

Paper 2: Diocesan Synod 2nd April 22

Bishop's Council Update

Introduction

Bishop's Council has met three times since 5th November 2021. Each meeting was shaped by marking moments in the life of our diocese. The December meeting of Bishop's Council was the last of the triennium and therefore the final meeting for the members who had served us from 2018. We therefore marked the occasion and thanked everyone for their contribution. We express our thanks again to them for all they have addressed and tackled during what proved to be an extremely challenging triennium. This included bold decisions in terms of the Resourcing Growth project, and then navigating the height of the pandemic.

As you are all aware, it was election season at the end of last year which meant a new Bishop's Council was elected to serve from 1st January 2022 for this triennium. Our meeting on 19th January 2022 was therefore our first meeting of the new Bishop's Council and as Trustees and Directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance. There will be opportunity at our Synod meeting to meet those who our on Bishop's Council but the membership is as follows: -

1. Ex Officio (8)

Bishop Jonathan – Chair
Anthony Cane – Dean of Portsmouth
Victoria James – Diocesan Secretary
Jenny Rowley – Archdeacon, Portsdown
Will Hughes – Acting Archdeacon, Meon
Allie Kerr – Acting Archdeacon, Isle of Wight
Debbie Sutton – Chair of the House of Laity & Vice Chair
Bob White – Chair of the House of Clergy & Vice Chair (also General Synod Member)

2. Bishop's Nominee (1)

Philip Poulter – Finance Chair

3. Members of the House of Clergy (7)

Bruce Deans – Fareham
Sam Martell – Gosport
Susie Collingridge – Petersfield
James Hunt – Bishop's Waltham
Andrew Hargreaves – Portsmouth (also General Synod Member)
Tom Kennar – Havant
Mark Williams – Isle of Wight

4. Members of the House of Laity (11)

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Stuart Forster – Fareham
Lucy Docherty – Fareham (also General Synod Member)
Steve Smart – Gosport
Vanda Leary – Petersfield
Neil Chrimes - Petersfield
Adrian Jordan – Bishop’s Waltham
Mark Emerton – Portsmouth
Irene James – Portsmouth
Simon Lemieux – Portsmouth
Coleen Jackson - Havant
James Bremridge – Isle of Wight

5. In attendance

General Synod Reps (who have not also been elected as members):

- Paul Chamberlain
- Rebecca Hunt
- Ian Johnston

Minute Secretary

Clare Jones – Bishop’s PA

Jenny Hollingsworth – Head of Strategic Implementation & Resources and Deputy Diocesan Secretary.

Other members of the staff team as required to support agenda items.

At the same time as welcoming new members of Council, we also said farewell to Bishop Rob as this was to be his last meeting of Council in the Chair. His time as Commissary Bishop has been special and he brought so much to the life of the diocese during that time. It was a welcome opportunity for Council to wish him well and express our thanks for his dedicated service of the diocese.

Then moving to March, Bishop’s Council was able to celebrate Bishop Jonathan’s arrival as our Bishop having been installed on the Saturday. What a task to Chair Bishop’s Council at the end of day one!

Key Decisions Taken By Bishop’s Council

Finance Matters & Parish Share

The final parish share outturn for 2021 was also discussed by the Diocesan Deanery Finance Committee (DDFC), Diocesan Finance Executive Committee (DFEC) and Bishop’s Council. In recognition of the effort which went into achieving a contribution rate of 89% of the ask a letter was sent to every parish to express our thanks.

Over the course of the three meetings Council has received 2021 Forecasts. These are still in draft and will not be finalised until the audit concludes. It is intended that the DFEC and Bishop’s Council will receive a draft copy of the annual report and accounts once the audit is

nearing its conclusion (May 2022) with the final document being presented to Bishop's Council at its AGM before coming before Synod on 25th June 2022.

Although much effort continues to be directed towards the end of year process, we are also looking forward into 2023 and beyond. Bishop's Council has agreed that there should be a one-year budget prepared for 2023, but for this to be placed in the context of a financial plan covering 2024 and 2025 helping us move forward together to first sustainability but ultimately towards a thriving diocese. This work will be supported by the DFEC and DDFC as is routine within our governance structure and their work is important in supporting recommendations to Bishop's Council. Learning from the feedback within the 2022 process and responding to a request from Petersfield deanery, a finance project group has been set up as a task and finish group for this year only. That group is made of representatives from each deanery who in the main do not already serve within the finance governance groups. They are looking at the detail of areas of the budget and will support by feeding into the DFEC in the budget preparation. The aim is greater transparency as to how funds are utilised and improved communication around finance moving forward. The group met for the first time on 8th March 2022.

Skills Audit & Committee Membership

Bishop's Council at its meeting in January addressed some vacancies in terms of committee membership and these included: -

- Confirming that Sue Jones from Petersfield deanery should join the DFEC
- Appointing the Dean of Portsmouth to be Chair of the Vacancy in See
- Appointing the Diocesan Secretary to be Secretary to the Vacancy in See.
- There is still work to be done to fill the spaces on the Vacancy in See, but this is in hand.

Bishop's Council completed a skills audit which at our March meeting was used as the basis to agree areas of training for members as trustees and this will be undertaken over the course of the coming months as in house provided training. The areas include: -

- Safeguarding from a Trustees perspective including Serious Incident Reporting
- Risk management with Ecclesiastical (free as part of a pilot)
- DBF income & expenditure
- Introduction to trusts including custodian trusteeship
- Property responsibilities
- Data protection from a trustee's perspective
- Charity management and compliance including charity accounting

This audit will also be used to support the process of filling Council and committee vacancies as they arise.

Lay HR

Council conducted the annual review of the lay contract and handbook. This included: -

- Changing our approach to notice periods so that some roles serve a longer notice period

- Approving updated policies relating to Lone Working, Complaints and Home Working
- Approving new policies relating to Gender Reassignment and Menopause.

Clergy Support

Bishop's Council made decisions on two areas of clergy support:

Isle of Wight Allowance

In February 2016, the Bishop's Council reviewed the grant made to stipendiary clergy and those in House for Duty posts of the Isle of Wight. The intention of the grant was to be a contribution towards three to four annual trips a year to the mainland for family contact/personal business, noting the high costs of travel during peak seasons. It is important to note that trips related to parochial responsibilities are claimed in normal expenses. The allowance was increased to £750 from £257 during this review in 2016 and it rose in line with inflation since then, such that by 2019 it was £792. In response to Covid, in 2020, the Bishop's Council agreed to withhold the payment of this grant but increased it to 50% of the 2019 grant level for payment last year.

Bishop's Council has agreed that for 2022 this grant will be reinstated such that the payment of the full grant will be made in April as normal. It was also agreed that a 2% uplift would be applied to the 2019 figure which would make the allowance £811 per person. On current numbers of clergy in post on the Island this remains within budget for 2022.

Council Tax Rebate Relating to Heating Costs

Members Synod may be aware of the announcement that there is to be a rebate on Council Tax for financial year 2022/23. This amounts to £150 on properties in tax bands A to D. The question has rightly been asked as to how the DBF will handle this and support clergy when the council tax is paid by the DBF and therefore the rebate will be received by the DBF.

It is important to note that the majority of our clergy housing falls outside of bands A to D so the rebate only applies to a small number of properties. As such the rebate expected is only in the region of £2500. This amount divided equally between clergy would have little impact and it was also noted that those in the properties which attract the rebate might not be those who experience the biggest impact of the rising energy cost.

The recommendation of the Property Sub Committee to Bishop's Council was that the value of the rebate is put into a designated fund and clergy be advised that they can apply to their Archdeacon in the event of fuel hardship to seek some relief from the fund. Bishop's Council accepted this recommendation from the Property Sub Committee.

The Road Map for 2022

At his first Bishop's Council meeting, Bishop Jonathan spoke to and outlined a broad outline for 2022 which is dealt with in paper 3. This was given a positive reception by Bishop's Council.

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Victoria James
Diocesan Secretary
25th March 22

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