

**Minutes of a Session of the Bath and Wells Diocesan Synod, held on Zoom,**

**on Saturday 30 October 2021 at 9:30 am**

The session opened with prayers led by Bishop Ruth.

The Zoom technical host, Christopher Roome, outlined protocols for speaking and voting.

1. **Presidential Address**

<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/who-we-are/diocesan-synod/>

Bishop Ruth welcomed the newly elected Synod, and outlined some of the challenges ahead:

* COP 26, where leaders from around the world will gather to discuss the climate crisis and make decisions about our world’s future. Synod would today hear an update on progress being made in our diocesan plans to tackle this climate and environmental challenge.
* To navigate the challenges of the current financial situation, we had already had to reshape the support services we offer to parishes and schools. We had sought to do so with care and an eye to where we could have the best local and sustainable impact. This had not been without pain and cost to individuals within that process, and Bishop Ruth thanked all those who had being a part of that journey for their grace and commitment, and the way they had put the diocese and its needs before their own.
* Synod would today be presented with a budget not only for this year but a projection for the next five years. We recognised that we cannot ask more of people in terms of common fund contributions this year, and thus a deficit budget was being set. However, if income from common fund is to be kept at current levels then expenditure needed to be reduced. We cannot sustain a budget long term where we draw down further monies from a depleting resource, by selling property or borrowing from investments. This is the realism we need to face. The projected plan gave hard facts and numbers, including stipendiary clergy figures, over the next five years.

In facing these challenges we needed to recognise that our God is one of great abundance. His grace is sufficient for all our needs and ours must be a response to His love which calls from us both a commitment to growth in personal generosity and a determination to address the fragility in the fabric our life together.

“Today as we begin this new Synod, may we recommit ourselves to that vision to which God has called us, and joining together in embarking on the journey without fear, but with our eyes fixed on Him who calls us.”

1. **Chairs of the Houses of Clergy and Laity**

Synod noted that The Revd Preb Jane Haslam had been elected as Chair of the House of Clergy, and Dr Caroline Mason had been elected as Chair of the House of Laity.

**The Revd Preb Jane Haslam, Chair of the House of Clergy, in the Chair**

1. **Minutes**

Synod resolved that the minutes of the session held on 28 July 2021 be approved as a correct record.

1. **Matters arising from the minutes**

The previous Synod had received a question about the Archbishops’ Council’s refusal to fund full-time racial justice officers in every diocese(page 9, question 3). A further question was raised: “what is the theology behind the question?”

1. **Bishop’s Council Minutes**

Synod resolved that the minutes of the meetings of Bishop’s Council held on 1 September 2021 (Special Meeting), 30 September 2021 and 14 October 2021 (Special Meeting), be noted.

In response to a question it was noted that the Bishop’s Council is the Board of trustees and directors of the Diocesan Board of Finance, whilst Diocesan Synod are the members of the charitable company. The minutes of Bishop’s Council enable the Synod to be aware of decisions taken on their behalf by Bishop’s Council.

1. **Questions**

Three questions had been received; the questions and replies are attached to these minutes as an appendix.

1. **Update on Vacancy in See**

The Chair of the Vacancy in See Committee, The Ven Simon Hill, reported that the views of over 1000 children and 400 adults had been taken into account during the process of preparing the “statement of needs”, which would be completed in mid-November.

Six people from the diocese would join six national representatives and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to form the Crown Nominations Commission, which would interview candidates on 28th February and 1st March 2022. The appointment would be announced when the time is right.

1. **Elections**
2. **Diocesan Synod**

A summary of results by deanery had been circulated. To date, some 85% of elected places had been filled. There were vacancies for co-opted members and Bishop’s nominees.

Members would hold office from 1st August 2021 to 31st July 2024.

**(b) General Synod**

The following had been elected to represent the Diocese on General Synod between 2021 and 2026, and would also be ex-officio members of Diocesan Synod:

**House of Clergy (4 places)**

* The Revd Roger Driver
* The Revd Simon Robinson
* The Revd Jo Stobart
* The Ven Dr Adrian Youings

**House of Laity (5 places)**

* Christina Baron
* James Cary
* Emma Joy Gregory
* Matt Orr
* Nic Tall

**(c) Bishop’s Council**

Nominations for election to Bishop’s Council would be invited from members of Diocesan Synod within the next week, with elections due to take place by the end of 2021. Those elected would hold office between 1st January 2022 and 31st December 2024.

Synod noted the report.

1. **Shaping Diocesan Synod**

There was an opportunity at the start of a new triennium for members to shape the role of Diocesan Synod.

The statutory role of Synod included: ‘to express their opinion on any matter referred to them by the General Synod’ and ‘to advise the Bishop on any matters on which he may consult the Synod’. Members of the Synod are also members of a charitable company, the Bath and Wells Diocesan Board of Finance, and had a duty to approve the DBF budget and to sign off the DBF accounts. The DBF must by law comply with any directions given by Synod.

Synod was encouraged to find a way of being that dealt with the statutory business, but also provided space for a more reflective role, so that we can draw on the experience and wisdom of members: to enable Synod to be a resource and not a rubber stamp.

Members were asked to consider the following questions in Zoom breakout sessions:

* What do you hope to contribute to Synod over the next 3 years?
* What do you hope to get out of Synod over the next 3 years?
* What should be the role of Diocesan Synod in the challenges facing the church?

During a brief feedback session the following issues were highlighted:

* Synod should bring hope, understanding and wisdom to support and challenge the Diocesan leadership
* The importance of communication-to help the diocese understand what parishes are doing and vice versa
* To use the different life experiences and skills of Synod members
* To ask questions
* To support each other in financial challenges and other issues
* A forum for active connectedness and real consultation before decisions are made
* To improve understanding of the governance of the diocese and the Church of England and to make the governance structures work well

The comments received would be fed back to the Synod Planning Group and reported back to the next Synod with a view to shaping Synod over the next triennium.

**The Synod adjourned briefly.**

**Dr Caroline Mason, Chair of the House of Laity, in the Chair.**

**10. Update on Environment and Climate Change Rolling 3-year Action Plan**

In November 2020 Diocesan Synod had adopted a draft Environment and Climate Change Policy. David Maggs, Diocesan Environmental Officer, reported that the following action had since been taken:

* A twin track route to Net Zero, combining technical solutions with care for the wonder of creation through the promotion of biodiversity.
* A partnership with the Somerset Wildlife Trust focussing on churchyards and other church land.
* An interview in “Manna” with Dr Peter Brotherton, Lead Director for Climate Change at Natural England.
* Promotion of the National Church’s “The Practical Pathway to Net Zero” tool to support local action towards net zero.
* The start of the promotion of asking all churches to develop a forward plan for their main source of heating by the end of 2023.
* Events for school staff and governors.
* Resources for children and families.
* Energy audit of Flourish House.
* 20% of churches had received an Eco-church award or were working towards an award.

It was noted Deanery Accompaniers are there to support deaneries (contact Julia Hill at Flourish House) in these and other matters.

The National Church had recently published a consultation, which was open to all: “Route map to Net Zero Carbon by 2030”, with a closing date of 28.02.22.

During a discussion a number of points were raised, including the following:

* In the light of the budget discussion we will have later in this meeting, do we have any estimate of how much Synod/DBF should be anticipating needing to spend in order to achieve net carbon zero by 2030? In response it was noted that the cost was likely to be £10,000-£20,000 for each house; the cost of carbon offsetting would be higher.
* It was acknowledged that the installation of solar panels on churches sometimes encountered opposition from neighbours and the local authority.
* Advice was available through the Diocese on green energy for churches and through Green Journey (<https://greenjourney.org/index.html>)
* There were massive challenges in heating churches; were there any examples of savings? In response it was note that we had to be realistic; electric heating was the main option.
* An aspiration to recruit a voluntary Environment and Sustainability Adviser for the DAC.
* It was important to incentivise clergy and staff to switch to electric vehicles, eg through the installation of charge points.
* Grants were available for the installation of cycle racks.

Synod note the update.

**11. Motion submitted by Portishead Deanery Synod**

The following motion was moved by The Revd Astrid Tiesame-Samsom, Assistant Area Dean of Portishead Deanery:

“1. That the Church of England should make it easier for churches to install Solar Panels, Heat Pumps and other means of generating energy in order that these buildings can be heated in a low carbon way.

2. That the Church of England should facilitate the adoption of low carbon heating in parsonages.”

Following a brief debate the Synod resolved that the Portishead Deanery Motion be approved

and that Bishop’s Council be invited to review the motion to facilitate passing it down to General Synod.

**12. Update on DBF re-shaping**

The Archdeacon of Bath reported that the DBF had sought to address two issues:

• A reshaping of Central Support Services in order to support our parishes, deaneries and schools in delivering the vision of our Diocese i.e. a vision-led approach, focused on our Diocesan priorities.

• To identify savings of approx. £225,000 pa, as one part of a larger need (£750k deficit for 2020) to reduce expenditure in the Diocese in the light of falling income, exacerbated by the impact of Covid.

The re-shaping process was ongoing and savings had been identified. 19 DBF roles were at risk of redundancy; there were 17 new roles within the new structure (not all full-time). It was likely that by the end of the process the number of compulsory redundancies would be in the region of 5-6. The Archdeacon thanked staff for their approach during a difficult period.

During a discussion a number of issues were raised including the following:

* Most dioceses were seeking to make savings; Covid-19 had exacerbated underlying problems.
* In response to a query about coaching and mentoring it was noted that an external HR consultant was offering advice and support.
* In response to a query about timelines it was noted that the re-shaping was provisional at the moment with an estimated completion date for the process of mid-November. There would then be a period of transition up until Christmas, Synod were asked to bear with staff during this period.
* Our plans must be to support the ministry of clergy; is it realistic to reduce the numbers of clergy houses?
* Some staff contracts had come to an end and had not been renewed.
* In response to a query, it was not intended to re-shape clergy posts to include diocesan roles.
* Had any thought been given to restructuring parsonage provision; would a smaller parsonage be more appropriate for a member of clergy who was single, and what kind of office space was needed by members of clergy?

**13. DBF Budget for 2022**

The DBF Chair, Ian Theodoreson, highlighted the context for setting the budget of a move towards a mixed ecology of ministry in the diocese, and the adverse impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on parish and diocesan finance.

Bishop’s Council had proposed a deficit budget of £1.992m, to be funded from Diocesan reserves and gains on sales of properties, with parish share to be held at 2021 requested levels.

Mr Theodoreson also highlighted the indicative 5 year plan under which the DBF would no longer rely on income from the sale of houses as had been the case previously; expenditure would be 11% lower by 2026.

During a discussion the following issues were raised:

* The estimated outturn for common fund receipts in 2021 was £9.0m.
* We needed to acknowledge that parish finances are struggling, and to respond with grace and understanding.
* We need to make these choices in the context of our vision.
* Other dioceses are having to make tough decisions
* What other options have Bishop’s Council considered?
* In response to a question as to what percentage of reserves would be drawn down over the next 5 years, it was stated that the proposed draw down of reserves after capital and investment gains was, £1.2m in 2022, and around £250k over the next 3 years. Should capital gains and investment values not be achieved, then draw down would be over £5m. Mr Pinnock would look into providing a percentage and respond to the questioner.
* Concern at the reduction in clergy training, given that there are no stipendiary clergy in the diocese under the age of 32. “If we don’t train the under 30’s, we won’t get them here as clergy.”

Synod resolved

1. To approve:

* A deficit budget in 2022 of £1.992m to be funded from Diocesan reserves and gains on sales of properties
* The Parish Share request for 2022 to be held at 2021 requested levels

1. That a Special Meeting of Synod be held to review the proposal that by 2026, the diocese will break even without the need for gains on sales of properties, through making reductions in costs as proposed in the 5 year plan.

**14. Date of next meeting**

19 March 2022 at 9.30 am (venue tbc).

**The session ended at 1.10pm**

**Appendix-questions and replies**

**(1) From: Dr Edmund Marshall (Chew Magna Deanery)**

“In the redundancies of Accredited Lay Workers made in the Diocese since September 1, 2021, what consideration was given to ensuring that the pain resulting from those redundancies has been evenly spread across the Diocese?”

**Reply: The Ven Dr Adrian Youings**

*“As I explain in my report to this Synod (Agenda item 12) on the reshaping of diocesan support services and DBF staff, no one has been made compulsorily redundant at this point in time in the current process. We have accepted requests for voluntary redundancy. We are still in the formal process of consultation and are working with all staff whose roles are at risk to find ways to avoid redundancy such as offering new roles for them to apply for within the diocese. We are still in the midst of that process. There is an accepted process for the organisational reshaping that is governed by Employment Law. The process is still ongoing, and until it has been completed no details of individual appointments can be given. It would not be fair to employees undergoing organisational change or to the people managing the change. Therefore it is not possible or appropriate to comment on any individual roles or any generic roles at this stage, so I can’t comment specifically on the roles you have mentioned.*

*As you will see from the paper I have submitted for Agenda item 12 of this meeting, a large number of DBF roles have been placed at risk in the current process. Also, as you will see from the budget paper for Agenda item 13 of this synod, the need to make very significant financial savings over the next 5 years will have a wide ranging impact on our diocese, including a significant reduction in the number of stipendiary clergy posts. The pain of this season will certainly been felt across the breadth of the Diocese.”*

**(2) From: The Revd David Keen (Yeovil Deanery)**

“a) The Budget paper proposes a reduction by 2026 of 15.7% in stipendiary clergy posts and 22% in curate posts. Over the same period DBF staffing costs will reduce by 8.6%.

Page 11 of the Budget paper shows figures going back to 2018. From 2018-2026, stipendiary clergy costs will fall by 11.8%, whilst DBF staffing costs reduce by only 2.1%. DBF staffing costs have grown by 15% in the last 3 years, so most of what is presented as a saving seems to be more like an adjustment to previous staffing levels.

Whilst I pay tribute to all that our support staff do, and accept the need for major economies in our spending, it is parish clergy who have the most direct effect on church membership, giving and Parish Share.

Please could you explain why numbers of parish clergy are being cut much more heavily than support staff – twice as much in the budgeted figures, or 5 times as much if we compare with 2018?”

**Reply: Ian Theodoreson, DBF Chair**

*“The need for cost reductions/new sources of income from 2022 onwards was identified in the 2021 budget which Synod approved last year, and this then is our starting point. During 2021 we have undertaken a major restructuring and realignment of Diocesan staff resources, resulting in a cost base at the start of 2022 which is 7% lower than in 2021 and, with further planned savings, will be 15% lower over the life of the plan. By contrast we are projecting stipendiary cost reductions over the life of the plan of 9% and, as has been stated, if our Parish Share collection rates exceed expectations, this figure could well be lower.”*

“b) On p6 of the budget paper, the costs of various savings are spelled out. Please can some thought be given to two additional costs, which are not included in the paper? Namely:

i)The cost of vacancies – there is evidence that parishes lose about 10% of their membership, permanently, in any vacancy longer than 6 months.

What is saved in salary costs in a vacancy is far exceeded by the long-term losses in parish income, and therefore Parish Share income to the Diocese. Are long vacancies a false economy and do we need to review our practice?

ii)The reduction in clergy numbers will have a knock-on effect on parish membership, and therefore anticipated income from Parish Share.”

**Reply from Ian Theodoreson, DBF Chair**

*“We recognise that there is a ‘cost of vacancy’ in terms of the impact it has on congregations however we also believe that our move to a more ‘mixed ecology’ of ministry that the focal ministry model supports together with better-resourced Archdeaconry teams means that congregations will be supported by a wider network of leadership rather than being reliant on one clergy person. Having said that, our long-term planned vacancy rate of 10% is a lot lower than the 15% plus currently experienced by parishes.”*

**(3) From: Mr John Bloomfield (Shepton Mallet Deanery)**

Mr Bloomfield had sent his apologies for absence for the meeting and had nominated The Revd Richard Priestly to ask the question on his behalf:

“In the minutes of the previous Synod under item 9, Reshaping and Renewal, Matthew Pinnock said “Levels of regular worshipping community had been falling overall before the pandemic. In some communities levels had recovered, whilst in others the problem had been exacerbated. This had put pressure on income levels.” Local experience confirms this statement.

In the budget there is a slight increase in common fund between 2021 and 2022 then in the following years there is an extra line “Additional Common Fund Recovery” which shows an increase of 4.6% over the 5 years from 2022 to 2026.

Bearing in mind the statement by Matthew how is this increase explained?

Is there an expectation that the work of pioneer ministers and possibly chaplains will add extra income to the diocese?”

**Reply from Matthew Pinnock, Head of Finance and Operations**

*“In 2019 Common Fund receipts were over 10.3m, in 2022 we are budgeting for a figure that is an 8% reduction on that figure, and in 2026 we have budgeted for a figure which is a 3.8% reduction on 2019 figures. So it is important to note that there still remains an expectation that Common Fund income is reduced compared to pre-pandemic levels.*

*Over recent years before the pandemic, regular worshipping communities were reducing by amounts varying from 0.5% to 4% a year in some cases. The 8% reduction budgeted in 2022 is therefore in line with these regular worshipping reductions having a normalised impact on Common Fund recovery, if you sought to remove the impact of the Covid Pandemic.*

*As a Diocese we should, however, not be content to plan for a continuation of this pattern, and a continuation of reduction of regular worshipping communities.*

*Through work of all our Christian communities, be it lay or ordained we need to thrive to engage with a wider Christian audience, and whilst this may be through work of Pioneers or Chaplains, it will also have to come from the resource we have both historically resourced and are newly resourcing in stipendiary ministers and DBF support services.*

*The diocese cannot sustain an ongoing falling level of stewardship in our local church communities, and the reshaping of the diocese currently being undertaken is with the aim to address this and to grow the kingdom across the diocese.*

*Most worshipping communities in our parishes are between 1% and 5% of the total population of the parish, however people who identify themselves as Christian is over 50% in the 2010 census so we should be prayerfully optimistic that we can engage with our wider Christian communities and achieve the relatively modest increases in Common Fund generation, through new work planned and re-engagement with communities post pandemic. If this cannot be achieved, then further reductions will inevitably have to be looked at.”*