A Strategic Framework
for the Deployment of Church Leadership
in the Diocese of Portsmouth

28th October 2026

Discussion v1.3

Purpose of this Paper

The Diocese of Portsmouth has a vision for rejuvenation. We know who we want to be, what we hope to see, and the priorities that will help us move forward.

At the same time, leadership capacity at every level, and the financial resources available to support our hopes are increasingly constrained. These constraints limit our ability to implement our vision. We cannot sustain every current pattern of ministry while also responding fully to opportunities for growth and renewal. We therefore need to steward our limited people, finance, time and skills with clear intention.

The starting point is a shared understanding, across parish, deanery and diocesan levels, of the life of our communities. This will include their differing contexts, constraints, opportunities, histories and traditions, together with the life and balance of their participation in God's mission.

In developing this shared understanding, the Diocese will work collaboratively with deaneries and parishes to appreciate:

- **the abundance** — the gifts, relationships, capacities and missional opportunities already present; and
- **the need** — what is underdeveloped or constrained, and what might appropriately be supplied.

This paper therefore proposes a collaborative framework through which we can develop an intentional and differentiated deployment plan: placing the right people, in the right places, with the right support.

This is not primarily a financial exercise. It is a shared way of making prayerful, courageous and compassionate decisions before financial pressure alone determines the outcome. It does not prescribe uniform solutions but provides a framework for discerning the most appropriate support in each context.

How to Read this Paper

This paper provides the overarching framework for a suite of four connected papers which together describe how the Diocese moves from strategic vision to practical decisions about leadership, support and investment.

- **Strategic Framework for the Deployment of Church Leadership** establishes the theological foundations, strategic principles and overall approach.

- **Understanding Parish Life** provides a shared approach through which parishes, benefices, deaneries and diocesan leaders can develop a rich and trustworthy understanding of each Christian community.

- **Understanding Parish Life – Lead and Lag Indicators** offers practical tools to help churches reflect upon their life, recognise fruit, identify opportunities and constraints, and consider how their ministry might develop.

- **Discerning the Diocesan Response to Parish Life** develops the principles and practical process through which the Diocese determines an appropriate combination of leadership, support and investment.

These are not four separate initiatives. Together they describe a single process of prayerful discernment: beginning with understanding, proceeding through shared reflection and evidence, and leading towards a contextually appropriate diocesan response. This parent paper establishes the principles that inform the whole process. The accompanying papers develop their practical application.

The value of the framework will lie in developing a shared understanding that enables clear and transparent decisions and, where change is required, practical local transition plans.

A. Vision

Our vision is to become a rejuvenating community of Jesus-centred, Kingdom-seeking disciples: a community incarnationally present, participating in triune life, and proclaiming the gospel in the midst of every network and neighbourhood. Our strategic priorities assume a holistic vision of Christian life, worship, ministry and mission, shaped by enabling leadership that is both contemplative and active, and open to life-transforming encounter with Jesus Christ.

To be Jesus-centred is first to be with Jesus: to abide in him, to be formed by his presence and to allow the life of God's Kingdom to take root within us. To be Kingdom-seeking is to become like Jesus and to do what Jesus did, in the way that he did it: allowing the life of the Kingdom to flow through us into the world. Presence comes before participation; abiding before fruitfulness.

These two dimensions belong inseparably together. As our love for God deepens, so should its expression in love for our neighbours. The fruit we seek is therefore not simply greater activity or institutional growth, but people being transformed through their relationship with Jesus Christ and participating more fully in God's mission.

As in every Christian the character and practice of leadership matters. We need leaders who are themselves rooted in Jesus and who enable the whole people of God to participate in his mission.

1.1. Prayerful and Enabling Leadership

In our vision of ministry, oversight begins with understanding. The Bishop and the Diocesan Leadership seek to *under-stand* the Diocese:

- to listen, discern and appreciate the life, calling and context of its communities; and
- to support, build, encourage, accompany, and enable the ministry of the people of God in everyday life.

The same posture should shape leadership throughout the Diocese.

Prayerful and enabling leaders help all the baptised to become deeper disciples who discover, develop and use their God-given gifts for the building up of the kingdom by participating in God's mission.

Anchored in Jesus, they identify, encourage and develop others; welcome gifts and skills different from their own; and create a culture in which responsibility is shared and new leaders emerge. Their task is not to accumulate ministry, but to release it — equipping others to participate as fully as possible in the life and mission of the Church.

1.2. Discerning the Right Leaders

We aspire for all our clergy and lay leaders to enjoy a deep and rejuvenating relationship with God. We seek clergy who are corrigible — open to learning and growth, often through one another — who look to receive from God before seeking to discern, understand, and minister to others.

We seek clergy and lay leaders whose calling, competence, capacity and resilience have been prayerfully discerned, and who demonstrate the charism and, crucially, **the ability to lead Christian communities into fruitfulness**.

Evidence of calling and gifting to ordained or lay ministry should be the primary consideration in discerning placement, rather than whether the role is stipendiary or self-supporting. Deployment will be decided *more by* mission and strategy than balancing the books. Both dimensions matter in an integrated approach, **but mission must lead before finance**. It is therefore possible, and in some contexts preferable, for churches to be led by Self Supporting Ministers, whose ministry is equally valued and vital to the life and mission of the Church.

1.3. Discerning the Right Place

Local context shapes both the priorities for mission of the church, and the specific skills, experience, and capacity required for its leadership. Placing prayerful and enabling leaders will attend carefully to the social, cultural, economic, and ecclesial realities — and the potential — of each place. In practice this means diocesan leaders will give close attention and high priority to deanery planning.

This discernment recognises that communities differ widely in history, spirituality, ecclesiology, geography, demography, confidence, and resource, and that these differences are not obstacles to mission but part of the particular vocation of each place. We seek to affirm the national priority of a mixed ecology becoming normal.

Contexts therefore call for different forms of leadership, patterns of church life, and measures of fruitfulness, held together by a shared diocesan vision and strategy acting as a framework across the different organisational levels of the diocese (archidiaconal, deanery and parochial).

An important hallmark of our diocese is the recognition that we stand in continual need of God's rejuvenating work. This emphasis on rejuvenation invites openness to respond differently to the way we have previously sought to promote the Church's life and mission. At the same time, we affirm that the Church of England's long history of presence is deeply interwoven with the life of many communities — particularly in rural contexts — and that **this inherited pattern of belonging and pastoral care remains a vital expression of our calling.**

1.4. Providing the Right Support

The right support is prayerful, enabling, relational, and sustained. Support at diocesan level is a key Church of England goal. Our diocese under-stands parishes, chaplaincies, cathedral and Christian communities through a posture of humble service, resourcing and collaboration. It exists to encourage, sustain and release leadership, not to replace or control it.

Through the shared ministry of bishops, archdeacons, and diocesan officers, support is offered that promotes the flourishing of parochial, deanery and cathedral church leaders, their well-being and the health of the communities they serve. This support includes:

- spiritual encouragement and pastoral oversight;
- enabling oversight that offers accountability, wisdom, and care;
- expertise in strategic direction that provides clarity of purpose and shared priorities; and
- organisational and infrastructural support that reduces unnecessary burdens and enables leaders to focus on their core calling.

Together, these forms of support create the conditions in which prayerful and enabling leaders can serve with confidence, resilience, and hope, knowing they do not carry the weight of leadership alone.

The appropriate diocesan response will therefore extend well beyond the deployment of ordained ministers. It should draw upon the full breadth of diocesan and deanery capabilities, responding to the particular combination of abundance, need, opportunity and constraint present in each benefice.

This requires the Diocese not only to understand what support a benefice needs, but also to reflect upon the support it already offers: whether that support is accessible, welcomed, effective and appropriately coordinated.

B. STRATEGIC FOUNDATION

2.0 A Framework for Discernment

Prayerful discernment requires prioritisation. We cannot do everything that we would like, and so we must attend carefully to where people, prayer, and resources can best be aligned in service of our shared calling.

Across all contexts, we share a common vocation: to be rooted in Jesus and seek God's Kingdom together. We prepare good soil for the seed of God's Word and trust God for growth in spiritual depth, faithful ministry, number of disciples, and social impact.

We recognise that churches differ significantly in size, context, history, confidence, resources, and opportunity. As a result, not every church will express every aspect of mission equally, nor will fruitfulness look the same in every place. Nevertheless, every church is called to participate in God's mission according to its particular vocation and capacity.

This framework reflects the Church of England's Five Marks of Mission and aligns with the Six Bold Outcomes, including service of the common good, encounter with Jesus Christ, discipleship, leadership development, new Christian communities, and churches that are younger and more diverse.

Encounter, Engage, Establish and Equip describe four interconnected dimensions of faithful Christian life and mission. Together they provide a broad pathway of discipleship, while also offering a shared lens through which churches, deaneries and diocesan leaders can reflect upon the life and vocation of each parish, benefice or Christian community.

This is not a fixed or one-directional progression. People may encounter Christ and respond to him in different ways and at different points. As disciples become established in faith and equipped for ministry, they participate in God's mission through service, witness and evangelism, creating further opportunities for others to encounter his Kingdom and respond to Jesus Christ.

The four dimensions therefore describe a renewing rhythm of Christian life: being formed by Christ, participating in his mission, and inviting others into that same transforming relationship.

2.1 Encounter: serving communities in the name of Jesus and seeking the common good

As followers of Jesus Christ, we make the presence of God's Kingdom visible by serving our communities, building relationships, and seeking the common good in his name. We seek to encourage churches to:

- demonstrate the love of God's kingdom with local communities and institutions;
- communicate effectively through websites, social media, magazines, leaflets, and personal relationships;
- develop places of hospitality, welcome, and belonging;
- contribute to human flourishing and the common good;
- serve those experiencing disadvantage, exclusion, or hardship;
- care for creation and steward God's gifts wisely.

Examples may include cafés, parent and toddler groups, Eco Church initiatives, social action projects, debt advice, foodbanks, and other expressions of practical service.

This reflects the Church's calling to proclaim the Kingdom of God through visible acts of service, justice, compassion, and care.

2.2 Engage: helping people engage with Jesus Christ

The Church helps people engage with the living God revealed in Jesus Christ, respond to his invitation to repentance and faith, and begin the lifelong journey of following him. This includes:

- evangelism, sharing the gospel naturally and confidently;
- offering worship that is prayerful, accessible and welcoming;
- working with schools, families, care homes and local institutions;
- using festivals, pastoral offices, chaplaincy and everyday relationships as opportunities for witness and invitation;
- creating environments in which people can explore faith and encounter Christ;
- creating opportunities for people to respond to the gospel, make a personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Examples may include festival worship, baptisms, personal witness/evangelism, weddings, funerals, weekly school worship, chaplaincy, pastoral ministry, Alpha courses, and opportunities for faith exploration.

This reflects the Church's calling to evangelism: proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, inviting people into a transforming relationship with Jesus Christ, and encouraging a response of faith that leads to lifelong discipleship.

2.3 Establish: forming disciples and nurturing Christian communities

Encounter with Christ leads into discipleship and participation in Christian community. Churches are encouraged to:

- establish people within worshipping communities;
- celebrate new faith and the way people have found Christ;
- nurture new believers;
- provide pathways for learning, formation, and spiritual growth;
- deepen participation in worship, prayer, scripture, fellowship, and service;
- develop communities that are rooted in Christ and resilient in discipleship.

Examples may include adult worship, all-age worship, youth groups, small groups, nurture courses, Christian Unions, preaching, and teaching.

This reflects our commitment to making disciples who continue to grow in holiness, maturity, confidence, and participation in God's mission.

2.4 Equip: developing disciples and leaders, and releasing ministry

Disciples are called to participate in Christ's mission. Churches are therefore encouraged to:

- identify, nurture and release lay and ordained leaders;
- develop gifts for ministry and service;
- develop confidence in evangelism and witness;
- equip people to serve within the Church and wider community;
- develop generosity and shared responsibility for ministry;
- raise up future generations of leaders; and
- foster cultures in which ministry is shared, delegated and multiplied.

Examples may include leadership development, small groups, serving teams, ministry training, vocation pathways, stewardship, training in personal witness and evangelism, and opportunities for service and mission.

This reflects our commitment to building leadership capacity and enabling the whole people of God to participate in the Church's mission.

Encounter and Engage particularly illuminate how the presence of God's Kingdom is made visible and encountered within a community; Establish and Equip particularly illuminate the depth, vitality and generative life — the pulse — of the Christian community. All four overlap and belong together within a healthy pattern of Christian life and mission

These four dimensions provide a shared framework through which churches, deaneries and diocesan leaders can reflect on the life, mission and development of each context. Such reflection will draw upon both quantitative evidence and local discernment. The practical application of this framework is developed further in the accompanying paper, **Understanding Parish Life**, together with its supporting indicators and tools.

3.0 From Discernment to a Differentiated Deployment Response
The starting point for an appropriate diocesan response is a comprehensive and contextually informed understanding of each benefice. The intention is to produce a concise, shared picture of the benefice, supported by evidence, local knowledge and discernment behind it.

Encounter, Engage, Establish and Equip provide a shared framework for reflection and discernment. Together with evidence about context, leadership, ministry, finance and missional opportunity, they help parishes, deaneries and diocesan leaders develop a shared understanding of each place.

Presence, Pulse and Potential provide three complementary dimensions of diocesan response to that discernment, guiding decisions about leadership, support and investment.

They are not categories of church, nor alternative boxes into which churches are placed. In most contexts the appropriate response will contain elements of all three, with differing emphasis according to the abundance already present, areas of need or underdevelopment, leadership capacity, particular vocation and missional opportunity.

3.1 Presence
Every Christian community is called to make the presence of God's Kingdom visible within the place it serves. The diocesan response will therefore consider what forms of leadership and ministry will sustain or extend that presence in ways proportionate to the context, capacity and opportunity of the place.

The purpose is not simply survival, but to sustain a Christian community that worships God, serves its neighbours, helps people encounter Jesus Christ, nurtures disciples and participates in the life of the Kingdom. This will often require locally rooted patterns of ministry. It may include reorganisation or consolidation, but will ordinarily seek to promote greater revitalisation wherever capacity and opportunity allow.

3.2 Strengthening and Deepening Pulse
Pulse describes the depth, vitality and generative life of the Christian community: people growing as disciples, participating in ministry, developing confidence and raising up others. Where this life is already evident, diocesan support may strengthen and extend it; where it is underdeveloped, support may seek to develop discipleship, leadership, confidence and participation.

The aim may include enabling communities to:

- grow in spiritual depth, confidence, and number
- become younger and more diverse
- raise up and release new leaders
- contribute to the financial sustainability of the diocese; and
- where appropriate establish new congregations, fresh expressions, plants, or transplants

Support may include strategic or increased capacity through clergy, curates, lay ministers, children's and youth workers, administrative support, strategic funding or development programmes.

3.3 Recognising and Investing in Potential

Potential may be identified through population growth, demographic change, strategic location, limited effective church presence or another significant missional opportunity.

Where significant potential is identified, the diocesan response may concentrate capable leadership and sustained investment to reach new people and establish new Christian communities which can, over time, become thriving and revitalised churches.

Over time, we see these communities as developing the characteristics of healthy revitalised church with new disciples, deepening spiritual life, growing leadership capacity, wider community engagement and increasing sustainability.

Such support may therefore include planting clergy, curates, lay leaders, and specialist ministry staff, alongside financial investment in buildings, facilities, and mission initiatives.

Such investment will require a long-term horizon, clear expectations and regular review, recognising that fruitfulness and sustainability develop over time.

3.4 Applying the Framework

The diocesan response should be holistic in its consideration of what might help a benefice flourish, but selective in the priorities agreed. We envisage two complementary A3 summaries: a shared picture of parish life, presented through four blocks of indicators (Context, Parish Life, Parish Support and Diocesan Support), followed by a corresponding diocesan response organised around Presence, Pulse, Potential and Shared Commitments.

Together, these provide a practical basis for agreeing appropriate leadership, support and investment, identifying responsibilities and reviewing progress.

C. DEPLOYMENT APPROACH

4.0 Implications for Investment

Applying the framework will require clear and prayerful decisions about people, support and investment. Ministry provision cannot be uniform, but must be aligned with the vocation, reality and opportunity of each context.

This means that:

- ministry support will become increasingly differentiated rather than evenly distributed;
- sustaining or extending Presence may require locally rooted ministry, reduced stipendiary provision, reorganisation, consolidation or significant reconfiguration;
- strengthening or deepening Pulse may require strategic or increased ministry capacity;
- significant Potential may justify concentrated, sustained and regularly reviewed investment;
- the appropriate **combination** will shape not only the scale of provision, but the particular skills, experience and capacity required of leaders; and
- decisions will affect clergy, lay ministers, curates, specialist staff, administration, funding and benefice structures.

These decisions will require a clear communication strategy together with courage, clarity, humility and compassion.

4.1 Understanding the Scale of the Challenge

The Diocese is seeking simultaneously to sustain faithful Christian presence, strengthen churches showing vitality and missional momentum, and invest in contexts of significant opportunity. It must do so within finite financial resources and increasingly constrained ordained and lay leadership capacity.

Current patterns of ministry carry substantial embedded costs and cannot all be sustained unchanged. Growth in people coming to faith, discipleship, generosity and leadership capacity will take time and will vary considerably between contexts. Without intentional change, financial and leadership pressures will progressively reduce the Diocese's ability to sustain ministry and invest in mission.

The challenge is therefore structural rather than temporary. It requires differentiated decisions about where existing patterns should be sustained, strengthened, reshaped or replaced.

4.2 What are we doing about it?

The Diocese is already responding through three complementary strands of work:

- Rejuvenation – growing younger, more diverse churches that make new disciples.
- Generosity – encouraging greater participation in Christian giving.
- Unlocking Resources – releasing historic assets to support mission and transition.

These initiatives remain essential but are insufficient on their own. This framework complements them by providing a strategic approach to the deployment of leadership and resources.

4.3 Develop the leadership pipeline

Implementing this framework will depend upon identifying, forming, deploying and supporting leaders whose calling, competence, charism and capacity fit the particular balance of Presence, Pulse and Potential in each place.

This includes stipendiary and self-supporting clergy, licensed and authorised lay ministers, focal ministers, churchwardens and other local leaders who share responsibility for the Church's mission.

Different emphases will require different leadership strengths: relational and contextual leadership to sustain and extend Presence; disciple-making and leadership development to strengthen Pulse; and pioneering, strategic and team-building capacity to realise significant Potential. In some settings, the appropriate deployment may therefore be a complementary team rather than a single leader.

Together, this framework represents a shift towards a more intentional, differentiated and sustainable pattern of ministry: the right people, in the right places, with the right support.

4.4 Implementing the Framework

The framework will be implemented through a collaborative process of understanding, discernment, decision-making, accompaniment and review.

This will involve five broad stages:

- Understand: develop a shared picture of the benefice.
- Discern: prayerfully identify the principal opportunities, needs and constraints, and consider the forms of Presence, Pulse and Potential support that might be most appropriate.
- Test: assess possible responses against the Diocese's agreed principles, the resources available, leadership suitability, costs, wider mission and practical capacity.
- Agree and decide: engage meaningfully with those affected, clarify the contributions of parish, deanery and Diocese, and secure the necessary decisions and approvals.
- Accompany and review: support implementation, reflect upon outcomes and changing circumstances, and revise the shared response as appropriate.