

**Note of business transacted at a meeting of
the Newcastle Diocesan Synod held on
Saturday 24th September at 10:00am and hosted using Zoom Video Conferencing**

The Revd Canon Brian Hurst took the Chair

1. Welcome and opening worship

The Revd Canon Brian Hurst welcomed members and guests to the meeting and in particular the Revd Steve Wright (Hexham) attending his first meeting.

The Chair led the Synod in prayer.

Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth took the Chair

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from 21 members.

3. Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were made.

4. Meeting held on 7th May 2022

4.1 Note of business transacted on 7th May 2022 ([Paper DS22 05](#))

The Synod noted the business transacted on 7th May 2022.

4.2 Matters arising

Canon Izzy McDonald-Booth (Diocesan Advocate) provided a short update on progress with Living in Love and Faith. Responses were being collated nationally and the House of Bishops would be working with the material ready for the February 2023 session of the General Synod. Canon McDonald-Booth extended her thanks to all across the diocese who had participated in learning together and who had contributed and responded to the questions posed through Living in Love and Faith.

5. Notices

5.1 Vacancy in See

The Bishop explained that in light of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II the announcement about the outcome of the Crown Nominations Commission for the See of Newcastle would be delayed. An announcement had been expected in September.

5.2 Environment: Routemap to net zero

The Secretary reported that he had recently met with the Bishop's Adviser on the Environment, the Revd Mark Nash Williams. The Agenda for the Synod to be held on 26 November would include a significant amount of time for the Environment, including a revision to the Diocesan Environment Policy.

6. Presidential Address

The Chair invited the Bishop to give his Presidential Address to the Synod. A copy of the Bishop's address was made available after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

7. Introduction to Deployment Planning and Budget Planning

The Secretary provided an overview as an introduction to the business items on Deployment and the Budget. The Secretary hoped the overview would be helpful to members, especially newer members, and the overview was made available after the meeting [using this link](#).

Key points from the overview:

- The Budget for 2018 agreed in September 2017 included a Parish Share request of £5M.
- The request proved to be too high and changes to the approved 2018 budget were made at a meeting of the Diocesan Synod in April 2018.
- The 2019 and 2020 budgets included greater consultation with parishes and resulted in a Parish Share total of £4.5M supporting the 2019 and 2020 budget.
- At a meeting of the Diocesan Synod held in May 2019 Bishop Christine set out that a Parish Share of £4.5M would resource a parish clergy cohort (incumbent status posts) of 80FTE posts across the diocese. This was the point at which the 80FTE figure appeared.
- As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic the Budget for 2021 was agreed using the 2020 Parish Share request of £4.5M as a baseline. Offers received from parishes came to nearly £4M and the difference plus inflationary costs was funded from a grant received from the National Church and from the sale of property no longer required for ministry.
- As a result of the continuing impact of COVID-19, the 2022 budget was also set using the 2020 Parish Share request of £4.5M as a baseline. Offers received from parishes were £4.0M and the difference plus inflationary costs was met from the sale of property no longer required for ministry.
- The challenge facing future budgets, including 2023, would be whether parishes could recover their financial positions to return to offering Share closer to the pre-pandemic level of Parish Share (£4.5M).

There being no questions from the floor the Chair thanked the Secretary for the introductory overview.

8. Deployment ([Paper DS22 06](#))

The Chair explained that the item on deployment would begin with three presentations. The presentation had been shared under paper DS22 06.

The Archdeacon of Lindisfarne, the Archdeacon of Northumberland and the Transformation and Strategy Programme Manager were invited to lead the item on deployment. The three presentations covered:

- (i) **Why:** building on previous planning with Deanery Development Groups and the current context we are responding to, including Next Steps, the cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine and the continuing recovery from the pandemic.
- (ii) **Theological Framing:** how our faith needs to underpin this process; and
- (iii) **What:** unpacking the proposed toolkit.

A copy of the presentation was made available after the meeting and is available [using this link](#).

After each presentation the Synod moved into breakout groups and after the third presentation and breakout group the Revd Allison Harding led the Synod in prayer and the Synod then paused for a break. On its return the Synod engaged in a plenary session to discuss matters arising from the deployment presentations.

The Revd Canon Ian Flintoft (General Synod Member) shared that his group had explored the issue of recognising how hard it was to capture potential within data and how crucial it was that we do not just look at 'what is' but we reflect potential in our deployment plans. **Carol Griffiths** (Bamburgh & Glendale) shared her concerns about communication of the process and the need to embrace parishes and PCCs into this stage of the process. **The Revd Canon David Glover** (Hexham) shared his insights from planning in another diocese where the deanery had been given clear aims to work towards and requested that Deanery Development Groups be given clear tasks to help give clarity to the process and to help alleviate anxieties and the disseminating of energy. **Dr John Appleby** (Tynemouth) highlighted that his group had noted the different stages Deanery Development Groups were at across the diocese, particularly those who were lacking officers and vacancies with Area Deans. His group stressed the importance of leadership and proper

consultation. **Emma Doran** (Tynemouth) recognised that some Deanery Development Groups would prefer to be given a number to work towards and others would want to discern the number themselves and that the process would need to support these different ways of working.

The Revd Catherine Macpherson (Bedlington) asked if the drop from £4.5M to £4.0M in Parish Share was a blip and whether parishes had the ability to return to the £4.5M level. Her group had felt the current situation would suggest this would be a real challenge. The group had also recommended support be provided for Deanery Development Groups, such as facilitation, to help the Groups with the planning tasks. **The Revd Canon Christine Brown** (Newcastle West) suggested it would be helpful to have an understanding about other kinds of resource that would be available to support the cohort of paid priests, including paid lay missionaries and chaplains as well as the flexibility with the deployment of Reader ministry. **The Revd Allison Harding** (Newcastle West) talked about looking at potential through collaborating with colleagues across parish boundaries. The Archdeacons and the Transformation and Strategy Programme Manager thanked the groups for the feedback which they had captured and would work into the Deanery Planning Toolkits to be launched at the meeting of Deanery Development Groups on 15 October.

The Chair thanked everyone for their participation with the tasks and for their feedback.

The Revd Canon Brian Hurst took the Chair

9. Budget panning 2023 and forecasts for 2024-2025

The Chair explained that Canon Simon Harper, Chair of the Board of Finance, had needed to leave the meeting unexpectedly and the Secretary would therefore present the Budget item.

The Secretary gave a presentation highlighting that the cost of living crisis was expected to impact the upcoming budget consultation. A fragility already existed as a result of the slower than anticipated recovery from the pandemic and more recently due to the war in Ukraine. The Government had recently announced plans to cap energy prices for businesses (including charities) and it was hoped this would offer some reassurance to parishes. The Secretary referred to the position set out in his overview at item 7 of the agenda and highlighted that while some parishes had felt able to increase their parish share offers the overall Share had remained static between 2021 and 2022 because other parishes had reduced their offers. The funding gap of £665k in 2022 was being met from contingency funds accumulated from the sale of property no longer required for ministry. The sale of property was not a short-term arrangement to help parishes during these difficult times but was not sustainable. The continuing call on contingency funds to support Parish Share would also impact on the investment we need to make to progress in our environmental efforts for Net Zero.

The Finance Manager explained that the impact of dramatic inflation increases was a concern for 2023 and if the gap between the 2020 baseline and 2023 offers continued at a similar level the overall shortfall in 2023 could be circa £1M.

The Secretary set out the timetable for the 2023 budget consultation which would begin in the week following the Synod and would close on 7 November. The results of the consultation would be brought to Synod in November within a Budget Proposal for 2023. Within the consultation parishes will be asked to give an indication about Share in 2024 and 2025. The Synod noted that confirmation from the National Church about funding for 2023 had not yet been received. The Secretary had been assured this would be issued in September but now expected confirmation in early October.

The Revd Tom Birch (Corbridge) asked if the National Church would be helping dioceses manage the financial difficulties caused by the slow recovery from the pandemic and the recent rise in cost of living. **Carol Griffiths** (Bamburgh and Glendale) shared her concern about parishes feeling vulnerable in light of soaring energy costs and expected many would struggle to participate fully in the upcoming consultation. **Carol Barclay** (Newcastle Central) shared a similar concern and

expected parishes would find it difficult to commit to figures for 2024-25. **The Revd Capt Steve Dixon** (Tynemouth) explained that many places were suffering from long covid and this was impacting congregations. He felt this would make it difficult to plan parish finances for the next two years.

The Revd Tom Birch (Corbridge) explored whether the Synod could agree a motion for General Synod about the impact of the delay in confirming National Church Funding for 2023. In response, the Secretary explained that it may be more useful to explore the matter with the General Synod members to ascertain if they could raise this at the next meeting of the General Synod.

The Chair thanked the Secretary and Finance Manager for the presentation.

10. Any other business

The Bishop extended his thanks to all who were supporting their communities following the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. This included opening churches for people to gather, pray and to offer their condolences. The Bishop explained that Books of Condolence were to be retained and held locally.

11. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Diocesan Synod would be held on 26 November and the venue would be confirmed as soon as possible. Meeting dates for 2023 would be circulated in October.

12. Closing prayer and dismissal

The Chair invited the Bishop to draw the meeting to a close.

The Bishop led the Synod in prayer and closed the meeting with a blessing.