

**Note of business transacted at a meeting of
the Newcastle Diocesan Synod held on
Saturday 26th November 2022 at 10:00am at the
Dr Thomlinson Church of England Middle School, Silverton Lane, Rothbury NE65 7RJ
and also hosted using Zoom Video Conferencing**

The President was the Rt Revd Mark Wroe, Acting Bishop of Newcastle and the meeting was chaired by the Chair of the House of Clergy, the Revd Canon Brian Hurst. The Registrar was in attendance.

58 members; 4 guests; and 8 officers were in attendance (in-person and via 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 invited the Rector of Upper Coquetdale, the Revd Canon John Sinclair, to lead the opening worship.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from 36 members.

3. Declarations of Interest

No new declarations of interest were made.

4. Meeting held on 24th September 2022

4.1 Note of business transacted on 24th September 2022 (paper DS22 05)

The Synod noted the business transacted on 24th September 2022 at a meeting hosted using Zoom Video Conferencing.

4.2 Matters arising

None.

5. Notices

5.1 Vacancy in See

On 20th October 2022, Downing Street had announced the appointment of the Rt Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley as the 13th Bishop of Newcastle. Following the announcement Bishop Helen-Ann had toured various parts of the diocese including: the Cathedral; Benwell St James and members of their community art project; the West End Foodbank; Embleton Vincent Edwards Church of England Primary School and their 'beach school'; Alnwick, St Michael; Hexham Abbey; Jesmond, St George and their Dementia Cafe; and Newcastle St Thomas.

The confirmation of Election as the Bishop of Newcastle was expected to take place in February.

5.2 Diocese of Botswana

Bishop Mark extended greetings from the Diocese of Botswana following his recent visit as part of their 50th Anniversary celebrations.

5.3 Deanery Planning Toolkit

The Archdeacons updated the Synod on the launch in October of the Deanery Planning Toolkit at a meeting held in Morpeth with representatives from Deanery Development Groups. A check-point meeting had been arranged for February and the Deanery Development Groups had been asked to submit their deanery plans by the end of June 2023. The Archdeacons would work to support each Deanery Development Group with this work.

5.4 Energy Support Grants

The Secretary reported the National Church had resolved to provide £15M funding to help parishes with increased cost of utilities. The Diocese of Newcastle had been awarded £296,000 from the £15M fund and the Board of Finance had agreed a simple distribution to Parochial Church Councils based on where a parish was ranked within the published indices of deprivation (IMD). The minimum grant per Parochial Church Council would be £1,000 and the Secretary explained the grants would be paid before the end of December.

6. Questions

A question had been received from the Revd Canon Ian Flintoft (a General Synod Representative).

Canon Flintoft had asked: Given the announcement in May this year of a significant increase in national funding for the next three years to support God's mission and ministry across the country, could an update be provided on the ways in which the Diocese of Newcastle is engaging with these new funding opportunities.

In response, the Secretary explained that the National Church had announced in May its intention to distribute £1.2billion between 2023 and 2025 and that it planned to maintain the level of funding for the subsequent six years. The significant increase was welcomed but the detail of how the dioceses could apply to access funding was yet to be published. It was understood, the distribution would help to fund diocesan plans to serve the nation by reaching more young people and disadvantaged people as well as helping to address issues of racial justice and helping to cut the Church's carbon footprint. The detail of how to apply for funds was expected to be published in the near future.

7. 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](#).

8. Environment (Part 1)

The Bishop's Adviser on the Environment and members of the Environment Working Group (EWG) were invited to make a presentation to the Synod.

Ella Vickers (Newcastle Central and member of the EWG) began with an opening prayer and this was followed by a presentation from the Bishop's Adviser on the Environment, the Revd Mark Nash-Williams, who had joined the meeting via video conferencing. The presentation included reference to the COP27 outcomes published on 20 November. A copy of the presentation slides is available [using this link](#).

The presentation was followed with the Synod breaking into groups for discussion facilitated by two members of the EWG, the Archdeacon of Lindisfarne and the Revd Tim Mayfield. Groups were asked to consider the following questions:

- a. What is inspiring us/our churches? What could we work on together?
- b. What is my church doing, what could it be doing?
- c. What can I do to help my church in this direction?
- d. What can I personally do as well as my church activity for the environment?
- e. Make Pledges, groups read them out anonymously, cascade ideas down to PCCs.

The Archdeacon of Lindisfarne and Dr John Appleby (Tynemouth) led a short plenary and invited feedback from the groups to help highlight points from their discussions. Feedback included:

- The need to foster collaborative action across parishes and was there learning from the recently completed project, Rural Churches for Everyone (RCfE), on how to foster such collaboration.

- Giving thought to establishing an environmental fund to help resource parishes to meet their responsibilities to achieve carbon net zero.
- Encouraging people to engage with training, such as Carbon Literacy Training, and help to cascade learning.
- The need to 'go big' with interventions to help achieve net zero and look to the National Church to help with funding to do this but not to forget to celebrate small steps that are simple to make and which continue to help to make a difference.
- Continue to encourage all to switch to using green energy suppliers and continue to support those investigating the installation of renewable energy systems such as air source heat pumps.

The Synod paused for a refreshment break before resuming for item 9.

9. Environment (Part 2)

The Synod resumed for the second session of the environment presentation which looked at the National Route Map for net zero and diocesan progress towards net zero. A copy of the presentation slides is available [using this link](#).

The second session also included the Synod's consideration of an updated Diocesan Environment Policy (paper DS22 09). The revisions included the specific recognition that we are experiencing a climate and environmental emergency; and the requirement for a new Net Zero Working Group.

Dr John Appleby (Tynemouth) moved that the revised Diocesan Environment Policy be agreed. The Chair sought a vote and by a show of hands the revised Diocesan Environment Policy was agreed.

10. Deanery Synod Elections 2023 (paper DS22 10)

The Diocesan Secretary spoke to the paper and explained that elections to the deanery synods needed to be carried out at Annual Parochial Church Meetings (APCMs) in 2023.

The Archdeacon of Northumberland moved that the Synod resolve in respect of the election of houses of laity of the deanery synods in 2023 the number of representatives to be elected at the Annual Parochial Church Meetings shall be as set out in Annex A of paper DS22 10.

The Chair put the resolution to a vote and by a show of hands the resolution was passed.

11. Budget 2023 (paper DS22 11)

The Chair explained that members were sitting in their capacity as members of the Board of Finance for item 11 and invited the Chair of the Board of Finance, Canon Simon Harper, to present the proposed budget for 2023. A copy of the presentation is available [using this link](#).

Canon Harper explained that at the Synod's meeting on 24th September the Synod had noted that the challenges presented by the cost of living crisis and the fragility of the slower than anticipated recovery from the pandemic were expected to impact the budget consultation for 2023. Following that meeting a consultation had been carried out and the responses to the consultation framed the proposed budget set out in paper DS22 11. Canon Harper reported that but for 14 parochial church councils, all had responded to the request and he thanked all who had taken time to respond.

The outcome of the consultation showed that while the total of the parish share offers in five deaneries showed an increase on the offers made in 2022, the total in the remaining seven deaneries was less than the total deanery offers made in 2022. Combined together this meant the total offered for 2023, an offer total of £3.889 million from all twelve deaneries, was £93,000 less than the 2022 offer.

Canon Harper explained that the reduction in total parish share offers, the inflationary costs for 2023 and the funding gap (that the Board of Finance had been resourcing following the pandemic from the sale of property assets) meant the total budget deficit for 2023 was projected to be £908,000. This deficit would be funded from the balance arising from the sale of properties no longer required for ministry together with any expenditure savings which could be achieved in 2023. The Synod heard that the ability to fund a large deficit going forward into 2024 and beyond would be very limited.

The Chair opened the item for debate and the following points were made:

- The outcome of the Deanery Planning work must address financial sustainability and affordability. This would help to avoid the need for a further iteration of planning and the consequent disruption and anxieties this would create.
- The Deanery Planning Toolkits carried a lot of data and financial information. In some areas there was a lack of confidence in the data. It was important to work to improve data collection to help build confidence in using data as part of decision-making processes.
- While some deaneries were less well-resourced to meet their ministry costs others were better placed to meet their ministry costs and to contribute towards the ministry costs of other deaneries.
- In 2009 the General Synod had recommended people contribute 10% of their net income to charity, 5% of which was recommended to be given to the church. If this continued to be the national recommendation some believed this should be communicated.
- Communication to parishes was key to helping people to understand the wider financial challenges. Thought should be given to the way in which the message is communicated and how this is delivered.
- Giving per head had increased but Electoral Roll numbers had decreased dramatically across the diocese and this meant there was a smaller number of people expected to sustain the costs of maintaining the maintenance of buildings locally and the provision of ministry across the diocese.

In responding to the debate, the Chair of the Board of Finance recognised the need to continually improve ways in which to engage people about the importance of being able to fund the mission and ministry across the whole of the diocese and to help people to look beyond their local parish boundaries. The timescale for the 2024 budget would be shaped around lessons learned from the most recent consultation to help to improve engagement in the process. The Chair thanked all those engaged in parish finances and to all who give so generously to support the Church of England's mission and ministry in this place.

The Chair of the Board of Finance moved that the Synod, sitting as the Diocesan Board of Finance, resolve as follows:

- a. That the budget be approved; or
- b. That the budget be referred back to the Standing Committee.

The Chair put the matter to Synod and by a show of hands the Synod resolved that the budget be approved.

12. Any other business

General Synod members reported that they had arranged for a prayer vigil to be held at Newcastle Cathedral on 13th December at 6:30pm to which all were invited. The vigil would coincide with the College of Bishops' final meeting to discern a way forward with Living in Love and Faith (LLF). The outcome of the College's meeting would be a main item for the February 2023 session of the General Synod.

13. 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.