funded Benefice Ops Manager		
Funded Benefice YCF Pastor	5	Tapered funding
Grant for YCF Equipment	One off	
LyCiG		
GROW		
Mission		
Funding for interim stipendiary post	3 years	
Mission Transition Grants		Dependent on context
Coaching for Benefice leader	8 sessions	

Appendix 4 Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do we need projects and programmes – wouldn't it be more effective and simpler just to give parishes the funds direct?

This deceptively simple question highlights some of the complexities within Church of England structures and the challenging and lack of agreement over which decisions should be made where. These are important considerations which deserve rigorous debate, reflection and discussion – which we do not have space or time for here!

Our role is to recognise and work within the current reality. If we wish to access significant national funding, we can only do this through a diocesan wide mission development strategy that aligns with key national priorities and aspirations.

Fortunately, we do not feel that these priorities and aspirations are unreasonable or contradict our own local vision and prayers.

We have also seen the real tangible benefits of the Diocesan team working in partnership with local parish and benefice leaders in crafting and delivering new plans. Working together in this way is something we would wish to aspire to and support, regardless of how funding flows throughout the Church.

If we are successful in this bid and strategy development, it could result in millions of pounds extra being invested across the parishes of our diocese in the coming years.

2. Why are the plans focused primarily at Benefice level not parish level?

First, it's important to note that in this context the term 'benefice' includes single parishes benefices.

Our suggestion to focus investment, support and intervention at benefice level is due mainly to practical considerations.

- Each benefice is under the leadership and care of an incumbent status post (vicar, rector, priest-in-charge, or Team Rector.) By asking each benefice to develop plans, it enables our clergy to work on developing ideas in a joined-up and coherent way across their areas of responsibility.
- We have seen through the Growing Rural Parishes Programme the huge benefits in working at benefice level – especially for our smaller parishes.

New ideas and plans that might be beyond a single PCC, become possible when the resourcing and supporting can be shared with their neighbours.

- With 236 parishes, ranging in size from just 39 people to nearly 50,000 people, developing parish level strategies and funding programmes becomes monumentally complex.

This is our current thinking, but we are of course very open to feedback and comments on this.

3. We're worried that some of the data you've used is out of date or inaccurate. Won't this undermine your plans and mean our benefice is being unfairly penalised?

The data we've used is primarily stats and financial returns provided to us by each PCC every year. Due to the long timescales involved in accessing parish data, we are always using figures that are a couple of years out of date. We therefore started this work clearly with that risk in mind and have done our best to accommodate it in our thinking.

It should be noted however, that the primary purpose of the data has been to help identify trends and patterns at a diocesan level. If some statistics are a little bit out in a few parishes, it is unlikely that it would have had a significant impact on the overarching results.

We are however committed to ensuring this exercise is repeated every year with the latest data available being collated and shared back to our parishes to help inform the development of local plans and strategies. This will enable us to track progress, ensuring the quality and consistency of the data improves with each iteration.

4. The plan references supporting 101 benefices out of 126 total. Why not all 126?

This figure is an estimate at the current time, designed to recognise a few realities:

- **Not all Benefices will wish to engage.** Although the offer of funding maybe attractive, the need for any funding to be linked to agreed targets and objectives may discourage some benefices from wishing to engage further. We wish to respect that and not force support and intervention on any benefice.
- **Some benefices may not need support.** We are already actively working with a number of benefices through existing strategic programmes and therefore there may not be such an urgent need to provide further support in the coming years.

- **Not all benefices are sustainable.** Whilst very difficult to discuss, we need to recognise with honesty and openness that not all our current benefices can be made sustainable in their current form. The reasons for such situations will be varied and complex. We do not anticipate that this will be a large number, but it is a reality we will need to face with compassion and fortitude.

5. Will these programmes allow the possibility for funding more parish clergy?

6.

Potentially!

If there is a clear cogent argument for increased ordained stipendiary ministry in a benefice development plan, that, supported by evidence and detailed modelling, would lead to greater long term missional and financial sustainability then we would love to look at using some of the funds to increase our clergy headcount further.

7. Do these plans signal the end of Church Planting and resource churches?

Our Resource Churches and subsequent church plants have been a huge blessing to several of our parishes and communities over recent years. With each new revitalisation, we have all learned much, seen new people come to Christ, and new outreach into the community.

8. How much money will we bid for?

We don't yet know!

The detailed work of costing these plans has not yet been undertaken as didn't want to progress to that stage until our consultation process had concluded.

That being said, we would anticipate that a programme of this scale over the proposed timescale would require a significant budget of many millions of pounds.