Newcastle Diocesan Synod 28.02.26

Diocesan Governance Review

February 2026

This Terms of Reference was reviewed by the Bishop's Council on 4 February 2026, and approval was granted for the review to commence.

Terms of Reference

Diocesan Vision: ***Becoming confident Christians turning outwards in mission, enabling more and different people to experience the love of God.***

1. Purpose of the Review

The purpose of this review is to examine the Diocese of Newcastle's diocesan-level governance arrangements, in order to assess how well they support the Diocese's vision, mission, stewardship, and accountability, and to identify where they are effective, where they could be strengthened, and where change may be needed.

For the purposes of this review, *governance* is understood as:

- The systems and structures through which authority is exercised, decisions are taken, accountability is maintained, and assurance is provided, in support of the Diocese's mission and within its legal and canonical responsibilities.

The review is intended to provide a clear, evidence-based understanding of current arrangements and where appropriate, to offer proportionate and practical recommendations to ensure that diocesan governance is:

- fit for purpose in the present context;
- legally and canonically sound;
- supportive of effective leadership and mission;
- transparent, coherent, and well understood; and
- sustainable in terms of people, time, and resources.

The review is not a predetermined restructuring exercise, but an inquiry designed to inform future decisions.

2. Background and Context

The Diocese of Newcastle has articulated a vision of:

Becoming confident Christians turning outwards in mission, enabling more and different people to experience the love of God.

This vision sets the strategic direction for the whole life of the Diocese: episcopal leadership, governance bodies, senior staff, deaneries, parishes, and individual disciples.

At the time of the appointment of the Bishop of Newcastle (+Helen-Ann), four diocesan priorities were discerned:

1. Pastoral supervision for incumbent clergy
2. Diocesan governance review
3. Discipleship and formation
4. Early years

This review addresses priority (2) directly and underpins the effective delivery of the other three. The review is being undertaken in recognition that:

- governance is a critical enabler of mission, stewardship, safeguarding, and trust;
- governance arrangements must evolve as the context, scale, and complexity of diocesan life change; and
- it is important periodically to test whether structures, roles, and processes remain fit for purpose, proportionate, and well understood.

The review will therefore examine how current governance arrangements are functioning in practice, how they are experienced by those involved, and how well they support the Diocese's strategic, pastoral (People – growth, wellbeing and care etc), legal, and fiduciary responsibilities.

3. Scope of the Review

3.1 In Scope

The review will examine diocesan-level governance arrangements, including:

- Diocesan Synod (legislative and representative functions);
- Bishop's Council / Diocesan Board / DBF (executive, trustee, and fiduciary functions);
- the exercise and delegation of authority across diocesan bodies;
- senior staff and executive leadership structures, insofar as they relate to governance, accountability, and oversight;
- diocesan committees, panels, and teams operating at diocesan level.

In particular, the review will consider:

- where authority and decision-making responsibility currently sit;
- how authority is delegated and overseen;
- how accountability is exercised and assurance obtained;
- where roles, responsibilities, and boundaries are clear or unclear; and
- where duplication, gaps, or unintended complexity may exist.

3.2 Out of Scope

The review will not extend to:

- national governance (e.g. General Synod, Archbishops' Council, Church Commissioners), except insofar as national frameworks shape diocesan responsibilities;
- local governance (e.g. Deanery Synods, PCCs, churchwardens, congregations), except insofar as diocesan governance affects or supports them;
- Diocesan Board of Education governance (see below);
- Cathedral governance (see below);
- Religious Resources Centre (RRC);
- Safeguarding operational casework.

3.3 Interfaces to other bodies

The review will consider how diocesan governance bodies:

- operate within national statutory and policy frameworks; and
- relate to, support, and provide oversight to local governance bodies, where this is relevant to effective diocesan governance;
- interface with the Cathedral, DBE, RRC only insofar as they affect diocesan level governance coherence and accountability;
- interfaces with subsidiary bodies, committees, trusts where they materially impact diocesan governance.

4. Constraints and Parameters

The review, and any recommendations arising from it, must operate within and respect:

- Church of England Representation Rules and ecclesiastical legislation;
- Charity Commission guidance and charity law;
- Companies Act and associated corporate governance requirements;
- legal and regulatory obligations relating to finance, safeguarding, employment, and property;
- the constitutional role of the diocesan bishop; and
- the non-delegable legal responsibilities of charity trustees.

5. Method and Approach

The review will be conducted in a manner that is:

- evidence-based;
- transparent;
- proportionate;
- consultative; and
- attentive to both formal structures and lived experience.

It is expected to include:

- mapping of current governance structures and formal responsibilities;

- review of constitutional documents, standing orders, schemes of delegation, and role descriptions;
- interviews, workshops, or consultations with those involved in or affected by governance;
- analysis of strengths, risks, gaps, and opportunities; and
- testing of emerging findings before finalising recommendations.

6. Outputs and Outcomes

6.1 Review Outputs

The review will produce:

- a clear description of current governance arrangements and how they operate in practice;
- an assessment of strengths, risks, gaps, and areas of ambiguity;
- assessment against recognised good governance principles;
- analysis of how well governance supports mission, stewardship, safeguarding, leadership, and accountability;
- a set of proportionate, prioritised recommendations;
- a draft implementation roadmap highlighting indicative resource and cost implications.

6.2 Intended Outcomes

Subject to decision by the appropriate diocesan bodies, the review may lead to:

- improved clarity of roles, responsibilities, and decision-rights;
- strengthened accountability, authority and assurance;
- increased transparency and trust;
- simplification or rationalisation of structures where appropriate;
- improved induction, formation, and support for those in governance roles;
- governance arrangements that better support the Diocese's vision and values.

7. Authority, Reporting and Communications

This review is commissioned by the Bishop's Council, acting in its capacity as the Standing Committee of Diocesan Synod and as trustees of the Diocesan Board of Finance. The review is advisory and has no delegated authority to implement any changes.

7.1 Sponsor, Ownership and Authority

- Bishop's Council: Sponsoring body

- Bishop's Council & Diocesan Synod: Authority to receive, review, consider recommendations, authorising any subsequent changes, oversee communication, adopt & implement recommendations.
- Review Team: authorised to:
    - request and review relevant documents
    - consult and interview office holders, staff and members of relevant diocesan bodies;
    - report on findings and recommendations for consideration by Bishop's Council and Diocesan Synod.

7.2 Decision Making

- Bishop's Council (as the standing committee to Synod) will be the first point of decision making and escalation for the review;
- Bishops Council will determine:
    - which recommendations fall within its own authority to implement;
    - which require Diocesan Synod approval;
    - which require consultation with, or approval by, other statutory bodies

7.3 Review Team

The Chair and convenor of the review team Diocesan Secretary, Chris Elder, will be joined by other clergy and diocesan representatives. Other stakeholders to be consulted include the leads for Finance, Safeguarding HR, Legal, Finance, Property, Communications. The Review Team will meet regularly (indicatively monthly) to review progress, plan next steps, check alignment to the ToR and provide updates to the sponsor.

7.4 Independence and Objectivity

The review will be conducted with appropriate independence and integrity. Where members of the review team hold diocesan governance roles, conflicts of interest will be declared and managed.

7.5 Confidentiality

The review:

- will be conducted with due regard to confidentiality and data protection (GDPR);
- may identify risks which need to be handled sensitively e.g. reputational, financial, legal, HR related, safeguarding. The core review team will manage all such risks with escalation to the Bishop's Staff Team in the first instance;
- information gathered through interview will be treated confidentially;
- any safeguarding concerns disclosed during interview will be treated in accordance with diocesan safeguarding policies.

7.6 Timeline

The following shows the high-level indicative timeline for the development of proposals for consideration by Bishop's Council:

Phase	Focus	Month	BC meeting	Synod meeting
1	Approval of ToR	February	04/02/2026	28/02/2026
2	Initiation & Scoping	March		
		April	30/04/2026	
3	Evidence Gathering and governance mapping	May		
		June	24/06/2026	
4	Analysis, diagnosis & emerging findings	July		04/07/2026
	Testing & refinement of findings	Aug		
5	Present interim report	Sept	29/09/2026	
6	Refine & develop recommendations	Oct		
7	Present final report & recommendations	Nov	04/11/2026	28/11/2026

At the end of each phase there will be a point of reflection to review the plan and schedule for future phases. Decisions concerning the planning and implementation of any recommended changes will follow separately through the appropriate governance processes.